

It must have been an hour after midnight when we went into the house, and though the minister and his wife were surprised to see Barker and Agnes, they were pleased as well, and somehow seemed to think that matters would get on better now, for they were more cheerful than before, as though the neglect of their friends had been very humiliating.

Mateel had fallen into a light sleep soon after lying down, but she wakened in the course of an hour, and still talked of how long, how patiently, she had waited for Jo, and how terrible it would be if he were dead, and could never know. At times she seemed to realize that he would never come, when she remained silent a long while, as if to think it all over, but she would soon forget this, and say that while she was patient, and would wait as long as she could, she hoped he would hurry, as she was growing weak so fast, and was so anxious to see him, and explain it all.

We were all very quiet, occasionally walking carefully from one room to another as a relief after sitting a long time in one position, and it so happened that we were all standing around Mateel's bed when she asked :

"Father, do you believe Jo is in heaven?"

The good man was startled by the question, not knowing how to reply, but after thinking a moment, he answered, speaking with an effort :

"It is my hope of the future that when I enter the beautiful gates, I will find Jo Erring waiting for me, where I can explain away all that has seemed mysterious here. As I believe in the mercy of God, I expect to meet him, and enjoy his intelligence and friendship, both of which I have always esteemed. As I believe in my wife and child, as I believe in my religion, I believe in Jo Erring."

The invalid seemed much pleased with this assurance, and simply said :
"I am glad he will know that I was not fickle or false, for I will explain it to him."

She closed her eyes then, and we all stepped softly out of the room to allow her to sleep, but when her mother went back a few moments later, she found that the unhappy woman was dead.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

It has been ten years since we buried Mateel beside her husband in Fairview churchyard, and built monuments over their graves. I have been rid of my tiresome business so many years that I seem never to have been in it at all, and I can scarcely remember the time when Agnes was not my wife. Damon Barker lives with us in the stone house in Twin Mounds, which has been rebuilt and remodeled so often that it, too, enjoys a new condition, and I sometimes fear we do not think so much of Jo and Mateel as we ought, or of the Rev. John Westlock, and the poor woman who died of a broken heart; for somehow we cannot help thinking of them all as having lived a long while ago, so many changes have

taken place since they were among us. Many of the people who lived in Fairview and Twin Mounds when they did are dead; others have moved away, and so many strangers have arrived that it seems like a new country, and one in which those who occupy our graves never lived.

In looking through Jo Erring's room at the jail after his death, we found a will bequeathing his property to me, a certain amount to be paid yearly to Mateel, and the mill I have since leased to such advantage that it has been the source of a great deal of profit. If I have not mentioned it before, it may be interesting to know that my father's wild land, of which he owned a large quantity, has greatly increased in value, and I was thinking only a few days ago that I was worth considerable money, and that my income was ample to support me without work of any kind. In addition, Mrs. Deming died possessed of some property, which came into the possession of Agnes, and with Barker's money we are quite an aristocratic family.

Big Adam operates the mill on Bull River, under lease, and I have understood that in a few years he will be in condition to buy it outright. I am sincerely glad of this, for he is a very worthy man, and has had a wife and children of his own these five or six years. It is said of Big Adam and his wife that they are the happiest couple in all that country, and I often go there to witness how contented and fortunate the good fellow is after his hard life. Not long ago I was sitting with him in the mill after dark, and when I told him how much satisfaction his happiness afforded me, he made the old reply of pulling an imaginary cork, and pouring out liquor in distinct gurgles. His bandit father was killed a few years ago in attempting to rob a railroad train, but Big Adam still occasionally tells that his father gave up his life in the early settlement of the West; in short, that he was killed by the Indians.

There has been little change in Mr. Biggs, or Smoky Hill, except that both have grown older, and improved a little. I drove over to that country not long ago in quest of a servant girl, remembering that Mr. Biggs had said that it produced good ones, and learned that two or three of his sons were very idle and bad, and made their mother and their neighbors a great deal of trouble. Mr. Biggs himself is a great deal in town, as he has opened a kind of office there for the sale of land, although I suspect that it is no more than an excuse to keep away from home. I hear from him frequently with reference to the management of children, for there have been several occasions to mention the subject; but for all that it is notorious that he has not the slightest control of his own. I have heard that his oldest son beat him on one of his visits to the farm, for he is much larger than his father, and of a very ugly disposition, in spite of the circumstance that he wore braid on his clothes until he was seven or eight years old.

I have never yet seen Mrs. Biggs, for her husband appealed to me a good many years ago never to visit his house if I respected him, as it did not correctly represent him. Agnes goes out occasionally to quell an insurrection among the children, who have the greatest respect for her, and she tells me that I may hope to see Mrs. Biggs soon, as she cannot pos-

sibly live much longer, and that we shall be expected to attend the funeral.

I think at least a half dozen of Theodore Meek's boys have married, and settled around him on the Fairview prairie, and their children are as much at home in the old house as in the new ones. When I was last there I could scarcely get into the house for them, and my impression was that the boys had married well, for they were all very prosperous and very contented. Their nearest neighbors were the Winter boys, who have developed into honorable and worthy citizens. Their father has been in heaven some years, and they seem to be very proud of the reputation he left in Fairview, and take good care of their mother, who manages their house, as they have never married.

The Rev. John Westlock has never been heard of since the stormy night when I saw him turn a corner in a Twin Mounds street, and disappear; and if he is alive this night I do not know it, no more than I know he is dead. I have published advertisements in a great many widely circulated newspapers asking him to let me know of his whereabouts, and soliciting information of an old and broken man of his description; I have made several journeys in answer to these advertisements, but the men I found were not at all like him, and I have come to believe that he is dead; but if he is not, and this should meet his eye, I trust that his stubborn heart will relent, and that he will consent to finish his days in peace under my roof.

Rev. Goode Shepherd and his wife returned to their old home in the East a few months after the death of their child, and twice since they have journeyed to Fairview to visit her grave. Their devotion to her memory is very touching, and it has always been a comfort to me to know that the minister still believes that Jo has been forgiven, and that the blessed Savior blotted out with a tear the record of his desperate crime at the ford.

I hope the place where Jo and Mateel are buried is very pretty, for I have spent a great deal of time in attempts to make it quietly attractive, and my heart has always been in the work. While everything else has changed, Fairview church is just the same, and every night when the wind blows furiously, I imagine that the great bell is tolling a muffled requiem for their unfortunate history from the rickety tower; every bright day I think that the birds are singing softly over their graves, and in their quiet corner of the yard, close by the path leading toward the old house where they first met, there is a willow that weeps for them in summer, and tenderly covers their graves with its leaves in winter. I think it was planted by Theodore Meek, in whose family there was always so much love and content; and I am sure that whenever the good man visits his own dead, he sends a message upward for Jo Erring and Mateel.

THE END.