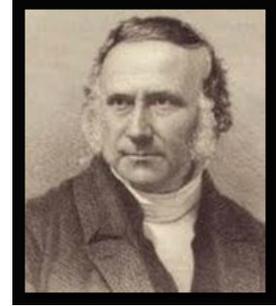


The Lost Child



I received a very polite and fraternal note from a neighboring clergyman, whose kindness and confidence I had experienced many times before, desiring me to attend the funeral of the only child of a gentleman and lady, who had formerly been attendants on his ministry, though at that time they had come to reside nearer to myself. Another duty called him to a distant part of the state, and he commended these afflicted parents to me. I had never seen them, and I believe they had never seen me; but the brief note which commended them to me, prepared me to have a high respect for them, and to sympathize in their sadness, as they were now bereft of the only child they ever had.

The person who brought me the note and engaged my services for the funeral, could tell me but little about them. They were not communicants of any church, though my clerical friend in his note gave me to understand that they were persons of a serious turn of mind, and at times felt some personal anxiety, one or both of them, on the subject of religion.

I felt no hesitation about my duty. Indeed I could not mistake it, and had no desire to avoid it. But I was burdened with the impression, that it was a difficult duty for me to discharge with acceptance and propriety. It is a delicate thing to go to strangers in the day of their deep sadness. A friend may carry the balm of consolation to hearts that have often opened to him, but how can a stranger dare to meddle with the tenderness of grief? I feared that their hearts would be shut up against me—must be from the very nature of the case, or would recoil from me as

an intruder, if I should attempt at all, stranger as I was, to meddle with the sacredness of their sorrow, or should even try to lay the consolation of heaven's mercy upon the grief-spot of their smitten bosoms. And I was the more embarrassed, on account of what their messenger had told me respecting the child they had lost. It was a little gem of earth,—a most beautiful, intelligent and amiable little girl, about four years old, with a maturity of mind far beyond her years; and her parents were peculiarly cast down, now when death had snatched her away. I knew that I could sympathize with them, but I did not know that they could receive my sympathy. Affliction seldom resorts to a stranger. It seeks solace in solitude, or the sympathy of some long-tried friend. And I was not a little afraid, that their tender and hallowed sadness would shrink from me, if I should attempt even to comfort them. They had no faith, as I supposed; and I knew that nothing but the truths of Christianity could afford them anything better than a fictitious and deceptive comfort, worse than none. I knew that mere reason would be dumb over a corpse,—that no philosophy could grapple with grief and the grave.

At the hour appointed I went to their house. It was filled with people. I spoke with the parents for a few moments, and before the funeral services commenced there was put into my hands the following letter:—

“DR. SPENCER,

Rev. Sir:—We thought we should like to give you a few particulars in regard to our only child. She was of uncommon promise, and for her age, possessed a mind much matured. During her illness of two weeks she was a great sufferer, without murmur or complaint. Her mind continued perfect until the last, and she would often say, ‘Mamma, comfort your little daughter.’

“Previous to her last sickness she had enjoyed unusual health with a heart full of mirth, tenderness and sympathy. She was a favorite, and beloved by all. We have never known her to speak an untruth. She loved to do right, and was very conscientious in regard to her conduct on the Sabbath. She loved to talk of God and heaven, and a few weeks since,

while an uncle was very ill, she said, 'Mamma, when we die, if God would only take us in his arms and carry us right up into heaven, so we should not have to be put into the dark coffin, how happy it would be.' We trust she is now there."

I read this affecting note (signed by both the parents), and the funeral services were conducted in the usual manner. Before prayer, I aimed to say such things as I thought might be profitable to the assembled multitude, and such especially as I had some hope would bring at least a gleam of comfort to the crushed and bleeding hearts of these parents, now stripped of their precious treasure. It was a most solemn and tender occasion. The little coffin was placed near the folding doors, which opened between the parlors. I had looked into it just as I entered the room. Its slumbering tenant was lovely even in death. It looked as if it were asleep, and appeared more pure and beautiful than the flowers which were placed beside it, and on the coffin's lid. But that marble brow was cold; and those lily lips, which seemed as if ready to utter some syllable of love, would never speak again. I could not look upon it. I turned away and wept.

After the religious exercises were closed, I sat where I could see the countenances of the multitude, who came one after another and looked into the little coffin. I did not see one who turned away without eyes suffused with tears. Everyone was affected. Old men, with stern and severe faces, wept over it. And when the parents came to take their last look, and the mother bent down over the coffin to give her last kiss to such a child, I felt that her heart must break. tears streamed from her eyes; her whole frame shook like an aspen leaf, with the dreadful violence of her agitation. There were no noisy out-bursts of grief, but such a deep and dreadful sorrow as seemed too much for nature to endure. She retired from the coffin supported by her husband; and tear-dimmed eyes followed her, as she went up to her chamber—a childless mother!

Promising to call on them the next day, I left the melancholy scene; and this sweet child was conveyed to the tomb.

