

“The Death of Little Alice”

On a Sunday morning in the year 1821, before Divine Service began, a parishioner came to me in the vestry, to say that Alice T----, a girl of nearly fourteen years of age, and an attendant at the Sunday School, was sick, and desired to see me. Understanding that she was very ill, I took the earliest opportunity to visit her between the morning and evening service. When I arrived at her bedside, and asked her how she did, I told her that she wished to see me, and I requested that she would try to tell me, as well as she could, the reason for which she had sent for me. Her reply was sensible and affecting. “Yes, sir,” said she. I do want to see you; I am very ill, and I want you to talk with me; I want you to pray by me, and to tell me how I must leave this world with comfort, and go to heaven when I die.” You may readily suppose I did talk with my interesting young friend, and did point out to her the way that leadeth to everlasting life; and if I ever prayed with ardor and sincerity, it was when I offered up intercessions and supplications by the bedside of this little girl. Though she was then much debilitated and worn with sickness, yet I learned many things from her which deeply impressed me. I have visited many sick beds, but seldom did I see more pious resignation to the will of God; seldom did I see a person who had a more becoming sense of the awfulness of going into eternity. I never met with greater anxiety for instruction; and none could give a more Scriptural reason of the hope that is in them. My young friend’s religion was equally removed from two errors, which are very common in the world. People often build their hopes on some imaginary goodness of their own, without any reference to Christ their Redeemer. They have no sense of sin; they talk about some good things which they have done, and many bad things which they have avoided; but not one word about what Jesus Christ did to save sinners. We hear no expressions of gratitude to Him, or of dependence upon Him, as the “Lord our righteousness.” Or, going to the opposite extreme, sick persons talk much about the mercy of God, and the atoning merits of Jesus Christ, without any regard to their own habits of life or dispositions of heart, evidently forgetting the Scripture declaration, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” She said, “I and every body need a Saviour; I could not be saved without Him, and hope He will be my Saviour. It is this that now makes me happy and content either to go or to stay.” In this hope, and with these feelings, she died; and I doubt not she is an inheritor of the blessedness promised to those that die in the Lord.

Alice, however, had other sorrows which deeply affected her mind. She had the double misfortune of having lost her mother in her infancy, and of having for her father an idle, intemperate man. She was therefore taken care of by her grandfather and grandmother, with whom she lived, and who had brought her up. On her dying bed, filled with gratitude for their kindness, she called to mind many hasty words and disobedient acts which she had been guilty

of towards these her best and dearest friends; and she requested me to state to them her sorrow for those things, and to intercede with them to forgive her. I did so ; and it was truly affecting to behold the aged grandmother bending over her foster-child, and with tears of affection assuring her of her full and hearty forgiveness. Speaking of these relatives, she said, I thank them for all their goodness; they have been very good to me; they have done every thing they could for me; I hope god will reward them, I cannot.” And then looking up to me, she said, “And I thank you, sir, for all your goodness; I am much obliged to you for coming to see me; I hope God will bless you.”

Here, you see appears a truly religious and pious mind; and these things I am sure, will convince you, as they convinced me, that this child possessed a goodly portion of that wisdom which is from above, and which is pure, spiritual, and heavenly.

Where, my dear reader, do you think this little girl had learned this religion? I asked her this question, and I heartily wish that every thoughtless parent, whose children are neglected, had been with me at her bedside when she answered, “II learned it at the Sunday school.” I was assured by a young woman who waited upon her, that at night when she could not sleep, she would frequently talk about what the clergyman had said to the scholars at school. She would often say, “I used to be too careless about such things once, but I think a good deal about them now.”

I had previously known my little friend Alice. I had known her at the Sunday school, where she was constant in her attendance, and exemplary in her behaviour. I had examined her for concerning her faith, and had noticed her at the Lord’s Table two or three times afterwards; but I confess I had not been fully aware of the extent of her religious knowledge and piety. It was reserved for her deathbed to discover them fully, and I assure you the discover was to me a most precious circumstance. It greatly endeared to my heart the cause of Sunday schools, and more than recompensed me for all the mortification and discouragement which I had experienced from the negligence of some and the obstinacy of others.

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