

The Fireside.

AUNT ABBY'S FIRST EASTER.

BY ANNIE TRUMBULL BLOSSOM.

"I wasn't brought up to keep Easter. To tell the truth, I didn't know anything about it, or what 'twas for, till I was a woman grown. You know there was a feeling, those days, against all such things, even Christmas itself, as Roman Catholics, or, anyway, Episcopal seasons, and not to be kept by other denominations. Why, pa used to tell how he sent a big, fat turkey, one time, on Christmas Day, to Parson Roe. The old man sent it back, with a note that said that any other day he'd take it, thankful, but not on a popish feast day. He didn't get turkey real often, neither, so it must have been hard work to return it.

"So, as I said, I don't believe I'd ever heard of such a time as Easter till I was grown up. Then Dr. Watkins came to the village to practice, after old Dr. Ashby died. He was an Episcopal, and he wanted a church of that sort. He found a few other folks that felt the same way,—English Bill, the rope-maker, and Miss Viney Lee, whose father had been a Tory, and some young folks that wanted something new and queer,—and they started an Episcopal church. They used to have their meetings in a house way up at the north end of the village, not far from the burying-ground.

"Well, I was spending the biggest part of my time, those days, in that burying-ground; for my little Dannie, my only child, the only one I ever had, was laying there. I guess I've told you about him,—the cutest, prettiest little yellow-haired fellow, taken away from me so sudden, when he was hardly more than a baby. He died just at the beginning of winter. Maybe you know something about what that means. To lay down the little body you'd always keep so warm and careful, covering it with soft blankets, cuddling it close to you away from drafts or the least mite of cold air, holding its cunning little feet in your own warm hands, so's they'd never be chilled,—to lay down that soft, pretty baby, I say, in the cold outdoors, and under the very snow itself,—oh, how can we ever, ever bear to do it! But we have to,—so many, many of us mothers have to. It 'most broke my heart. I was a member of the church, a believer, and I tried to bear my trouble right. I knew it was only the body, and not the soul, that I was putting away there. But I loved that little body with all my heart and soul and mind. In a mite of a child like that, only going on two when he died, it's the body part we love, almost more than the soul, seems to me. The soul in a baby is so little and hid up, you 'most overlook it. I loved the yellow curly hair; the blue eyes; the soft, pinky cheeks; the little bit of a mouth, just as red and sweet as one of my cinnamon roses; the pretty baby fingers; the helpless little feet—every single speck of that child's body that I'd held in my arms night and day for 'most twenty months. And now I must put it out in the cold, and leave it there. I tell you, even thinking of the happy little soul up in heaven didn't make up, just then, for losing and leav-

ing all alone, out there, that blessed little body.

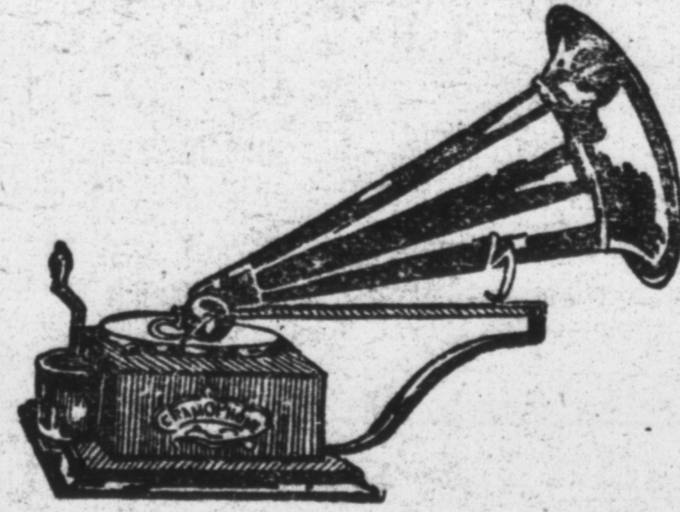
"But I tried to take it right. I said, time and time again, from the very first, 'Thy will be done.' I told the Lord I knew it was all right, that he doeth all things well, that he only gave and took away again, and I said, over and over and over again, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' But as long as I felt that way,—didn't complain or rebel against God's will—it didn't seem to me there was any harm in making much of that little bed where my baby's body laid. Seemed to me it was the best thing to do, making one think of God and his chastening, of heaven and the many mansions and the little children up there that always behold the face of their Father. So day day after day, and week after week, I passed my time,—the biggest part of it,—there in the burying-ground, by Dannie's little grave. I kept the snow away, and laid sweet-smelling fir balsam branches over it. Of course, there wasn't any flowers in bloom at that time of year, but I found pretty moss under the snow and running pine, and I had everlasting, pearly white, that I'd picked and dried in the fall. So I kept that little bed sweet and pretty, and as warm as I could. And there I sat hours and hours of every day. I wrapped 'up warm, so's not to take cold, and somehow kept from getting real sick, though I don't see how it was.