The next day I called at the house. Business had compelled the father to leave home, but the mother met me with a heavy heart. She could scarcely utter a syllable for some moments. She gave me her hand with a look of despair that horrified me!

“I have called to see you, madam,” said I, “for I sympathize with you in your heavy trial, and if I could, I would say something which shall comfort you.”

Evidently struggling to conceal her emotions, she answered:

“I am glad to see you, sir. I feel very wretched. I never expected such a trial as this. My child was everything to me. Our hearts were wrapped up in her, and now she is gone! I do not know how to endure this. I cannot endure it—I feel that I cannot!” and she wept bitterly.

“It is God, madam, who hath taken away your child. I am sorry for you, my heart bleeds for you. I do not blame you for mourning, and God will not blame you for it. You cannot avoid it, if you would; and you would not, if you could.”

“Oh, no, sir,” said she weeping, “she was such a lovely child—so affectionate and intelligent, and—my all! She had a maturity of mind far beyond her years. I wanted you to know something about her before the funeral; and because we wished you to know something of her, we wrote you that little note.”

“That letter,” said I, “affected me very much. I shall answer it as soon as I have time. It was put into my hands just after I came in here yesterday, and as I glanced over it and found her expression about being taken right up into heaven Without being buried, I could not repress my emotions. I could scarcely command composure enough to conduct the funeral exercises with propriety. I am sorry for you;—I can weep with you; but God alone can do you any good. Do you think you are submissive to His will?”

“I am afraid not, sir. I know His will is right; but I cannot feel reconciled to it as I ought. It is such a stroke to me, I know not how to bear it. I never knew what affliction was before. We were very happy. I am afraid we loved our child too much. I often thought how much I had to

enjoy in my husband and my child; but now God has taken her away, and I am perfectly wretched." She sobbed aloud.

"My heart bleeds for you, my dear friend; but I want you to remember, that God only can comfort you, or make your affliction beneficial. You must not murmur. You must not rebel or repine. You are not forbidden to mourn. I do not blame your grief, and do not wish you to blame yourself for it; but I want you to be satisfied with God, and especially I want you to be profited by your dreadful trial. God means something by sending it; and I want you to ask Him what He means, and be led by this sad providence nearer to Himself, in faith that rests on Christ and will fit you for another world. Do you think you have any faith?"

"Oh, no, sir. My mind is all dark. I have no comfort, no peace. .It seems as if I could think of nothing but my child."

"I do not blame you for thinking of her. You, cannot help thinking; but you ought to be led by this affliction to seek the Lord. Have you been praying to Him?"

"I have tried to pray, sir; but my prayers seem almost like mockery. My thoughts wander; and God seems to be very far off. I am entirely cast down. My heart seems broken, and I think there is no comfort for me in this world, now my child is gone."

"I assure you, my dear friend," said I, "I feel your affliction deeply and tenderly; and that makes me the more anxious for you, to have you fly in faith to that Saviour, to that God and Father, who I know has comfort for you, and will lay the balm of a precious solace upon that deep sorrow of heart, which no other friend can reach. Fly to Him, as a child to a father. He will not cast you off. He will love and comfort you; I know He will."

"I am very miserable," said she. "It seems to me that my trial is more than I can endure."

"God will enable you to endure it, and to profit by it, if you give up sin and the world, and betake yourself to Him in faith. He invites you to his arms; He wants you to lean upon Him confidingly and affectionately,

as a child. He asks you to 'cast all your care upon Him,' drawn by the power of that blessed argument, for' He careth for you."

"I do feel as if I needed comfort," said she.

"God only can comfort you," I replied.

"My child was my treasure," said she.

"Prepare to follow her to another world, Madam"

"I wish I could. When you were speaking yesterday at the funeral, your words went to my heart. It was so sweet to think she is happy now, and may be hovering near us to do us good. I could have heard you speaking as you did of my angel child all night—any length of time. It gave me the only comfort I have, to think she is forever happy with God."

"Waiting there," said I, "to welcome you into heaven, and rush into your arms in a little while; if you will only give up the world, and, as a sinner to be saved, flee now to the Saviour who calls you. Do you mean to do so?" Mournfully she replied:

"I hope I shall try. The world all seems different to me now. I was happy; but now, all is dark to me, for this world and the other! I cannot think of anything but my lost child."

"Not lost, Madam, not lost; but gone before. Do not think of her as lost to you; but think of your duty to prepare to follow her."

"I feel entirely discouraged. If I try to seek God, it is in vain. My prayers are not answered. Everything is dark. I can think of only one thing."

"My dear friend," said I, "you must not let this affliction be lost upon you. Turn now to God with all your heart. He will pity you. He will hear your prayers and comfort your heart, if you will come to Him in faith. Do you intend to do so?"

"My thoughts have been directed to the subject of religion, but I cannot seem to have any faith. All is dark to me; and now, my loss is more than I know how to bear."

