

STORY OF A LIFE YIELDED TO GOD.



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A Loving Tribute

There passed away from the world at Pretoria, South Africa, on June 18th, 1947, the writer's dearly loved sister, Phebe Ferguson, at the ripe age of 78: "Absent from the body . . . at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8, R.V.), as expressed in the words of Holy Scripture. She was the fifth in a family of seven children, of whom five are already in the "land of cloudless day," where no sin can enter and partings are no more; but life, rest and peace—"the flowers of deathless bloom"—delight the hearts of the redeemed of God; where the Saviour is seen in all His glory and beauty, not as "through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Our parents were godly people, who lived and prayed for their family, that all might come to receive the "salvation of God" (Acts 28:28). Before they departed this life, the prayers of years had been answered in the joy of the last and youngest accepting

Christ as his Saviour—my brother Arthur Henry. Two now remain behind, perhaps for a little while, to witness further for the Lord—my sister Mary Emily (in Pretoria) and I. What a sweet thought that we shall be an unbroken family in Heaven, through the abounding grace of God!

CONVERSION AND UP-LIFT

We came out from England in December, 1882, settling in Napier, New Zealand. After some time my sister was led to see her soul's need; and to believe the Gospel concerning our complete ruin in the fall of Adam, and the all-sufficient remedy for sin in the death of the Son of God, upon the Cross. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; and "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." (Rom. 3:23; Isa. 64:6). "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His

stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Gladly, in simple faith, she "received Him" as her own Saviour, and thus became a child of God (John 1:12), and the happy possessor of eternal life, as Christ Himself declares: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

During two visits to Napier by George C. Grubb (1890, 1892) a missionary from the Keswick Convention, England, greatly used of God in leading believers into a higher and more devoted life for Christ; through him my sister received a spiritual up-lift that marked her life for more than half a century. It became henceforth with her, as expressed by the Apostle Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). And again, "Yield yourselves, . . . as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13). We are not saved only from

perishing in our sins and that we may go to Heaven; but saved, that we should be set apart for God to be used of Him in an evil world. How important and necessary, therefore, is it that every Christian should realise, "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20). So, in the words of Francis Ridley Havergal—

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated Lord to Thee"—

my sister presented herself to Him. What follows in this narrative will show how the Lord responded in fitting and using her for His glory, making her the instrument of blessing in the lives of more souls than we can tell.

TEACHING PROFESSION

After coming to Napier she took up the teaching profession, and upon securing her certificate as a qualified teacher, she filled, for a number of years, the position of mistress in the

Port Ahuriri, Wairoa and Dannevirke public schools, during which time she ever had before her the doing of the will of God. Her life began to tell for Christ. There lay in her heart, however, the hope of some day reaching the "regions beyond" and labouring among a heathen people.

It was while teaching in Dannevirke that she found herself much attached to an earnest young minister of the Gospel; but the Lord had a different path in life than marriage for His dear child. After much prayerful exercise of heart, the choice was made for the single life, that she might be more wholly devoted to her Lord for His service. How many souls will one day thank God in glory that such a choice was made!

IN SOUTH AFRICA

During the Boer War in South Africa the British established some Concentration Camps for Boer women and children, with provision of schooling for the young people. To this

end England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand contributed a quota of lady teachers, this country being assigned 15. My sister now became greatly exercised in mind as to whether this was the call of God to her for service in a foreign and needy country. This work seemed to present abundant opportunities for Christian testimony and for the Gospel, apart from school duties, and might be the stepping-stone for more direct witnessing that God had in store. "Assuredly gathering" that this was a Divine call, she volunteered and was accepted. This was in 1902.

Those proved happy days for Christ in the Transvaal, South Africa, as she carried on her duties as a school teacher, in one of the camps, and in witnessing for Him as the many opportunities arose. That this land was God's appointment for her, became a settled conviction as the time went on.

At the conclusion of five years' ser-

vice, with the discontinuance of these Camps, a return passage to New Zealand was provided by the Authorities, with an offer of a scholastic position if caring to return to the 'Transvaal. On getting back home, and after talking matters over with us all, it seemed perfectly clear that she must not stop, but go. In due course she left; but accompanied now by my younger sister, Mary Emily, mistress in a Napier school, together with an elderly lady friend and worker, Miss Tarlton. They were fully assured that the Lord had need of them among the natives and coloured people of Africa, where the harvest was great but the labourers were few. Just exactly what form their service would take, was left in the hands of the Lord to arrange after arrival on the field. One step at a time was all they needed; the way would open before them. Nor were they disappointed; all worked out beautifully. How good it is to be on the Divine path, trusting in the Lord.

