

Baby Has Gone to School.

The baby has gone to school; ah, me! What will the mother do, With never a call to button or pin, Or tie a little shoe? How can she keep herself busy all day, With the little "hindering thing" away? Another basket to fill with lunch, Another "good by" to say, And the mother stands at the door to see Her baby march away; And turns with a sigh that is half relief, And half a something akin to grief. She picks up the garments here and there, Thrown down in careless haste, And tries to think how it would seem If nothing were displaced. If the house were always still as this, How could she bear the loneliness? —Ez.

Selected Serial.

ALYPIUS OF TAGASTE.

A Tale of the Early Church.

BY MRS. WEBB,

Author of "Pomponia; or, the Gospel in Caesar's Household," etc.

CHAPTER IV.

For some days Alypius wandered about like a troubled ghost. His studies were utterly neglected; his "vain philosophy" gave him no comfort, and failed to divert his mind from the thoughts and feelings which had taken such strong possession of him. Even the society of his friend Julius had lost its zest; for Julius rallied him about his admiration of Medora, and also expressed some little astonishment, and even contempt, for the pity which he had manifested towards the Nazarenes.

One of Alypius' favourite rambles was to the Point of Lochias, the promontory that bounded the great port to the east. From this point, and the rocks which proceeded from it a considerable distance into the sea, a fine view was obtained of the whole harbour, fringed, as it were, with towers and palaces and temples; and dotted with innumerable vessels of varied size and picturesque forms, bearing the wealth and the luxury of many distant lands into this great emporium of trade. Across the entrance of the harbour, and at about the distance of a mile, rose the noted Pharos, built by Sesostris of Cnidus, in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, 283 years before the Christian era. This splendid lighthouse was erected on a small rocky island from which it took its name; and was connected with the main land by an artificial dyke of great length, at each end of which was a passage for ships from the great port to the port of Eunostus, lying to the west of the city. Over these channels were two fine drawbridges, which completed the Heptastadium, as the whole connecting embankment was called, and formed a very favourite promenade for the gay citizens of Alexandria.

The less frequented Lochias was Alypius' chief resort. Thither he had often walked with his friend; and on the rocks which jutted into the sea, and were washed by its waves on either side, he had sat for hours, discoursing with him on the doctrines of their leading teachers, and the so-called religion of the philosophers. Now he repaired to this spot alone, and he mused on very different subjects. He thought of the ancient religion of the Egyptians, which he had been taught to despise as barbarous and obsolete, but of which he had been told the lovely Medora was a votary, and her brother an officiating priest. He knew little of the tenets of the Egyptians; but he believed them to be marked by ignorance and superstition, and not worthy to be compared to the enlightened opinions of the Greeks and Romans. Of these opinions his knowledge was very extensive; but the influence which they exercised over his feelings or his conduct was very slight. Indeed, he regarded religious belief as a matter which chiefly concerned the lower orders, and was useful as a restraint upon those who were incapable of being guided by those principles of honour and morality that were inculcated in the schools, and were considered quite sufficient for the educated members of society.

From these principles, and their often unsatisfactory results, the thoughts of Alypius turned to the

Christians. He knew, as we have said, something of their doctrines from Monica and her friends. He knew that the main principle of their lives was an entire and self-denying devotion to the Master whom they served, and a constant effort to promote his glory by their lives, or, if need be, by their deaths. He knew that purity and holiness, to a degree undreamed of either by the Egyptians, the Greeks, or the Romans, was inculcated by their teachers, and practised—or at least aimed at—by all who professed to be followers of the Nazarene, whose holy example they sought to emulate. All this he had known from childhood, but the subject had never greatly interested him. He had followed the opinions and the ways of his teachers and his young companions; and especially had been led by Monica's son, Augustine, whose lively talents and captivating appearance and manners had rendered him a very dangerous friend and associate for Alypius, in the days of their intimacy at Tagaste.

Since Alypius had resided at Alexandria, he had heard a great deal of the doctrines of the Christians, who dwelt in great numbers in that city and neighbourhood. Though Christianity was new the religion of the Emperor, yet the condition of those who professed it in the provinces depended, to a great degree, upon the character of the Prefect for the time being, and that of the inferior magistrates; and also upon the influence which was brought to bear on these men in authority by the feeling and spirit entertained towards the Christians by the heathen populace. Many of the Roman governors, who were themselves supremely indifferent to the religious opinions of their subjects were induced to commit acts of cruelty and persecution for the sake of securing their own popularity. This had been the motive of Fabius in the instance which we have just recorded; and this had been the occasion of putting once more to the proof the oft-tried faith of the Christians, and displaying once more their indomitable fortitude, to the scorn and derision of some, but to the admiration and sympathy of others, who, though heathens themselves, could yet understand and appreciate the devotion and the noble self-sacrifice of the martyrs.