"You cannot bear it rightly, but by the help of God. 'In Me is thy help,' says He: and you will find help there, if you will only seek Him with all your heart. He has directed your attention to the subject of your

salvation before; and now He has given you such an affecting call, that surely you ought to heed it. I hope you will. Go to Him—tell Him all your wants and sorrows. He is of infinite love and kindness; and you have no need to be discouraged. He will not let you sink.”

Very much in this manner our conversation continued for some time. I strove to comfort her, for I felt that she had a very sore trial, in which I could not but sympathize with her grief. She was a perfect picture of woe, if not of entire despair. Her intelligence too, and her frankness and simplicity, had deeply interested me; and I especially strove to persuade her to make a just use of her bitter affliction. But it was very noticeable how her mind rested upon but one thing. Whatever I said, she would come round to that. Her lost child absorbed all her thoughts, all her heart. If I spake of God, her mind would turn upon her child. If I spake of submission, it took only a moment for her to get her thoughts turned back to her child. If I spake of her duty to improve her affliction, or of the kindness of God, or spake of Christ, or comfort, or prayer, or the Holy Spirit, or sin, or faith, or heaven, a single expression would bring round her thoughts to the same melancholy theme—her lost child.

I felt it to be no easy thing to deal with such a heart rightly. To soothe and comfort her crushed spirit, and at the same time to lead her to make a just use of her affliction, appeared almost impossible. If I should attempt to lead her mind off from her lost child, all a mother’s heart would be against me. If I should attempt nothing more than to condole with her, she might indeed be soothed a little by the sympathy, but that soothing would not lead her to salvation. I strove, therefore, to find some hold upon her sensibilities, some link which should unite her sorrow and her Saviour; which should neither do violence to a mother’s bleeding heart, nor peril her everlasting interests. And before I left her, one of her own expressions had, as I thought, furnished me what I desired. I resolved to employ the idea afterwards—it was the idea of her own child now in heaven.

Before I left her, I prayed with her, as she requested me to do, that their affliction might be sanctified to her and her husband.

As soon as I was able, I sent an answer to the letter which was given to me at the funeral; and in the answer I aimed to comfort and counsel my sad friends as well as I could.

Pressing engagements hindered my seeing her again, except once for a few moments, till nearly a fortnight after the funeral. It was Saturday when I called upon her again, and found her, if possible, more miserable than before. In answer to my inquiry, she replied:

“I feel perfectly miserable, and there is nothing that can comfort me. I feel my loss more and more every day.”

“I am sorry for you, my dear child. Your loss is indeed great, and I do not wonder at your feeling it. I do not blame your sorrow. I should blame you, if you had none. God would have you mourn. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, whom he loved. But God can comfort you, and I hope He will. The Holy Ghost is the Holy Comforter. Have you been praying to Him?”

“Yes, I have tried; but my thoughts are wandering. It seems to me that God will not hear such prayers as mine. My mind is all dark. I have tried to pray, but it does me no good.”

“What have you been praying for?”

“I have prayed that our affliction may be sanctified to us.”

“Do you think it will be?”

“I am afraid not. God does not answer me, and my heart appears to me to be very hard.”

“Have you any comfort in praying?”

“No, none at all; and I am discouraged in trying to seek God.”

“You need not be discouraged. If you seek Him with your whole heart, He will be found of you. He has promised that, and He will be true to his word.”

“But my heart is so senseless. I try to believe, but it seems as if I had no faith. I read the Bible, but it is dark to me. I try to pray, but my heart is not in my prayers; and I am afraid God will never hear me.”

“Do you think you have been led to know and feel that you have a wicked heart, and need God’s help to make it different?”

“I know it, but it seems to me I do not feel it at all; and I wonder at myself.”

“Do you wish to feel it?”

“Yes, I do. I have prayed to be enabled to do so. I know I am a sinner, and I wonder I do not realize it more. I think I never have had conviction enough.”

“How much conviction does a sinner need, in order to be prepared to come to Christ? He needs just to know and feel that he cannot save himself. If he knows he is a lost sinner, he knows all the truth about himself that he needs to know; and he ought instantly to accept the offers of God, trusting Christ to save him. Do you think you feel your need of the atonement that Christ has made for sinners, in order that you may be forgiven and saved?”

“Yes, I do. I can do nothing for myself.”

Well, then, let Christ do everything for you. Trust Him to do everything for you. He offers to do everything for you. Come to him just as you are, with all your sin—with all your darkness—with all your unworthiness—with your cold and unbelieving heart—and let Him give you another heart. He waits to receive you, and your delaying is unnecessary. Your waiting to gain more distressful feelings about yourself, will not make you any better prepared to give up the world and trust in Him. Come to him now—not to be lost, but to be loved—not to be cast out, but to be comforted and saved. Come now, while the Holy Spirit strives with you.”

