

IN HEAVEN BUT NOT OF HEAVEN.

[NOTE.—The paper from which this was selected was sent us by Sister Sanders.]

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.)

He looked at me and I could not help but return his gaze; his eyes compelled me; and in doing so I confessed to being ravished by his beauty. I could never have believed the human face Divine could have born so grand a stamp of dignity and charm. But far beyond the entrancing loveliness of those celestial features was the expression through every lineament of that countenance, and through those eyes that were gazing upon me. It was as though that face was only a sunlit window, through which I could see right into the depths of the pure, benevolent soul within. I don't know how I appeared to my beautiful visitor; I know not what form I bore, for I had not, as yet, beheld myself mirrored anywhere since I had doffed mortality for immortality. I evidently had a deep interest for him, an interest that seemed of a saddening kind, for his features seemed to me to grow almost sorrowful as I lay there with my eyes fixed on him by a fascinating spell.

He spoke first. Had he not done so I could never have summoned courage to address him. His voice was soft and musical and fitted well with the seriousness of his aspect. I understood him almost before I heard his words, although I cannot tell now what language he spoke. I suppose it was the universal language of heaven.

This was the substance of what he said: My arrival was known throughout a certain district of the celestial regions, where were gathered the ransomed spirits who came from the earthly neighborhood where I had resided. The tidings of my arrival had been flashed through the heavenly telephone, which spoke not in one ear only, but in every ear in that particular region. My name has been whispered on every hillside and echoed in every valley, had been breathed from every tree and flower, had sounded forth at every turn of the golden street, had been articulated in every room of every mansion, and proclaimed from every tower and pinnacle of the stupendous temple in which these glorified saints day and night present their worship to the great Father.

All who had known me on earth, all who had any knowledge of my family, my opportunities for helping forward the Kingdom of Christ, whom they worshipped and adored, were burning to see me and hear me tell of the victories I had won and the souls I had blessed while on earth; and all were especially anxious to hear if I had been the means of bringing salvation to the loved ones they had left behind.

All this was poured in upon my soul. I knew not which way to look. Again and again, I remembered my life of ease and comfort. What could I say? How could I appear with the record of my life before these waiting spirits? What was there in it better than the record of self-gratification? I had no martyr stories to tell, I had sacrificed nothing worth naming on earth, much less in heaven, for His dear sake!

PART II.

My mind was running on in this direction, when I think my visitor

must have discerned something of what I was thinking, and felt some pity for me, seeing that he spoke again: "Where you find yourself is not actually heaven, but only its forecourt, or a sort of outer circle. Presently, the Lord Himself, with a great procession of His chosen ones, will come to take you into the Celestial City itself, where your residence will be if He deem you worthy; that is, if your conduct on the battle-field below has pleased Him. Meanwhile, I have obtained permission to come and speak to you concerning a soul who, I understand, lives in the neighborhood of your late residence, in whom I feel a deep interest. Our knowledge of the transactions of earth is, for our own sakes, limited, but now and then we are permitted to get a glance. "Can you," he said, looking at me with a burning longing, "tell me anything of my son? He was my only son. I loved him dearly, loved him too much. I spoiled him when a child. He had his own way. He grew up willful, passionate and disobedient. My example helped him not."

Here a cloud for a moment came over that beautiful brow, but vanished as quickly as it came. "Memory has been busy, but that has all gone," he said, as though talking to himself, and then he finished the story of his prodigal son. He, the father, had been rescued, washed, regenerated, learned to fight for souls, and used to win many to the blood-stained standard. An accident, however, had suddenly overtaken him at his work, and as suddenly swung him into heaven. "And now," he added, "where is my boy? Give me tidings of my boy! He lived near you, had business dealings with you. Is he saved? What did you do for him? Is there hope? Tell me what his feelings are today?"

He ceased speaking. My heart sunk within me. What could I say? I knew the boy. The story of the father's death and his prodigal son had been told me. I had never spoken one serious word to the boy about his soul or about his Saviour. I had been busy about other things. And, now, what could I say to his father, who stood before me? I was dumb!