Alypius was one of these. His best feelings had been aroused by the heart-sickening spectacle in the Circus. The victims had appeared to him to be heroes, worthy of the brightest days of Roman virtue. The criminals had seemed to him far superior to the judges and executioners. The disciples of the lowly Jesus had worn in his eyes an aspect of dignity such as no seat of government, no robes of state, could ever equal in glory. He had seen what faith—confiding faith—could work, not only in the strong young soldier, but also in the aged man, the gentle maidens, and the young and untried boy. What could be the powerful principle that had enabled all these to meet death—and such a death—with courage, and without one effort to avert their dreadful fate by denying their Lord and Master? Such thoughts were salutary, and they were not without fruit; but Alypius had much to experience, and much to feel, ere he could truly comprehend the value of the Christians' motives, and the Divine beauty of the Christians' conduct.

Long he sat on the rocks of Lochias, and watched the lengthening shadows of the vessels, and the reflection of their sails in the blue water. By-and-by the light on the summit of the lofty towers of Pharos was kindled, and shone as a guiding beacon far over the sea. Other lights sprang out of the growing darkness all round the circling bay, like a fringe of fire-flies trembling in the distance. Nearer to Lochias, in the eastern suburb of the city, stood the Cæsareum—the royal palace or temple of the Cæsars—with its two obelisks on each side of the entrance, rising tall and slender above all the surrounding buildings, and pointing to the unfathomable depth of deep blue sky that hung cloudless above them. There also rose the great Museum, with all its adornment of statues and frescoes, now scarcely

visible in the waning light; and there was the magnificent Exchange; and hard by stood the beautiful temple of Neptune, which contained treasures of bronze and marble.

All these, and many more stately and beautiful buildings, met the eyes of Alypius as he gazed thoughtfully around the bay; and the calm loveliness of the scene sank into his heart, and stilled the anxious workings of his troubled spirit. At length he rose to return to his lodgings in the city. He walked slowly along the way that led by the obelisks, on which the rising moon was now shedding a weird and silvery light. How tall and gaunt they looked against the clear night sky, and how many thoughts they awoke in his mind of the old days of Egypt's glory and power, when they had adorned some grand temple, perhaps far up the ancient and mysterious Nile!

So much did his own thoughts engross him, that Alypius was all unconscious of the few passengers whom he met by the way; and he was only aroused from his sense of solitude by coming in contact with the crouching figure of a woman near the base of one of the obelisks. She did not move or speak; and for a moment Alypius feared she was dead. But soon she heaved a deep sigh, or rather a groan, and he addressed her:—

"Why are you here alone, and lying on the ground?" he asked, gently; and he laid his hand on the woman's arm, as if to raise her up.

She looked up in his face with a sudden start; and, as the moon's soft light fell on her face, Alypius saw that it was pale and sunken, and that her eyes were shining with a wild and unnatural brightness.

"The ground—the ground!" she repeated, slowly. "Would that I were beneath it, and at rest!"

"Are you in distress, then—in want?" asked Alypius.

"I want nothing on earth—nothing that you can give."

"But I may help you, if you will tell me the cause of your grief. I can pity you, if I can do nothing else."

"How should you feel pity for me? You have never known what it is to be twice bereft of all you love."

"Have you no home—no friends—poor woman?" asked Alypius, in a voice of such sympathy, that it seemed to touch the woman's withered heart and pent-up feelings. Tears glistened in her eyes, and she said, in a wandering manner,—

"I have a home, but there are no kind voices now to welcome me there. And there is one little grave beneath the acacias and oleanders. I made it, and decked it for him, and he sleeps there—all that remained of his blessed form when the wild beasts left it."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Alypius. "Was one of those Christians who perished in the Circus a relative or a friend of yours?"

The woman looked up suspiciously, and the cold look came back to her eyes.

"Are you going to denounce me?"

"I did not say that I was a Christian."

"And if you had said so, you need fear no harm from me. I would not hurt a hair of any Christian's head. I saw those martyrs die; and I shall never forget it."

"You saw them die! You saw my brave and beautiful boy torn to pieces by the tigers; and, more cruel than the wild beasts, you did not try to save him!"

She rose from the ground as she uttered these words in a deep, hissing whisper; and then she stood confronting Alypius, and looking as if he were answerable for the death of him she mourned.

"I would have saved him—I would have saved them all," he replied, so earnestly that the woman's countenance again relaxed. "I would have thrown myself between that noble boy and the savage beasts; but I could not reach him. The sight almost maddened me."

"Are you a Christian, then?"

"No; but I can feel for the injured and oppressed of every religion."

"Can you? Then may the blessing of Christ rest upon you; and may he give you that faith which may indeed bring upon you suffering and

death in this world, but must lead you to everlasting glory and happiness hereafter."