“I need His blessing,” said she. “I feel very miserable. God has taken away the only child I ever had; and I believe He has done it to show me my sins; but I am afraid it will be in vain to me. I cannot feel anything my heart seems hardened.”

“But, my dear friend, your child is better off than you; and your duty now is to prepare to meet her in heaven. God has spread a cloud of gloom over this world, to turn your heart to a better one. But you do not give God your heart; you are still hesitating, fearful, and unbelieving. If

you remain thus, all your affliction will only be lost upon you. I am not a little afraid it will. Do you not know that the instances of conversion to Christ are far less than the number of mourners?—that very few persons are ever led to religion by such afflictions? Affliction goes everywhere—death goes everywhere. You see it all around you. ‘Who has not lost a friend?’ Parents die, and children die; and yet how seldom it is that the bereavement profits the living. Such trials do Christians good; but they seldom bring unbelievers to true religion. You know this is true; you see it to be so all around. And even now, when the only comfort you have is to think of the little gem you have lost, now a gem in heaven, I am afraid your affliction will not lead you to Christ.”

“My heart,” said she, “is very hard. I am miserable; but it seems to me I cannot feel my sins. I have

tried to seek God, but something keeps me from thinking of anything but one.”

“Give God your heart just as it is,—remember *just as it is*, and let Him make it feel. ‘Turn unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon you, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon’ You must have faith. You must believe what He says to you. You must trust His promises, and fall into His arms. Salvation is all of grace. Do not wait for feeling. Have the faith first, and let the feeling come afterwards. Receive Christ as your own, affectionately, and as a child; and then you may expect your hard heart will melt. The Holy Spirit strives to bring you to this. ‘Now is the accepted time’ Flee to Christ to-day, and be prepared to follow your child to glory.”

As her thoughts hung constantly around her child, I aimed, with all my might, so to connect the idea of her loss with the idea of her personal obligation to religion, that she should not be able to think of her child without thinking of her own salvation. I may not here record all my exhortations to her—it would tire the reader. But I strove to make every recollection say to her, “Prepare to meet your child in heaven.” I hunted her soul with that thought, and linked the thought with every recollection. I made it come up with every sigh, and burn in every tear. I

associated it with the last look she took of her child, and with that coffin-kiss, which I thought would break her heart. I wrote it upon the little grave, and made the green grass that grows over it say to her, "Prepare to meet your child in heaven." The past uttered it to her, the future uttered it. Love, hope, disappointment, grief, every little memorial, was made say to her, "Prepare to meet your child in heaven." I aimed to people the whole universe for her with that one thought, "Prepare to meet your child in heaven." I linked this thought with the morning, the evening, the bedroom, the books, with all this wilderness world. I painted to her, her lost one now bending over the battlements of heaven and looking down upon her, and saying, "Mother, Prepare to meet your child in heaven." I represented to her that lost child, now perhaps hovering around her as a "ministering spirit" sent forth from heaven, in some mysterious manner to minister for her as an "heir of salvation," and waiting to carry the tidings of her repentance on high, that there might be a new "joy in the presence of the angels of God."

After beseeching her in this manner to fly to Christ, and praying for her, I took my leave, saying to her with solemn tenderness,—“Prepare to meet your child in heaven.”

The next morning I perceived that she and her husband were in church, and appeared very attentive to the sermon.

It was not possible for me to call upon her on Monday or Tuesday, as I had intended. Late in the evening of Tuesday, a messenger brought me the following letter:

“DR. SPENCER,

Rev. Sir:—I have taken the liberty of addressing a few lines to you. Allow me, in the first place, to thank you for your kindness and sympathy towards us, strangers as we were to you. I shall never forget your consoling words; they fell like balm upon a bruised and broken heart. The light and the joy of our home was taken; but the fond hope which your words inspired, that our dear child ‘might be hovering over us, missioned from heaven in some mysterious manner to minister to our spirits,’ seemed to animate and encourage me not to be weary in well doing, When I saw you

on Saturday, I felt that I was still far from God. I had no heart to read the Bible, no heart to pray. I was overwhelmed with grief; my child was gone, and what had I to live for? It seemed that one thought had taken the place of every other; but I still continued to pray, although my lips uttered words which I thought my heart did not feel. On Sabbath morning, before entering the church, I prayed that God would bless to me the words that I might hear spoken. 'Faith and grace'—(alluding to the sermon)— "it was just what I most needed; but the door of my heart was closed, and they could not enter in. After dinner, I took up a book, and one piece that I read, 'Waiting for Conviction,' made me feel that I was standing in just that position. I had been relying upon my own self-righteousness, waiting for something, I knew not what. I felt as if you were talking to me; every word came home to my heart. I went to my room and prayed, as I had never prayed before,—'God be merciful to me a sinner.' I was a good deal cast down, and it seemed to me as if I must not retire to rest that night, until I had made my peace with God. I passed a restless, weary night; the words kept sounding in my ears, 'Prepare to meet your child in heaven.' I could but cry, Lord have mercy! When I awoke near morning, after a short and restless sleep, I felt as if the work must be accomplished before another day passed over. During the day, I felt better, had some comfort in reading the Bible, felt that God had answered my prayers, unworthy as they were. He had convicted me of my sin; and I seemed to have more faith, but still unbelief held its sway. I prayed earnestly for more faith and grace; and as I sat alone in my room, the twilight hour, I thought over all of my past life. I had done nothing for God, and He had done everything for me. He had given me a most precious gift, and I had never once thanked the Giver, but went on in my own pride and self-love, building fond hope and joy for the far-off future; and in a little time she was stricken from my sight. It appeared to me that God had taken that means to bring the parents to repentance; and I felt that it was but right and just. While I thus sat holding communion with my own thoughts, recalling the blessed promises of the Bible, all at once

