

The Fireside.

Bessie in the Valley of the Shadow.

A TRUE STORY.

It was a warm morning in July. I was looking through my mending basket, when my little son came in from doing an errand for me.

"O mother," he said, "Mrs. Weaver told me that Bessie Lee has the fever."

"Is she very ill?" I asked.

"Mrs. Weaver says she is not so very sick, but Bessie thinks she is going to die, and will not believe the doctor when he tells her she is not dangerously sick."

Bessie was a pretty, blithe girl of seventeen years, who never seemed to have a care in all her merry life. She lived only a block from us, but was a member of Broad Street church, so not under the pastoral care of my husband. That afternoon a messenger came to us requesting Mr. King to visit Bessie and talk to her. He found her almost beside herself with fear lest she should die.

The doctor said the nervous excitement was very bad for her, and felt anxious that the ministers should say something to comfort and calm her. Three had talked to her very earnestly, but she only grew more excited, so they were at times forced to hold her in bed. The next day I went by special request to see if I could say something to comfort her. Very earnestly I prayed for wisdom and guidance. When I came into the room she gave me a smile of welcome, and seemed to be quiet. With one hand she was tightly clasping her mother's. She held it thus all the time, so that her mother was forced to remain right with her day and night. She spoke a few pleasant words to me, when all at once the wild look came into her eyes and she cried, "O, Mrs. King, I am going to die and be lost! O what shall I do? What shall I do?"

I said: "Bessie, the doctor says you are not so very sick, but even if you are, can you not trust Jesus?"

"O, don't tell me that!" she exclaimed. "They all say that, and I don't know how to trust. I don't know what you mean by 'trusting.'"

It was some time before we could get the poor girl quiet again. As soon as she would listen, I said, "Bessie, who is holding your hand?"

She looked at me wonderingly, and replied, "Mamma."

"But who is holding the other?" I continued.

"Why, no one," she replied, in a surprised tone.

"Now, Bessie," I said, "I want you just to let Jesus hold that hand. Just put your hand in his and say, 'Dear Jesus, I am so weak and sick I do not even know how to trust you, but I want you to take my hand and hold it as long as I live, and don't let it go when I die.' Now you can't see him, but he is standing right here, waiting to take your hand; let him have it, for he says, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'"

She looked inquiringly at me for a moment, and a sweet, glad smile broke over her face. I saw her open her fingers and close them again, then I slipped away.

When I called next day she was sleeping. Her mother told me that she had loosed her hand soon after I left, and had fallen into the first natural

sleep she had enjoyed since her illness began. When she had been asleep a few hours, she was aroused to take some nourishment. She said, "Mamma, Jesus is still holding my hand." The doctor now thought she would rally, but he was disappointed. She slept all of the time, and when aroused to take medicine or nourishment, she would say, always with such a sweet smile, "Mamma, Jesus is still holding my hand."

A few days later, at one o'clock in the morning, they sent for me to come to Bessie. I found her slowly dying. Just as the day began to dawn, her gentle spirit passed away, leaving to her loved ones only the beautiful clay tenement. We closed the blithe eyes, but the expression of perfect peace remained on the quiet features. Jesus was still holding her hand as she passed through the "valley of the shadow" and entered into the beautiful city. As we gazed on the beautiful dead, some one whispered, "So young to die;" but my heart answered, "So young to be so blessed."

I have written this little experience of my life, which is true just as related, hoping it might help some person, who feels uncertain as to whether they are trusting in the Saviour. A lady told me the other day that long after she had become a professing Christian, she was uncertain as to whether she was really trusting in the Lord. She said, "The words of the little hymn expressed my feelings:

There is a point I long to know,
Off it causes anxious thought:
Do I love the Lord or no,
Am I his or am I not?

Gradually the assurance of God's love dawned upon my conscience, and I was at peace. If some one had said to me as you did to Bessie, "Simply let Jesus hold your hand, and ask him to always hold it," and had told me then, feeling the strength thus given, to strive with all my might to please him, I should have understood and felt there was something tangible for my faith to lay hold upon."