"Folks talked about it,—said they never saw such sorrow, such mourning, in a mother before; and somehow I like to have them say it. I liked to see them come to the windows as I went by in my gloomy black clothes, with my white, mournful face, and to know they were saying, 'Did you ever see such a crushed, broken-hearted woman? Here is two months or more since her child was taken, and still she just lives by his grave.' You know what I mean. I didn't do it for that. I didn't even know I liked to hear them talk that way, but I see now that I did. I gave up everything else for the sake of that grave. I'd been interested in a good many things before Dannie died. I'd belonged to the sewing society, and was one of the busiest workers in getting up the box of things we sent off every year to the home missionaries out West. I had a class of little boys in the Sabbath school, and I used to go out a good deal among the poor and sick in the town. But I gave all those things up now. It would be too hard to make or mend clothes for the missionary children when my own little boy never need my sewing again. And how could I talk to those boys in my class, remembering my baby, who would never grow up to be a little lad like them! And I just could not go out among the sick and sorrowful, and try to comfort them, when my own heart was sore and aching, and 'most broke. I didn't even go to meeting very often. Wasn't the little grave a more solemn, sacred spot than any earthly temple? I said to myself, 'Wasn't it good to be there,—better for the poor hurt soul than all the preaching and hymn-singing, and that kind of worship.

"I don't see now how I could have got so wrong and mistaken. There

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was plenty of things to show me my errors. Some one told me one day that Eddie Freeman, one of my Sabbath school boys, was getting into bad ways. He'd left the class because he didn't like the new teacher, and he was going with a wild set of bigger boys, had learnt to swear and do other bad things. 'But my little boy is safe,' I says to myself,—'safe here in his quiet little bed, with his mother watching over him day in and day out.' There was a good deal of suffering that winter, sickness about and poverty. But hearing of it only made me keep closer to my grave, and think, 'No sickness or sorrow can come here, to touch my baby in this blessed spot.'

"Well, it came spring. I was dreadful glad to see the first signs of it, the little pinky-white buds of the Mayflower showing when you brushed the snow away, and the soft, surry mouse-ears peeking up at the foot of the trees. I picked all I could find of the earliest, weak, soft little blooms that made me think of my helpless little baby, and strimmered them all over his grave. I sowed some grass-seed there, and watched and watered it, and I loved that little heap, and stayed by it more and more, and forgot everything else in the whole world.

"One Sunday in April I got up very early,—it wasn't quite light—and started for the burying-ground. I'd found some white anemones the day before, and dug up a lot, and I wanted to set them out around my baby's bed. I didn't know it was anything particular that day, though I recollected it was the Sabbath. But I remember it was a beautiful morning, soft and bright, with a pinky light over everything as the sun came up. And somehow, as I got to the burying-ground and sat down my basket of plants, there came into my mind the verse in the Bible about the women coming 'very vearily in the morning at the rising of the sun' to the sepulcher of our Lord. And just then I heard music. It came from the build-

ing where the Episcopalians held their meetings right close to the burying-ground. 'Twas singing, and though it was soft and sweet, I could hear every word plain. The first thing that came to my ears was, 'He is not here, not here; he is not here.' I don't know myself why these words struck me so. They're in the Bible, and I'd read them dozens of times. Maybe it was because everything was so still, and I had thought I was all alone, the only person awake in all the place, but anyway those words seemed to be spoke, or sung, to me myself, and nobody else, and they seemed to have a terrible meaning. I started up, and I says to myself,—I don't know but I said it out loud, 'Not here! the Lord is not here!' And soft, soft, but real clear and sweet, I heard the words again in a sort of chant like, 'He is not here; not here. Why seek ye the living among the dead?'

"I dropped down again on the ground by my boy's grave, and covered up my eyes. In one quick minute I seemed to see the truth, and to know what I had been doing, and, more, what I had been leaving undone. 'Twas just as if some big stone had been rolled away that had hid the truth, and I could see,—could see something, but not all. 'Not here,' I says to myself,—'not where I have spent these long months, nor in this solemn place I've set so much by and made so fair and sweet. Then where, oh, just tell me, where is the Lord? For you have taken him away, and I don't know where you have laid him.' And the sweet singing went on chanting-like again, 'He is risen, he is risen.' I looked up, way up, as far away from that little heaped-up grave as I could look, into the blue sky with the sort of pinky light over it, and it seemed so far away. I cried out, 'Oh! what shall I do?' And right away I heard the voices chanting out the answer, 'Go, tell my brethren. Go quwickedly,' they were singing, 'Go, tell my disciples.' I understood. How could