such light, and love, and hope, shone into my heart, it seemed as if I must clap my hands and sing aloud a new song:

“His loving kindness—oh, how great!”

“I could kiss the hand that had smitten. The heavy load of sin is gone. Will you, dear sir, be kind enough to call and see me to-morrow. I have no words to thank you for your kindness. I am as a little child just entering upon a new world, and I am afraid my feelings will not last.”

In accordance with the request contained in this letter, I called upon her the next morning. She met me with a smile of gladness. Her downcast look was gone—not a trace left of that deep and settled melancholy, which had formerly rested upon her countenance and made her such an image of wo. Her joy and peace seemed to have transformed her into another being. She was perfectly happy. Peace filled her heart, and her countenance was lighted up with the signals of an ecstasy which she could neither repress nor conceal. She was solemn, but ‘her joy was full.” Smiles of peace unbidden would spread, like a beam of light, over her features; her step, her mien, the whole woman was changed.

“I wanted to see you,” said she (with a look and in an accent of rapture), “I want to tell you how happy I am. I can bless God now. He has been very gracious to me, and I can praise Him for all He has done. I can see His goodness in all my affliction. I thought, yesterday, I must go and see you and have you rejoice with me.”

“What makes you so happy?” said I.

“Because God has heard my prayers, and removed my dreadful burden of sin, and given me peace with Himself. I know it is not anything that I have done—it is the mercy and grace of God. He has heard me, and given me faith and love: I cannot be grateful enough.”

“Do you think you have faith now?”

“Oh, yes, I have faith. I believe and trust Him, for He has shown me the way, and brought me to this delightful peace. I was very wretched, and could not feel reconciled; but now I see the hand of His kindness in it all. I see the leading of His Providence all along, in sending us here and

directing us to you. I cannot be thankful enough. I feel very grateful to you for your kindness to us in our affliction. I was afraid to have you come when my child died. You were a stranger to us, and I did not know as you could enter into our feelings; but when I heard you speak at the funeral, my fears vanished; and when you came afterwards and talked to me, I thought God had sent us here, and taken away our child, on purpose to have us led to repentance. I thank you for all you have done.”

“Do you *love* God now?”

“Oh, yes, I do. I cannot thank Him enough. I can submit to His will now, though my loss is so great. I see He meant it for my good.”

“Does your heart rest on Christ alone to save you?”

“Yes, I trust Him entirely. I have nothing else to trust in. I know I am a great sinner; but He has heard me, and answered me. He has set my heart at rest.”

“Have you this peace of mind and joy in God, all the time?”

“Sometimes, I am afraid I am deceived for a little while; but the most of the time I am very happy. At first, I felt as if I could not restrain my feelings. I did not want to come down to tea: I was afraid they would think me crazy, for I knew I could not conceal my joy, my looks would betray me, and I was afraid I should lose my happy feelings.

“I want you to see my young friend. I want you to tell her that she has only to come to Christ, that she ‘need not wait to get ready’ as you told me on Saturday. It all seems to me so easy now—only to come to God in faith—not wait to get ready. I wonder people do not see it. I wonder that I did not see it before. But I had not faith. Now I can see the way all clear; and this light and peace with God make me very happy. I feel my loss and cannot but weep; but I know God has done it for my good, and I am resigned and happy. I thank and praise Him for his kindness.”

“Have you any doubts or fears to trouble you?”

“Yes, I have at times, for a little while; but when I go to God in prayer, my joy returns. Sometimes, I am afraid my feelings are not the right ones, and that I am deceived. I know my heart is deceitful; but I trust in God, and then I am happy. I feel as if I was a little child, and want

to be led. I have only just begun to learn. I know but very little, and I am afraid these joyful feelings will not last. God has afflicted me, but now He comforts me.”

“You recollect I told you on Saturday that such afflictions were very seldom of any benefit to unbelievers.”

“I know you did, and it made me feel very sad.”

“But you know it is true,” said I.

“ Oh yes, I know it is true, a great many have lost children, and never came to repentance; and that made me feel the more anxious to improve the time.”