THE COLOURED SCHOOL

On their arrival in Pretoria they found that the Education Department had under consideration the establishment of a large Coloured School, to be situated in the Native Location, with the offer to my elder sister of the position as principal, and would appoint my younger sister as first assistant on the staff. The "colour line" objection was then so pronounced among the Boers and others, that a real difficulty faced the Department—how to provide a willing staff. Knowing that my sisters had no such scruples, and understanding that their real objective in Africa was missionary work, would they take on the school when ready? An important part of the syllabus was to consist of Bible teaching every morning to the assembled school. (The old Dutch definitely were a religious people). The Scripture lessons would be left in the hand of my elder sister, without any denominational bias, con-

fidest she would give quite suitable religious instruction to the scholars.

Missionary work was being carried on among the native tribes in various parts of Africa by workers in association with our Assemblies gathering in the Name of the Lord alone, but greatly needing more helpers. What should be done? Here in the Transvaal, and Pretoria in particular, a great field presented itself, just what appealed to them, with abundant scope for the three. Thousands of souls all around were needing the message of life—natives, Indians, Dutch, etc. Why look further afield?

After earnest prayer, and due consideration, my sisters reached this conclusion: That the opening appeared ideal, with great possibilities for God; that in off-time from school duties there could be done spiritual work all around; also that Miss Tarlton could find full scope in visitation and classes. The Coloured School would, practically, be a Mission School, so to

speaking. Another thought appealing to their minds was freedom to serve the Lord at their own charges, rather than any other way.

THE OFFER WAS ACCEPTED

The school was started. Time proved that their decision was of God. Right from its inception He was with them, the school grew and prospered, and the Education Department never had a regret over the arrangement made; on the contrary expressions were often given of approval and admiration. The morning devotions consisted in opening the school with prayer, then a selected portion from the Bible would be read and explained, verses memorised, appropriate hymns taught and sung, and questions would be asked and answers given.

For many years this work was carried on, with marked success, the abundant blessing of God resting upon it. The incorruptible seed of the Word was sown in faith in thousands

of young hearts. What shall the harvest be? The real results cannot be tabulated in this life, but the unerring account is on high—God knows the effect of every seed sown, and will manifest it in Heaven.

“And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth” (John 4:37). The sower and the reaper are joined together of the Lord; the former does the hard ploughing and less attractive labour, whereas the latter has the more joyous part of gathering in the sheaves. Yet there could be no sheaves had the sower not first toiled; but both, we are told, shall rejoice together when the harvest is all gathered into the heavenly garner (John 4:36). How precious is the thought, however, that we are “labourers together with God”, and that it is He who “giveth the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6-9).

The late W. J. McClure, well known and able teacher and evangelist from the United States, during a mission in South Africa, visited Pretoria

and called on my sisters. He was taken one morning to the Coloured School and spoke to the children. He was more than surprised and impressed with their repetition of Scriptures, the hymns they sang, and above all the intelligent replies to his questions; so much so, that he affirmed he had never come across, in all his life before, so well informed a company of children on Bible truths.

After the retirement of my sisters on superannuation, a new building was erected, which is now called "The Ferguson School." It can well be added, "Them that honour Me I will honour" (1 Sam. 2:30).

PRISON WORK

My sister's Christian activities, apart from school duties, were many; chief among them being the holding, for quite a number of years, of the official permit as Sunday afternoon visitor for the women's department of the

big Pretoria Prison. Here hundreds of law-breaking female inmates heard from her lips the message of the Gospel, many receiving it with joy and amendment of life. Amongst the number of prisoners were cases sentenced to death for murder; to these my sister had access, and one or two of them, I think, received God's pardon for their sins, for Jesus sake. We see that even at the "eleventh hour" the exceeding riches of Divine grace is revealed, as in the case of the thief crucified with Christ. A vehicle was sent regularly for the visitor and to convey her home again. It was a rare privilege to be given this service which was faithfully and capably discharged, year in year out, and the "coming day" will manifest the value the Lord put upon it.