As the woman spoke these words she looked earnestly at Alypius, and then raised her eyes to heaven as if in supplication. Her countenance was now calm, and she seemed to be raised for the moment above the sense of maddening grief which had so lately overpowered her. What was it in her face which made Alypius start, and gaze upon her so fixedly? He could not tell; and whatever it was, it passed away so quickly, that he could not even recall the sensation to which it had given rise in his breast. The wild glitter returned to that afflicted woman's eyes, and the hurried whispering tone to her voice; and she laid her cold, thin hand on the arm of Alypius, and drew him forward as she said,—

"I can trust you. Come with me, and I will show you where he is sleeping; and there is no one to weep over his grave but me!"

She hurried on in silence, and Alypius obeyed her guiding hand; for he felt a deep interest in her, and earnestly desired to know more of her sad story, and to endeavor to relieve her distress.

Silently they passed on through several streets until they reached a small, low house in a retired situation, among gardens, and wide-spreading tamarisks and acacias. The woman opened the door, and led Alypius through a dark passage out into a small enclosure behind the house, on which the clear moonlight was shining, and casting the shadows of the quivering foliage above.

"Here—here he lies," she said, in a voice half choked with emotion, as she drew Alypius to a little mound under the spreading acacia in the garden. "See—he is quiet, and at rest. The savage beasts, and the more savage heathen, cannot touch him here." Then her wandering look and manner came back again, and she went on in a whisper, while she held up her finger to silence Alypius:—

"Ah! do not speak; a strange voice might disturb him. Stay—I will sing to him, he knew my voice so well, and he loved to hear me sing. I could always make him sleep quietly—so quietly."

And she began to sing in a tone so sweet and touching, and yet so wild, that Alypius was deeply moved. Tears were in his eyes, and the woman saw them.

"You weep for me," she said, more gently, "and I seldom weep. My tears are all dried up. When my husband—he who taught me to believe in Jesus Christ—was taken from me, I thought my heart would break; and my family had all cast me off because he had become a Christian, and had taught me to forsake the worship of stocks and stones. But I had comfort in the certainty that he was gone to the Master whom he served; and I promised him on his death-bed that I would be true to that blessed Master, and would bring up our child to be his faithful servant."

"And does that child lie here?" exclaimed Alypius, interrupting her. "And was it he who so nobly sealed his faith, and died for the honour of his Master's name in the Circus?"

"Oh, no. That was not my own son—though I could almost wish it had been he; for then I should know that he was in heaven, where my husband dwells. But my boy—my Cleon—I know not where he is. After I was left alone and desolate, I left Alexandria, and went into Upper Egypt with a friend. We dwelt on the border of the desert, and in great seclusion, for a long time. Then came a band of wandering Arabs, and they robbed our dwelling of all that it contained—yes, even of my only treasure. My friend tried to save my child, and the savages murdered her. I had gone to the village in the neighbourhood; and when I returned all was over, and the Arabs gone. A young Egyptian who had seen it all, and had hidden himself in our garden, told me the fearful story. I hardly remember what happened after that. But I know that I came back to Alexandria, and that I found a friend in Portia, the mother of this martyred boy. He was a son to me, and she as a dear sister; but they

were accused as traitors and enemies to the State, and cast into prison. There Portia died: and you know the end of Icelius."

"But how did you procure the body of the martyred boy?"

"I had a friend—a humble friend—to whom my husband once rendered a great service, and he had not forgotten it. He was one of those whose dreadful office it was to attend at the Circus, and to have the charge of the beasts. He knew my love for Icelius, and that my poor heart was breaking. I said that I would give myself up and die with the sweet boy; but he prevented my thus throwing away my life in my despair; and he promised to try and save him. He did try—he used great and noble efforts, but in vain. I waited in agony all that fearful morning, hoping to see my boy restored to me. But, oh, what words can tell my anguish when he brought me in his mangled body! All that I had felt when I lost my own son came back to me—my senses seemed to forsake me, and strange sights and sounds to haunt my brain. I buried Icelius here; my friend helped me to lay him in the grave." And again she sang in the same strangely sweet voice, which thrilled to the heart of Alypius; and again that look returned which had so greatly startled him before.

It was gone in a moment; and he waited silently until she ceased to sing. Then he took her by the hand, and led her into the house, and tried to recall her thoughts to herself, and her future life.

She told him that her name was Claudia, and that her family were among the rich and great of Alexandria; but she firmly refused to tell their names, far less to permit Alypius to go to them on her behalf, as he proposed to do. She said that she did not require pecuniary assistance at present, as Portia had bequeathed to her all her humble possessions; but she thanked Alypius warmly and gratefully for his kind sympathy, and assured him that it had calmed and comforted her, and that she would gladly see him at her lonely dwelling whenever he would visit her there.

So he left her in solitude; but his mind was filled with plans for her future comfort and safety, which he lost no time in endeavouring to carry out.

(To be continued.)

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