

## The Fireside.

### A SIMPLE FAITH.

BY ANNIE TRUMBULL SLOSSON.

Only a few months ago, there passed away from this earthly life a dear woman whose childlike faith taught me many lessons. Her skin was dark, but I never knew a whiter soul. She had been born a slave, but God's abounding freedom was hers even in the days of bondage. She was my servant, but she was also my friend, and often, very often, my teacher. I know I cannot tell the story of her simple faith and beauty of her religious life as it should be told; I cannot make you understand it. I never knew such firm, unshaken trust in God, such a positive liberal belief in the Bible and every word it holds, such entire, utter freedom from doubts which at times assail most of us. I do not think she had ever heard that there were those who doubted the existence of a God. I well remember overhearing her exclamation, given to a young girl who was reading aloud to her of the verse, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

"Co'se it don't mean there ever was anybody that said that. Thank the Lord, it's lain out so plain and clear folks can't help seein' it's so. But it means that, if there ever should be anybody that said it, even in his own inside heart, he'd be a fool — and he would, sure."

Drusy was quite without what is generally called education. She could not read or write. But she knew her Bible well, though not in just the way its commentators know it. She had never heard of the higher criticism, nor revised versions, even of different editions or translations of the scriptures. Yet often her criticism seemed higher than that of most, and her version of the Book she loved an authorized one, having supreme authority and needing little revision. Yet her comments often provoked a smile, and her marginal notes and annotations, if I may call them so, were original, and sometimes amusing. She brought her religion, not only into everyday life, but into her every-hour—nay, every-minute existence. Sometimes her frequent, familiar references to the Deity would startle one. But it was only for a moment. You could not help recognizing the real, deep reverence underlying all, nor could you fail to see that her allusions were only familiar in the best sense of the term, when it expresses closeness of relation—a beloved accustomedness.

"Do you think it is going to rain, Drusy?" I would ask sometimes, when dry, fair weather seemed desirable in my eyes.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what he's goin' to do about weather this time. Mebbe he'll see there's some wet needed somewhere's about, and turn on the rain, mebbe he'll keep it dry. You never can tell what he'll do,—can ye?" And she would smile an almost indulgent smile, but one full of loving trust. It would be all right as long as he managed affairs, her look said, and she was not anxious.

"There, now," she exclaimed once, after an exciting presidential election, "to think we was wrong, after all! You know we thought that other gen'leman was the one that had ought to get the place; we held he was the best one for it. But 'pears we got it wrong, and

this other gen'leman was the one that 'd ought to have it, 'cordin' to the Lord. I'm real glad there's somebody that knows just what's best, and that he's got the say, for folks is so ign'rant, and politics is dreadful hard."

She had the vivid imagination common to her race, a love of the picturesque, dramatic, and marvelous. So to her the Book of Revelation was perhaps the most delightful part of the Bible, and its wildest, most incomprehensible imagery gave her intense pleasure. How many, many times has a conversation like this taken place!

"Drusy, would you like to hear a chapter from the Bible?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am! if you please."

Drusy's manner was always most courteous and respectful. She had belonged to a fine old family of Virginia, and was well trained from childhood.

"And what shall I read?"

"Anything that suits you, ma'am; it's all good."

"But I would rather have you choose, Drusy."

"Well, ma'am, if it's really just the same to you, I do feel to-day like hearing a little Revelations."

This did not mean those peaceful passages which speak of the place where there is no night, where tears are wiped away, where the quiet river glides along between tree-shaded banks. It was the strange, mysterious, figurative part of the Apocalypse she longed for, that which tells of the angel with the key and the great chain, who laid hold of the dragon, "that old serpent," and bound him, and set a seal upon him for a thousand years; of the four beasts full of eyes before and behind; of the white horse, the black horse; and the "horse that was red." She wanted to hear of the seven angels and their seven trumpets, and the terrible things that followed the sounding of each one; of the locusts whose shapes were like unto horses prepared unto battle; of the beast with seven heads and ten horns, and "upon his heads the name of blasphemy." What meaning did she find in this wonderful mystery? I do not know.