Yes, giving your consent to allow Jesus to hold your hand, and guide you, is "trusting on Jesus," believing in him. Not long since, as I was taking a walk, I met a lady holding a little boy by the hand; he was crying and struggling to get away, but she held him firm. Occasionally he would stumble and fall, but she still held his hand and pulled him up again.

So Jesus holds our hands. We sometimes think we know best and want our own way and struggle against him, still he holds us. Sometimes we stumble and fall, but he clings to us, for he has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Sometimes the way is rough, sorrow and temptation meet us at every turn, and our weary feet want to seek a smoother way, but that loving hand will guide us home, for he has promised. Perfect confidence in a Saviour's love and mercy will not make us careless in the performance of duty. It will make us love him more and more and strive to be like him. How easy it would have been for the little boy to have walked by his mother's side, had he been willing to be led. It is when we want our own way, want to walk in forbidden paths that the way seems rough and we stum-

ble and fall. Then we begin to lose confidence in the gentle, guiding hand, and we doubt whether we are his children or not. Why not say, in the words of the beautiful hymn:

I'll go where you tell me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain, or vale or sea.
I'll do what you tell me to do, dear Lord,
I'll be what you want me to be.
—Christian Observer.

HOW THE CHOIR RALLIED.

Just a little sentence uttered by one of her companions, but it would keep repeating itself over and over in her mind, and making a sorry disturbance there.

"Only a deacon's meeting next Sunday; no need to have any rehearsal of choir music. I shan't go anyway, if they do have; shall you?"

That was the sentence with a query at the end, to which she had at the time given an unhesitating reply in the negative.

But Kate Gray had not turned the corner twenty steps after leaving her friend at her own home before the words and her own hasty response had begun to torment her.

"Only a deacon's meeting"—was that true? Why should it be called thus? Simply because they happened to be left for one Sabbath day without a minister, and the services were to be conducted by one of the deacons.

"A deacon's meeting." What a strange name to call a church service by, she thought. Why did they not call the ordinary service, led by their pastor, "a minister's meeting?" That would be just as sensible and proper.

Kate's mind went on and on, and reviewed the matter from all points. At last she arose from the hall chair, where she had been sitting for ten minutes, thinking with her hat on just as she came from the street, and went out again.

"I'm going to see Jennie Dean now, before she has told every one that we are not going to rehearse hymns for Sunday. We are, if I have any influence at all, and I believe I have. Deacon's meeting, indeed! I'm ashamed of myself for falling in with such an idea for an instant."

Fifteen minutes later Jennie Dean opened her door to admit the friend from whom she supposed she had parted for the day.

Kate Gray proceeded promptly to the point.

"Jennie, I've been thinking the matter of the choir rehearsal over ever since I left you, and the more I think of it the more it seems to me that we would be doing a mean thing to neglect our choir rehearsal because the minister is going to be away. Now, just think of it a moment, and see if it doesn't seem the same way to you.

"It will be not a deacon's meeting any more than our ordinary service is a minister's meeting; it will be God's meeting; and if the service is going to be deficient as regards the sermon, we ought to do all we possibly can to make up the deficiency by trying to have the song service better than usual."

Kate paused to hear Jennie's reply, which was quite in sympathy with her own idea—so easily may we influence another for the right if we only try earnestly.

"You are right, Kate," said Jennie, "that was a silly notion of mine. I'm ashamed to think that I ever thought or

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said what I did to you. We'll call on Teresa Palmer together, and talk it all over and make the song service the best we have had in a long time."

Teresa Palmer, older, more serious-minded generally, and the best singer in the village, who would yet have never had the courage to stir others in a reform movement, felt gladly in with the suggestion made by Jennie and Kate.

"You dear girls, of course that is the right thing to do. As we have no regular leader we three will talk with all the others, and all together call on the organist, and next Sunday morning the dear old church shall ring with music as it has not before in a long time."

And so it came about that Deacon Ames was cheered and inspired to do his best by such a burst of sweet harmony from the full choir as he had not heard in many a day.

Hearing a report of that day's service from Deacon Ames and others, the

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