That cloud that I had noticed before, came again on the face of my visitor, only with a dark shadow this time. He must have guessed it all. He looked at me with a glance in which I felt that disappointment to himself and pity for me were combined, spread forth his white wings, and soared away out of my sight.

I was so intently gazing after his retreating form that I had not minded a second fair being, who had descended from above, and occupied the place abandoned only a moment before by my last visitor.

I turned and looked upon the newcomer. This time it was a spirit of the same class, of the same ransomed multitude who once were dwellers here below. There was the dignity of bearing, the same marvelous expression of inward power, and purity, and joy; but in this case combined (I could have imagined) with a beauty of more delicate and entrancing mould. Beautiful as I thought my first visitor to be, more beautiful than any conception or dream of earth could be, yet here was a beauty that surpassed it—not, perhaps, if judged from inherent rules, but judged from my standpoint, for it

must be remembered that I was still a man. My former visitor, I have said, was a glorified man; this one was evidently the glorified form of a woman.

I had, when on earth, sometimes thought that I could have wished for the privilege of beholding Eve in the hour when she came forth from the hands of her Maker and had imagined something—only something of what her beautiful form must have been as she sprang into being on that bridal morning, young and pure and beautiful—the fair image of her Maker—perhaps, the sweetest work of God. Now here I saw her,—I saw Eve reproduced before my eyes as young, as pure and as beautiful, nay, more beautiful than her first mother could possibly have been; for was not this His finished workmanship?

But I was soon awakened from my dream by the voice of the fair creature who, from her manner, evidently wished to speak to me on some matter of great importance.

She introduced herself much after the fashion of my first interrogator. She, too, had come from the very same earthly neighborhood where I had so long lived.

She told me her name. I had heard it on earth. She was a widow who had struggled through great difficulties. Her husband's death had been her life. Converted, she had given herself up unreservedly to fight for the Lord. Her children had been her first care. They had all been saved, and were fighting for God, but one. The mention of that name brought the same saddening cloud on her lovely face, which had dimmed the bright face of my first visitor; but the cloud vanished almost as it came. That one, that unsaved one, was a girl, who had been her mother's delight. She had grown up beautiful, the village pride, but, alas! had gone astray. It was the old story of wrong and seduction, and cruel abandonment, and all the consequent train of miseries.

I listened. I had known of some of the sad tale on earth, but I had turned away from hearing of it further, as being "no concern of mine." Little did I ever think that I was going to be confronted with it in heaven!

And now the bright spirit turned on me those eyes, that gleaming with love and pity; were more beautiful than ever. She said again: "My daughter lived near you. You know her. Have you saved her? I know not much about her, but I do know that one earnest and determined effort would save her." And again she asked me, "Have you my child?" I must have cried out in agony. I know I put my hands before my eyes, for I could no longer bear to meet her glance. How long she continued to look on me with an expression of pity almost greater than she had shown for her lost child, I knew not; but when I withdrew my hands, she was gone, and the silvery sheen of her white wings marked her out to my seeking eyes like a speck on the distant blue.

Again I gasped out, "Oh, my God, is this heaven? Will these interrogations go on forever? Will the meanness and earthliness of my past life haunt me every day and hour throughout eternity? What shall I do? Can I not go back to earth, and do something to redeem myself from this

wretched sense of unworthiness? Can I not live my life over again? This question had hardly passed through my mind when there was another rush of wings, and down beside me alighted another form, surprisingly resembling the first that had spoken to me, and yet, oh so very different! But I will not stay to describe him; you must imagine it.

He introduced himself much in the same way as my former visitors. He had been a great sinner, but had been awakened and won to Christ but a short time back by the Salvation Army, and had joined its ranks. Having had much forgiven, he had loved much. All his desire when on earth was to get free from the entanglements of business, and to devote himself, a living sacrifice, as an officer to the saving of men. When just on the threshold of the realization of his wish, he had been sent for to heaven, and here he was a spirit of glory and joy, coming to inquire from me concerning the corps in which he was a soldier, and of the crowd of companions he had left behind. Did I know his old corps? Their barracks were erected near my house of business; had I helped them in their struggles with difficulties and details? Had I done anything for his old mates, who were drinking and cursing and fighting their way to hell? He had died with prayers for them on his lips. Had I stopped them on their way to ruin?