But that she found something which meant to her much that was beautiful as well as awe-inspiring, comforting as well as terrible, you would not have doubted if you had watched her dark, expressive face as she listened. Her eyes shone, her lips moved as if she were repeating to herself the words she heard, she rocked gently back and forth, her hands clasped tightly together moved in a sort of regular measured way, slowly up and down, as she bent forward, eager to catch every word. Then at the utterance of some strange—to me almost meaningless—word, the tense attitude would relax, the bright eyes soften, become moist, and the features quiver with some tender emotion I could not comprehend. I remember well her asking me one day to read "that wormwood chapter." This proved to be the eighth chapter of Revelation, where we are told of a great star burning as a lamp, and how it fell from heaven upon the rivers and fountains. The name of the star was Wormwood, and, when it fell, a third part of the waters became wormwood, and men died of those waters because of the bitterness. As I ended, Drusy exclaimed:

"Oh! ain't that just beautiful? I

tell ye, the whole Bible's good, and I set store by every single word; but some of it's sort of hard to follow when you hear it read out. But with Revelation it's all so plain and straight-out, and easy and nach'l. When you read that part just now, I could see it all as plain as anything. The great big shinin' wormwood star up in the sky, and then it's beginnin' to fall and fall. I see it comin' down, and then drop into the water, and see the folks drinkin' it and then dyin'. It's all so nach'l,—now ain't it?"

It was not to me, I confess, though I had read the explanatory notes of many commentators. But Drusy understood it. Who had helped her?

A few years ago we were told that there was to be an eclipse of the moon visible in the eastern United States. As it was to occur late in the night, I did not speak of it to Drusy, not supposing that she would take any particular interest in the phenomenon, or care to keep awake till it could be seen. I stole downstairs from my room, in the silent hours, to watch for the spectacle. When all was over, and I was about to re-enter the house quietly, I suddenly saw that the kitchen windows were brightly lighted. Fearing that some one was ill, I went quickly into the room. There sat Drusy alone and quiet. This was strange enough at that hour of the night, but her appearance was even more surprising, for she was dressed in her best black Sunday gown, with its snowy folds of muslin at her throat. At my sudden entrance and exclamation of surprise she looked up. There was a touch of wounded pride in her voice as she said, "You didn't tell me a word about it, ma'am."

"About what?" I asked, much puzzled.

"The show," she replied,—the show in the sky. I heard Benjamin read about it in the paper,—how there was to be some kind of a show up there, and I knew God had got it up for folks to look at. He's always doin' such things for us, you know. Now I've got a bad cold and a misery in my head, and I don't dare to go out in the night air. Of course, he understands about that, and wouldn't expect it. But," she added gravely and with much dignity, "he'd have a right to feel hurt if I didn't take no notice at all, but just went to bed, and slept through the whole entertainment. So I got ready, and I've been settin' here ever since it opened. Is it out now, ma'am?"

Do you smile at such simplicity? Well, I smiled, too, at the time, but as I remember the scene now it is not all amusement that I feel. There are so many wonderful spectacles provided for us of which we take no notice, and through which we seem to sleep on as though no strange thing had happened.

Drusy was a Methodist; she loved her own church, but she loved all that was good and true, and was very tolerant and liberal in her attitude towards other denominations than her own. She grew impatient—in her mild way—when she spoke of the excited discussions which arose at times among her colored acquaintances of different creeds.

"Makes me 'most sick to hear them," she would say, "talkin' about what they don't understand themselves,—for sime of them's mighty ign'rant. But they go on talkin' louder and louder, the Baptists callin' out 'Buried with him in baptism.' 'Buried in baptism,' and them not knowin' what it means; and the 'Piscopals braggin' about their prayer-books with the printed prayers made so many hundred years ago; and the Methodists talkin' at the top of their voices about 'John Westery,' 'John Westery,' makes me 'most sick."

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"And who was John Westery?" I once ventured to ask.

The dear old woman hesitated, looking a little confused, then said, "Why, I don't know as much about them as I'd ought to, but I guess he was somebody that went roaming through the wilderness and preachin'. They say he started the Methodists, but I don't just know, don't seem to make much difference to me." I think the good woman had probably confused John Wesley with John the Baptist, though I cannot tell why.

One day, when we were together in the kitchen, we were talking of favorite texts and hymns. At last she said, "I think about the most beautiful word in the whole Bible is bassdum." The word seemed such a strange one that I thought I had misunderstood her, and asked her to repeat it. She spoke it again with much feeling and earnestness, "Bassdum." I was much puzzled, and

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