Again and again, when I saw her, she conversed in the same happy strain, affectionate, grateful, and simple-hearted as a child. She was peculiarly desirous that other members of her family should have the same faith and peace of mind which made her so happy. She told them how she felt, with an earnestness, affection, and simplicity which could not be surpassed, and with the manifest impression fixed upon her mind that salvation was freely offered to them, and they had nothing to do but to believe it and accept the offer.

As I was talking with her at one time, in the presence of a young woman in whom she felt a deep interest, and to whom she had done me the favor to introduce me, I thought many of her expressions must reach the young woman’s heart. I asked her,

“Do you still feel the same happiness that you have had?”

“Oh, yes, most of the time. Sometimes I have a little darkness, but it soon passes away and my happy feelings return. God answers my prayers. I go to him for everything. I have just begun. I am a little child, and want to be led all the time. I want some one to teach me whether my feelings are right. But I feel very happy.”

Said I, “I wish to ask you one question. You have given some attention to the subject of religion before this time. It has often been on your mind, and you have tried to seek the Lord. And after your child died, you were for some time in great distress and darkness. Now I wish to

ask you this question: What kept you so long in darkness—what hindered you that you did not come to Christ sooner?”

“Oh,” said she, “I was *self-righteous*: I did not have *faith*: I was trying to do something for myself, to get ready to trust in God.”

The eyes of the young woman filled with tears, her breast heaved with emotion, and I could not but hope that the truth, which I had elicited from the lips of her happy friend, would lead her to a happiness as precious. At least, she was taught, that she *need not* “wait to get ready.”

Notwithstanding the severity of her affliction, this bereaved mother was uniformly happy. She seemed to live on high. In prayerful communion with God and in contemplation of heaven, she spent her days in peace. She could not forget her child, and she could not cease to mourn; but her grief for her loss was mingled with joy in God, and many times have I seen tears and smiles blended together on her expressive countenance. She was a most affectionate mother. She loved deeply and tenderly. Her peace of mind, her submission and joy, were not in the least the results of a stupid or a stoical heart; but they were the gift of God, and in the exercise of them she was no less tender and affectionate as a Christian than she was as a mourning mother.

Her deep and tender solicitude for her irreligious friends was a most interesting feature in her character. From the commencement of her seriousness, I had aimed to awaken in her heart an interest in the salvation of others. Several of her “nearest and dearest friends” were, as she said, still in unbelief. From the first, she manifested much interest in their eternal welfare; but before the time when she came to her own sweet hope in Christ, her thoughts seemed to be called back from them to herself, and she found an almost insuperable obstacle in her way, whenever she attempted anything for them, even in prayer. Her thoughts were drawn back, and her feelings were borne down by the sadness and gloom of her own mind. But after she came out of that gloom, her heart turned to the subject of their salvation with much tenderness and strength of affection. She was not only willing, but prompt and joyful to second any of my attempts to bring them to Christ.

A few weeks after she began to find Christ her refuge, she expressed some of her reflections in the following letter:

“DR. SPENCER,

Rev. Sir:—I will intrude upon your time but for a few moments. We have been looking for a visit from you for some days. It has been so pleasant to have you come in and see us, that it really seems as if you had almost forgotten us. I shall ever hold in grateful remembrance your kindness to me; and those consoling words which feel like balm upon my bruised and sorrowful heart, will never be forgotten. They were the first words that made me feel deeply; and through God I feel that you have been the instrument of opening my eyes—‘whereas I was once blind, but now I see.’ Oh, how beautiful is the plan of salvation! to be redeemed, to be bought with the price of a Saviour’s blood, to be justified, adopted, and sanctified! to call God our Father! and when our hearts go forth to Him in prayer, to feel that He is so near to us! Oh, that I may be wholly His! My earnest desire is to be a whole-souled Christian, not a half undecided one. When I look at my poor sinful heart, so prone to wander, so vile, and so full of sin, I almost despair, sometimes, of ever attaining the only worthy end for which to live; but with God all things are possible, and I can but pray to be purified— ‘wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’ I have spent many calm and peaceful hours in my retirement, communing with my own thoughts and with God, thinking of my angel child as she walks the golden streets of the New Jerusalem. Hers was a bright and joyous spirit on earth, and how much more bright and beautiful there. Heaven does not seem so far off as it once did.

“I often ask myself when the time comes for me to mingle again with the world, if my heart will be as near to God as it is now. I hope that He will ever guide me. I must watch and pray. Prayer and the precious Bible must be my refuge. How beautifully the hymn,

‘Jesus lover of my soul,’

warms the heart, and makes it feel indeed, that

‘Thou, Oh Christ, art all I want,

All in all in thee I find:

God has supported and directed me. He seems to know just what I most need.

“But it seems to me that I know too little of divine truth. I want to be fed with the bread of life, to drink deeper from the fountains of living waters. My health has been such that I have not been able to attend divine service, and I thirst for more knowledge of the Bible.

