

CHAPTER XIV.

MY FATHER'S DEATH.

At the close of the first calendar year, as was my custom, we held a "watch-night meeting." It was held in the Methodist Church in Freedom, Pennsylvania, 1850-51. We had a very solemn time. The Lord was manifestly present. When we went home, very early in the morning, we received a telegram (the first in my life) from Steubenville, Ohio, saying, "Your father is dying and wishes to see you. Come home." He had long been a sufferer, but longer a Christian and active worker in the church. In addition to my natural affection for my father and my desire to be with him in the closing scene of life I had long cherished a desire to know how his faith would endure that severest of all tests, for I knew he would not deceive his children, and that he could not be deluded into a false trust or confidence, much less a false profession. We hastened to his bedside by the first steamer, as we did not have railroad communication.

On arriving we found father still alive. As I opened the door of his room he stretched forth his pale, thin hands, exclaiming: "My son, come while I tell you what great victory I have through our Lord Jesus Christ! Glory, glory to His precious name! The fear of dying is all taken away and I have perfect peace with God, and peace with all mankind. Preach a complete salvation, a full and perfect and finished salvation, in Jesus Christ our Lord."

Subsequently he said, "Satan has tempted me more severely than ever before in my life. He has tried to persuade me to trust in my good works and devotion to the church, and it has been a struggle to give up all these, but Jesus Christ is my only hope, Christ in me the hope of glory. Tho' Satan tempted me that the Savior would forsake me, I have had victory over that fear. He will never forsake me. Perfect love casteth out all fear, which hath torment."

He repeated and with effort sang parts of sacred hymns which he always admired, one of which I remember hearing him sing when a child:

"My span of life will soon be done,
 The passing moments say;
 As lengthening shadows o'er the mead
 Proclaim the close of day.

Courage, my soul; thy bitter cross
 In every trial here
 Shall bear thee to thy heaven above,
 But shall not enter there.

Courage, my soul; on God rely;
 Deliverance soon will come;
 A thousand ways has Providence
 To bring believers home."

He also repeated the words of that glorious sonnet beginning:

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
 Is laid for your faith on His excellent word."

And dwelt with manifest satisfaction upon the soul-stirring words:

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
 That saved a wretch like me,
 I once was lost, but now I'm found,
 Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
 And grace my fears relieved,
 How precious did that grace appear,
 The hour I first believed!"

The scene was so overwhelming and inspiring that I have never doubted the power of Jesus to save to the uttermost, and to the close of life.

Father lingered until the 4th of January, 1851, during which time he was in constant ecstasy, frequently shouting the praises of God until his strength would be exhausted. His triumph and his experience were truly glorious. In the afternoon of the fourth day after my arrival, at about 4 o'clock, we were all gathered in the room where our mother had fallen asleep in Jesus on the 7th day of September, 1837, saying, "Jesus is mine and I am His," to witness the closing event of a life which was to us more a comment on Christianity than anything else. For this had always been our father's theme, and had led to an exemplification of it in his every day life in the most familiar and endearing relations of the family. He was now evidently and rapidly approaching the "Valley of the shadow of death." We gathered close to his bedside to catch the last utterances from his faltering tongue. None but those who have been blessed with such a father and who have been called to mourn his decease can appreciate our anxiety at that moment. His sight had evidently failed for he asked, "Who is in the room? Are you all here?" My oldest brother answered, "We

are all here, father. Do you want anything?" He answered, "No." Then raising his hand and passing it over his sightless eyes he said:

"It is dark here, but glory is bright."

And the weary wheels of life stood still.

Angels caught the redeemed soul of our father in their loving arms and bore him to his home on high. To us all, but to me especially, it was a deeply solemn, gloriously triumphant hour. I have never since that hour felt like shouting the praises of God as then. It was victory, triumph over the last enemy by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The grave has lost its gloom and terror, and death his venomous sting. Since then Christ is dearer and heaven has been nearer. We made his grave beside our mother's, under the spreading branches of the old chestnut tree in the graveyard whose dust is sacred to the sainted dead, who sleep in hope of immortality.

I returned to my work a more sanctified and better man.