CLASSES FOR "BOYS"

A neat little schoolroom was erected by my sisters in their garden, and herein were held classes for native

“boys.” Lessons were given in English, the Scriptures read and explained, and copies of the New Testament in native languages given to the “boys” when able to read in their own tongue. In this effort did Miss Tarlton give valuable help, taking much interest in it. She also visited in the Native Location (just across the road from the house), and in many ways she spent her time on the behalf of the people round about—service for which she was well qualified.

Miss Tarlton was called home to her rest and reward a few years ago. Even nearing the close of life she was still able for just a little service for the Master. There is no “retiring age” for those who lovingly serve Him; we go on to the last bit of strength. Before leaving New Zealand, when about 60 years old, she thought her strength for work was done; but not so, for it was renewed for at least a quarter of a century in South Africa. Let not any Christian believe they are now too old for

more service for the Lord; instead, present yourself to Him, saying, "Here am I, send me" (Isa. 6:8).

The writer was medically informed after concluding 50 years' preaching, that the heart would no longer stand up to the strain. What now? Retirement? Nay, but "Feed the church of God"! (Acts 20:28). How so, with this infirmity? By Divine leading and help books were written for circulation among Assemblies of the Lord's people, and for many years have parcels been going far and wide in many lands, free of cost by His help—some millions of pages of printed matter. So in the closing stage of life a wider and more permanent service has been given, than in the former stages. What is God not able to do, even to old age, if His people are only willing to yield themselves! Try Him.

BIBLE AND TRACT DEPOT

My sister had a small depot in the house, stocked with Bibles and Testaments from the British and Foreign

Bible Society, in various native languages; also a supply of Gospel tracts. There has been a good demand for Scriptures and tracts by the natives themselves, which have gone far and wide. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psa. 119:130). "Being born again . . . by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

Household work in the Transvaal is rendered, generally, by native "boys," so called, who often become quite efficient in such duties. Two have faithfully served my sisters, one for upwards of 40 years, and the other for about half that time. One is Jack and the other is John. At "family worship" it has always been the practice to bring in the "boys" and give them the books to follow the reading. Both of them have been saved by God's grace and are bright Christians, living a consistent life. This is just one example of what has been accomplished.

I need not attempt to give, in detail, every service rendered for Christ's sake; suffice it to say that every opportunity of doing something to assist the needy, to give the Gospel by word and by printed page, holding classes for instruction; in short, all that came within her province as a Christian woman was gladly undertaken for the Lord, done in a quiet, modest way, with no desire for human praise, satisfied that He was pleased. She was definitely a woman of prayer and faith, rising early for reading and meditation in the Word, presenting herself to Christ as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1), Who bought her by His precious blood and had appointed her to His service.

CLOSE OF LIFE

About three weeks before her death, while at morning tea, suddenly she suffered a stroke and medical aid had to be summoned. It became needful to have her removed to hospital, where

all was done that could be. At first there appeared an improvement and hope was entertained that the precious life would be spared; but it was only of short duration, life began to ebb and unconsciousness came on, and quietly, without pain, the spirit departed from the earthly tabernacle for the realm on high, to be ever with the Lord.

The funeral of the mortal body took place in beautiful weather, attended by African natives, Indian, Dutch and other Europeans. The services were taken by two brethren from the Pretoria Assembly—Mr. Beatty and Mr. Hattingh. The children from "The Ferguson School" sang "Jesus Loves Me", and assembled Christians sang the hymns 'Abide With Me' and "Servant of God, Well Done." Impressive ministry was given, and a fine tribute paid to the glory of God, and the large crowd was greatly moved. She was loved by all, had served all, and a true friend

had gone never to return to them. She was held in high esteem in the Assembly with which she had been associated for upwards of 45 years—loved for her personal worth and for her work's sake.

THE LIFE'S LESSON

The long and devoted life has ended. No more can she be seen at 106 Border Street, Pretoria. The course is finished. God's purpose with her is accomplished to His praise, and we are left to consider her way and be wise. She has "done what she could" (Mark 14:8), and left behind her a noble example of what may be accomplished by a quiet, earnest soul who yielded herself and talents to the Master—all she had and was. Nothing spectacular, but the steady, day by day, doing of His will and embracing each opportunity as it arose—all done as unto Him.

To please God was her aim all the way through. There can be no higher

aim than that; yet the most gifted ones can do no more, and the simplest may do no less—pleasing God is the supreme thing required, and within the reach of all. Enoch's 300 years' walk with God and witness among men, is very simply and blessedly expressed thus: "Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). I think we need no hesitation in saying, before my sister's home-call she had "pleased God." As to ourselves, let the same excellent aim be ours; not that we strive to do some great thing in life, but rather yield ourselves—"spirit, soul and body"—unto God, that He, through us, may accomplish what He shall choose, for His glory. Who can say what blessed service will be the outcome. Amen, and Amen!

I cannot close without a special reference to my dear surviving sister, who has shared, with the departed one, these 45 years in Pretoria. What has been said of the one seems so

applicable to the other: they were the compliment of one another. The closest spiritual unity existed between them; they worked and prayed together; their object in life was the same; one did nothing without the other—they were “one in Christ.” They were “lovely and pleasant in their lives” (2 Sam. 1:23). Death has parted them for “a little while”; but the One whom they lived for, and served together, will not leave nor forsake her that remains behind (Heb. 13:5).

LATER

Since the foregoing was written, it has pleased God to call from her earthly service my dearly loved younger sister, Mary Emily Ferguson, at the advanced age of 82. The two who served so long together in such beautiful unity, whom death parted for 6 years, are now happily united in the land where partings are unknown.

After her elder sister was taken, Mary Emily remained in the old home by the Native Location, continuing her work for Christ with a Nursery-School for non-white children, which my sisters had erected in their garden. This she carried on until ill-health forced her to give up the work.

The last two years of life were spent in a private Nursing Home in Pretoria, as a helpless invalid, but without suffering. Here she received every comfort and attention, thus manifesting the Lord's loving kindness and tender mercy to one who had so fully served Him more than 50 years, in this part of Africa.

In the Nursing Home she bore a beautiful testimony before all who saw her, the heart filled with the joy of the Lord. It can be said that her last days were her best days—a foretaste of the joys of Heaven. Friends who came to comfort and cheer her, as they imagined, would leave blessed themselves. Her constant thought was

for the wellbeing of others; the mind never centered on herself. Day by day she looked for the Lord's coming joyfully.

On October 2nd, 1953, she quietly "fell asleep in Jesus," the body being laid to rest in the Pretoria Cemetery, alongside that of her dear sister Phebe. It was a beautiful and cloudless sunset to life's long day. Peace, perfect peace!

The funeral was very largely attended. Generations of pupils taught by my sisters, were present, besides a crowd of children from the Coloured School. It was a most unique occasion for South Africa—Europeans, Indians, coloured and Africans all mixing in perfect amity and unity, all gathered in grateful memory of the devoted Christian services of the two departed ones. The body was carried to and from the home by non-Europeans; and at the grave the children from the School sang the hymns, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and "Rock of Ages, Cleft

For Me.” Representatives of the Pretoria Assembly, and of the native communities, bore moving tribute to the departed, in a gathering that will be long remembered.

The life's testimony of the two sisters has closed, and they rest from their long and fruitful labours. It will next be reviewed at the Judgment Seat of Christ, when the perfect assessment for reward will be given, and the full amount of "fruit unto life eternal" will be revealed.

THE DAY OF SATISFACTION

When I shall wake on that fair morn of
 morns,
After whose dawning never night returns,
And with whose glory day eternal burns,
 I shall be satisfied!

When I shall see Thy glory face to face,
When in Thine arms, Thou wilt Thy child
 embrace,
When Thou shalt open all Thy stores of
 grace,
 I shall be satisfied!

When I shall meet with those whom I have
 loved,
Clasp in my eager arms the long removed,
When I shall find how faithful Thou hast
 proved,
 I shall be satisfied!

When this frail body shall arise again,
Purged by Thy power from every taint and
 stain,
Delivered from all weakness and all pain,
 I shall be satisfied!

When I shall gaze upon the face of Him
Who for me died, with eye no longer dim,
And praise Him in the everlasting hymn,
 I shall be satisfied!

—H. Bonar.