“‘How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth salvation.’ I know, my dear sir, that you have often been made very happy, and have felt doubly paid for all the toil and trouble, when sinners have come to you with faith and joy beaming in their countenance, and told you that they had found their God. My request, therefore, will not afflict you, though it should add to your labors.

“I know your time is much occupied, and you will please pardon my intrusion upon you.”

* * * * *

I visited her often. It was delightful to witness her joy. She seemed to live in the sunshine of peace. Seldom were her skies overcast; and when a cloud did darken her heavens, it was only for a moment, and only served to make the returning light more sweet.

“I have sometimes a little darkness,” said she.

“And what do you do then?”

“Oh, I pray to God, and the light returns.”

“Do you love to pray?”

“Oh, yes, I always love to pray. It seems to me such a precious privilege. Whenever I am sad, thinking of my child, or my mind is downcast, I find that when I pray, God answers me and I am comforted. I just go to Him with my trouble. It is a precious privilege.”

“Have you ever any doubt whether God has given you a new heart?”

“At times I have, for a little while. But the most of the time I cannot doubt; I have such sweet peace in thinking of God, Christ is so precious to me, and all my feelings are so different from what they used to be. I know I am still a sinner. I sin every hour; and I know my heart is deceitful; but I trust in Christ, and God comforts me with hope.”

Such were her feelings week after week. Her joy was full. Her faith appeared to grow stronger, and while her humility became more deep, the tenderness of her love and her confiding became more and more peaceful.

When our communion season came, she did not unite with the church. She thought it best to defer the public profession of her faith for a time. But she was present at the administration of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. A day or two afterwards I called upon her, and she adverted to it with a very manifest delight.

Said she, "I had a happy day last Sunday. When I saw those young persons come forward to unite with the church, I longed to be with them. I thought it would be such a privilege, to confess my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and aim to honor Him before so many people. And when the members of the church were partaking of the bread and wine, they all appeared so solemn and happy, I wondered that anybody could stay away. It was the happiest day I ever saw. I thought the Lord was there to comfort his people. It seemed to me that they had the peace of heaven; and I hoped the time would come, when I should myself be with that great company and partake of their joy."

"Such occasions," said I, "have been profitable seasons to us."

"Oh, I think they must be," said she. "Though I was only a spectator, I felt it was good for me to be there; and I did not wonder, when you said, that you scarcely recollected a communion season, when there was not at least some one sinner awakened to seek the Lord. It seems to me, that nobody could have witnessed the exercises of last Sunday unmoved. I should think that every spectator would be convinced of the presence of Christ, and the happiness of communion with him. I look forward with delight to the time when I shall come myself to that solemn spot, and give away myself to our Lord Jesus Christ."

In due time, she did come. Years have since rolled away, and she still lives a happy believer—one of the few, whom bereavement has called out of the world's allurements, and aided towards Christ and heaven.

If this publication should ever meet her eye, I am aware it may open afresh the fountains of her grief, and that is the only idea which makes me hesitate about giving this narrative to the world. But I am sure she will know that it is not in my heart to afflict her, by exposing to the world the sacredness of her sorrow, or by recalling to her mind a scene which grief burnt upon her memory; and I am sure she will pardon me the liberty I have taken, when she shares with me the hope, that some mourning mother will be led to Christ by this narrative of THE LOST CHILD—not lost, but gone before.

'Twas a gem fit for love, 'twas the gift of her God,
But no thanks did the gift e'er excite;
Death snatched it away—she sunk under the rod!
All her world was a chaos of night!

Then there whispered a voice from the land of the blest,
Oh my Mother, my Mother! on high!
I wait to receive thee to this land of sweet rest—
Oh my Mother, prepare thee to die.

I'm not in the dark coffin, Christ spread his arms round me,
I awoke 'mid this light and this love,
Where the bright beams of heaven spread their glory around me,
For I died to allure thee above.

She heard it; she felt that attraction of heaven,—
It was peace: she can now kiss the rod;
She flew to her Christ—she's a sinner forgiven:—
They shall meet in the bosom of God.

This is one of the few instances that have come within my own knowledge, wherein the sorrows of mourning have been of any lasting spiritual benefit to an unbeliever. To God's people bereavements and

sorrows are sanctified. This is general, if not universal. Our observation can behold it, and we often hear the testimony from their own lips. But to the 'children of this world,' their days of mourning are very much in vain. They can bury their friends, and with a depth and tenderness and bitterness of mourning weep over their loss; but in a few brief days their hearts turn back again upon the world, and they go on as carelessly and gaily as before. The place of the funeral is a very hopeless place for preaching the gospel to unbelievers. I recollect but two instances before this, in a ministry of more than twenty years, in which anything that I ever said at a funeral has been the means of arousing and leading to Christ a single impenitent sinner. The hope which irreligious persons so frequently indulge, that some future affliction, when it shall come, the loss of some loved and valued friend, will lead them to religion, is almost universally a hope of entire vanity and deception. They do not know their own hearts. Both observation and experience prove such a hope to be delusive. Bleeding hearts are not necessarily penitent ones. Among hundreds whom I have heard, at the time of their reception into the church, giving an account of the manner in which they had been led to religion, I recollect only two, who mentioned the death of a friend as the means of leading them to seek God. The member of a family dies, but the survivors do not become pious. Indeed, so common is this—such an ordinary historical fact, that scarcely a man among us can point to a single instance, where the doings of death and the effectual workings of the Holy Spirit to convert to Christ, have gone side by side. Indeed, unbelieving hearts crushed with a burden of sorrow in the dark and dreadful days of mourning, are more apt to be injured than benefited, by the bitterness of their sad experience.