Again I refused to speak. What could I say? I knew his corps, but I had never given them a word of encouragement. I knew the hovels in which his old mates lived, and the public houses in which they spent their money; but I had been too busy, or too proud, or too shamefaced to seek them out with the tidings of a Savior's love. I was speechless! He guessed my feelings, I suppose, compassionate me, and left in sadness,—at least in as much sadness as is possible in that holy, heavenly land.

For myself, I was in anguish, strange as it may appear, considering I was in heaven. But so it was. Wondering whether there was not some comfort for me, and involuntarily looking around, I saw, or thought I saw, a marvelous phenomenon on the horizon at an immense distance. All that part of the heavens appeared to be filled with a brilliant light, surpassing the blaze of a thousand suns at noonday, and yet there was no oppressive glare rendering it difficult to gaze, as is the case with our own sun when he shines in his glory. Here was a brilliance far surpassing anything that could be imagined, and yet, I could look upon it with pleasure. As I gazed on and wondered what it could be, it appeared to come a little closer, and I perceived clearly that it was coming in the direction of the spot on which I lay; for I was still reclining on the banks of the beautiful river where I first found myself.

And now I could distinctly hear the sound of music. The distance was a great many miles away, after the measurement of earth, but the atmosphere was so clear, and I found my eyesight so strong, that I could readily discern objects at a distance which, on earth, would have required a powerful telescope. The sound came nearer. It was music, beyond question, and such music as I never heard before; but there was a strange commingling of other sounds which al-

together made a marvelous melody, made up, as I afterwards discovered, by the strain that came from the multitude of musicians, and the shouts and songs that proceeded from innumerable voices. Gradually it approached, rapidly, I might have said, but that my curiosity was so strongly aroused to know what it was, that a few minutes seemed an age. At length, I was enabled to comprehend the marvelous vision that approached me. But who could describe it! The whole firmament was filled, as it were, with innumerable forms, each of beauty and dignity far surpassing those with whom I had already made an acquaintance. Here was a representative portion of the aristocracy of heaven accompanying the King who, as the spirit had informed me, was coming to the spirits of men and women who had escaped from earth to welcome into the heaven of heavens those who had fought the good fight, who had kept the faith, and overcome in the conflict as He had overcome. I stood filled with awe and wonder. Could it be possible? Was I at last actually to see my Lord, and be welcomed by Him? In the thought of this rapture I forgot the sorrow that only a moment before reigned in my heart, and my whole nature swelled with expectation and delight.

And now the procession was upon me. I had seen some of the pageants of earth—displays that required the power of mighty monarchs and wealth of ancient nations to create—but they were each, or all combined, as the glimpse of a feeble rushlight to a tropical sun, when put alongside the scene that now spread itself before my wondering eyes.

I cannot attempt a description, it would be impossible. Moreover, I was so agitated at the thought of meeting my Lord that the whole spectacle was, to my eyes, simply one vast sea of glory and overwhelming rush of harmony.

But on it came; the first rank of the shining host had passed me by. I had sprung up from my recumbent position and fallen prostrate as these heavenly spirits neared me, each one looking in himself, to my untutored eyes, like a god, so far as greatness and power could be expressed by the outward appearance of any being. Rank after rank swept past me. Each turned his eye upon me, or seemed to do so, and to them all, I could not help feeling that I was somewhat an object of pity. Perhaps it was my own feelings that made me imagine this, but it certainly appeared to me as though these noble beings regarded me as a craven, cowardly soul, who had only cared for his own interests on earth, and had only come up there with the same selfish motives.

However, onward the mighty cavalcade swept. I have said "cavalcade," for whilst part of the procession filled the heavens with their white, beautiful wings, and another walked with upright mien, the picture of dignity itself, there was a host, to my mind as imposing as any in the glorious crowd, mounted upon the most beautiful horses that ever eye rested upon.

On they came. Thousands passed me, yet there appeared to be no diminution of the numbers yet to come. I looked at the train as it stretched backward, but my eyes could see no end to it. There must have been millions! It was indeed "a multitude that no man could number."

(CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE)