AN EASTER SERVICE.

Bertha Burnham Bartlett.

Miss Homans stroked the bowed head of the girl who so silently knelt beside her, while her very heart cried out to offer sympathy—to say some word which would be of help—to her who needed comfort in this, her first great sorrow. Yet, what was there to say? Were not words empty and futile in a case like this, the sorrow of young womanhood brought face to face with the great mystery of humankind—the death of the one who had given her breath itself and then had so tenderly guarded her all through the years until now?

Suddenly the girl spoke, quietly: "And tomorrow is the ressurrection, Miss Homans. The resurrection!—think ofit! She—she always believed in it—but I don't! Oh, I suppose that seems strange—that with her—dead," Laura Derby choked over the word, then continued slowly—"I can find it in my heart to doubt the thing she believed so truly. But I do—I do, Miss Homans. She was mistaken. There is no resurrection. She is gone. She is—dead! And I—oh, I shall never, never see her—my mother—the one who never refused to speak to me before—I shall never see her again!"

No, there was nothing to say to the girl before her. There was only one thing she could do, indeed, for her, and that was to pray that the comfort which only He could give who was the resurrection incarnate might be vouchsafed to her who needed it so sorely. And so the wise friend sat hour after hour beside Laura Derby, silent and sorrowful, sharing with her the first sad hours of her bereavement.

It had seemed a peculiarly sad event, the passing of sweet Mrs. Derby,, to "where beyond these voices there is peace," partly because by her going Laura was left alone in the world, as we say of those whose kindred are not numbered with the living. In addition to this, however, the fact that the bereavement had been swift and startling in its coming intensified the grief and sympathy of all who knew of the tragedy of the railway accident.

In the dumb despair of the daughter it was the faithful Sunday-school teacher, Miss Homans, who had assumed charge of affairs planning and directing every detail of the funeral which must take place on Easter Sunday. If only the girl could have found relief in tears the task of the other would have been less difficult; as it was, Miss Homans' heart was heavy within her.

In the early hush of morning that "first day of the week," as the girl and her friend sat beside the quiet form, a sweet soft chorus fell upon their ears. In the half light Laura grasped Miss Homans' hand and listened; it was Whittier's beautiful hymn:

"We may not climb the heavenly steeps
To bring the Lord Christ down;
In vain we search the lowest deeps
For Him no depths can drown.
"But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;
And faith has yet its Olivet,
And love its Galilee."

It was Mrs.. Derby's favorite poem, and as the sweet cadences of the song penetrated the silence and shadows of the room where the daughter sat, it almost seemed to Laura that her mother herself was speaking to her.

"Thro' Him the first fond pray'rs are said
Our lips of childhood frame;
The last low whispers of our dead
Are burdened with His name.."

The voice of the singers faltered and almost ceased as they sang these last lines, while Miss Homans turned her eyes away from the girl's face, now working convulsively.

Then, though still softly and tenderly, the concluding stanza rang out in triumph:

"O Lord and Master of us all,
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine."

And then the tears came like the first drops of a tempest long delayed, and Miss Homans wept, as she had not dared to weep before, with the young girl whose reason she knew was now safe because of that blessed relief brought to her by Mrs. Derby's own class of young women, who, having offered this tribute of love, now stole away to their homes.

Long the convulsive sobbing continued; then at last Laura spoke brokenly:

"She tested her life by His—and I will do the same. She served Him; she taught me to pray; she—she—oh! they found her Bible and lesson book with her, and—her 'last whispers' must have been of Him—and I can't disbelieve any longer. She must be—"

Miss Homans finished the sentence:

"She must be and is, on this day, dear, like Him—alive forevermore."
—Selected.

A COWARD'S VICTORY.

"You are a coward, that's what you are, Merrick Sherman! You don't dare tap the tree."

Merrick's face reddened. Bob Hartley knew his friend's weakness and determined to make it serve his purpose.

"If you weren't a coward you would go ahead and tap the tree."

Merrick squared his shoulders defiantly. "I call it cowardly to harry a fellow the way you are doing, Bob Hartley," he said, sturdily. Then, as if determined to put an end to the discussion, he threw himself upon the ground, while his tormenter stood above him with his hands thrust into his pockets and continued his taunting harangue.

"Well, I know if my father had as fine a maple tree in his yard as your's has, I would go ahead and tap it if I wanted to. Your father will never remember that he said anything against it after he has once tasted the fine maple sugar it will make. If he does he can't help himself and scolding doesn't hurt. Your father never punishes as mine does."

"No!" Flashed Merrick proudly.

The exultant ring of the word aroused the vindictive nature of the boy to whom it was addressed, and made him determined if possible to bring his companion's chivalrous spirit down to the mean level of his own.

"Besides," Merrick continued, his brave eyes reading the sneer in the other boy's face, "my father trusts me, Bob Hartley, and I think it would be a mean thing to take advantage of him."

"Have you any other maple trees onyour place?" Bob asked suddenly

"No; that is the reason father does not want this one tampered with. He says it will be stronger in a few years and then tapping will not injure it."

"But suppose you let one of us do the job," craftily suggested Bob. "Suppose you let one of us go ahead and tap the tree; then you will not have had anything to do with it, and you can tell your father so."

"Why, I never thought of that!" exclaimed Merrick, his countenance brightening.

Merrick had snapped at the bait more readily than Bob had anticipated; but he was careful to conceal his delight, and merely said:

"Well, think it over. We will be down at the corner of the field with our pails at eight o'clock, and if you decide to let us do it we can go right to work; the moon will give light enough for us to work by. I should hate to have the Center boys better supplied with sap than ourselves at the sugaring off Saturday; they would crow so over us."

By the time Bob had finished talking Merrick had about made up his mind.. The reference to the Center boys had clinched the matter. As Bob had repeatedly asserted, if they were careful and put the plug high enough up on the tree his father might never find it out. "You might as well come down, I suppose," Merrick said, somewhat reluctantly, "and if father ever does find it out—"

"You can tell him you didn't do it, and that is all you need to say about it," Bob broke in quickly, not allowing Merrick time to finish. "Just stick to what you tell him. You didn't do it, remember."

The boys were plotting near a thick hedge close to the road, and neither of them noticed the figure of a man walking slowly up the hill He paused as he heard the boys' high-pitched voices; then after listening a minute, passed on, but with his head still turned in a listening attitude.

Having gained his point, Bob was eager to be off to inform Dick Bryant and Ned Walker of his success, so he bade Merrick a hasty good-bye and started off on a run. As his figure disappeared from view Merrick turned and slowly walked across the field in the direction of his home. He carried a sober face to the supper table, where he quite unexpectedly encountered his father, who had left home that morning with the intention of remaining away until the next day. He flushed guiltily when he thought of the plans for the evening, and when his father greeted him with his usual pleasant smile he would have liked to have the floor open and swallow him. Hastily eating his supper, he muttered an excuse and left the house on a run; for it was nearly seven o'clock, and the boys must now be on their way, as they had a distance of about two miles to walk. Suddenly an idea entered his head which caused him to stand still in the middle of the road. Bob Hartley was right; he was surely doing a cowardly thing right now. He turned deliberately around. "I am doing this just because I am afraid of being found out," he said to himself. "I'll let the boys come, and then I'll tell father what they are here for, and that I told them they might come. I can't stand this any longer. I feel as if I had been lying and stealing and a lot of other mean things. I would rather father had whipped me than have smiled at me as he did tonight."

Just then he heard the sound of voices in the distance. He hurried down to the fence, and in a short time several boys, moving cautiously and talking in whispers, crept out from the shadow of the hedge into the moonlight.

"Hello, Merrick! Glad you decided to let us tap the tree. We'll do such a neat job that your father never will find it out. Dick is tall and he is going to do most of the work," Bob Hartley assured Merrick, in a loud whisper.

"Hold on boys!" Merricks voice spoke out clearly and forcibly. "I have decided not to let you tap the tree."

"Backing down again. I thought he would!" sneered Bob, while exclamations of consternation broke from the other three boys as they stood in a group swinging their empty pails.

Merrick stepped out into the moonlight where all could see him, and measured every boy with his glance. "You called me a coward this afternoon, Bob Hartley, and so I am," he said. "I cannot meet my father again with a lie in my heart. He has told me not to meddle with that tree and trusts that I will obey him. It will injure the tree just as much if you tap it as it will if I do it. That is what father cares about—injuring the tree."

"You are right, my son."

Every boy started guiltily, and the first instinct of every one but Merrick was to run, for the figure of a man suddenly appeared on the other side of the fence, which he cleared with a bound, and stood among them. "Stop a minute, boys! I have a word to say before you go. I happened to be walking along the road a few hours ago, while this tree-tapping project was being talked over, and I confess that I came here to-night with extreme sorrow in my heart." Then he turned to Merrick, who stood with his eyes fastened upon his fathers face, and he laid his hand lovingly upon his head as he continued. "But my son has just uttered words that I prize more highly than my farm and every tree upon it. He called himself a coward just now, but I shall have to call him a hero!"

There was a minute of impressive silence; then, without saying a word, the boys turned and shamefacedly walked away. As father and son were going home together Merrick looked up into his father's face with shining eyes and said: "Is that all it takes to make a hero father? I thought you had to do some great deed—save a life, or—or—or something."

"Not always," was the answer. "It sometimes requires as much courage to face a crowd of scoffing boys and tell them the truth, as you have done tonight, as it does to rush into a burning building and rescue a life at the risk of your own. Both of these things show a hero."—Helen M. Richardson. in Sabbath School Visitor.

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