I knew of a woman, many years since, whose attention had been earnestly directed to the subject of religion, and who, for some weeks, had been prayerfully attempting to seek the Lord; when she was suddenly summoned to the death-bed of one of her children in a neighboring state. She came home from the funeral of that child; and immediately after her return, several other relatives of her own family were brought, disfigured

corpses, to her house, having been killed by the explosion of the boiler on a steamboat. No one could have been more shocked, or more deeply plunged into anguish than was she. "Now," says she (referring to her loss, a day or two afterwards), "I give up the world; it is nothing to me any longer." But when', by the lapse of time, her grief had somewhat lost its poignancy, her seriousness was all gone. Her grief had dissipated her religious anxiety; she had forgotten the subject of her salvation; and relapsing into her former indifference, she went on for months and months in her irreligion and prayerlessness, as unconcerned as ever.

Such things appear strange and wonderful to many people. At the first thought, probably, such a thing appears wonderful to everybody. But I think it is a thing susceptible of a very intelligible explanation. Sorrow leads the mind one way, and seriousness about salvation leads it quite another. Grief for a lost friend is one thing, and grief on account of sin is quite another thing. When a sinner is seeking salvation, his thoughts are turned upon his sins, his soul, his eternity, his God and Saviour; but when he is overwhelmed with personal affliction and sorrow, his thoughts are turned upon his loss. Then, it is not his sin that troubles him,—no, he is just thinking of his loved-one dead, his child, his sister, or his father taken from him, and now buried in the deep, dark grave. His mind is now called off from the state, the guilt, and danger of his own immortal soul, from his need of Christ to save him, and of the Holy Spirit to 'renew a right spirit within him' 'Whatever it may be, that leads him to forget his sins, does him an injury. Any diversion of his thoughts to a new channel, does him an injury. The channel may be more dark—more distressful—more dreadful to him; but his attention has become diverted to a new object, and that 'one thing needful' is at present crowded away into the background of his contemplations, or forgotten entirely. And hence, the deeper his sorrow, the more dangerous its influence becomes. His affliction just makes him forget his sins, and his soul.

And thus it is, as I suppose, that we behold, all over the world, the mourning of unbelievers so generally unattended or followed by any religious benefits. Their thoughts are on their loss—their earthly loss. The

death of their friend has spread a gloom over the world. Their house lacks an inmate,—their heart lacks a friend to lean upon, along the pilgrimage of life. Another star has gone out, and left a dark spot in their heavens, which once appeared so bright and beautiful to their eye. A seat is left vacant at the fire-side,—a friend is absent from the table,—a familiar voice is missed in the family-circle. But all these are earthly griefs. They are not spiritual ones to an unbeliever. The mourning unbeliever never much prized his now lost friend, as an aid to his holiness and salvation;—he prized him only for earthly reasons. He never loved the lost one as a companion to go hand in hand with him to Jerusalem, or along the vales of Palestine, amid the fragrance and beauty of ‘the rose of Sharon and lily of the valley.’ He never loved his companionship, because his lips were vocal with the melody of ‘another country, even an heavenly,’ which he hoped to reach;—but simply because his companionship made earth more pleasant, not heaven more near. And, therefore, when death has snatched away this now lost companion, only an earthly sorrow takes possession of the heart, just that ‘sorrow of the world which worketh death.’ And when he turns away from the grave of his buried friend, or, in the dark days that follow, thinks of him so mournfully, the whole effect of his sorrow is just to make the world more dreary; not the world to come, more gladsome and inviting. If he had lived with his friend as a Christian, it would have been very different with him now, when his friend is no more; and the death he deplores would have made his thoughts hang more fondly around the religious things, in which he and his friend used to aid and comfort one another. But he did not; —he was an unbeliever (himself, whatever his lost friend may have been); and, therefore, the death ‘which has saddened him, just confines his thoughts to this dark and dreary world, instead of leading them towards the world of immortality.

God is infinitely willing to sanctify to men their sorrows, and bring the beams of gladness over the dark days of their mourning. But men misuse their times of sorrow. The sad history of thousands of hearts that have bled, demonstrates but too plainly this melancholy truth,—our piety seldom aprings from the grave that our tears have watered.