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**"Boast not Thyself
of To-morrow."**



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“Boast not Thyself of To-morrow.”

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”—PROV. xvii. 1.

IT was in one of the sick wards of a crowded city poorhouse that the following solemn events occurred, which have left too deep an impression on me ever to be effaced, and the memory of which again and again comes to me as a voice from eternity, bidding me seize the present moment to speak *now* of Christ to any Christless soul within my reach, for to-morrow may be too late: and oh dear reader, may this little paper have a voice for you, saying to you, “To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart.” I had been visiting constantly some of the sick ones in the poorhouse, and, as I one day approached the bed of a dear sufferer in whom I was deeply interested, she said, “Oh, I am so glad you have come; I have been watching the door all the morning in the hopes you

would be in to-day.”

“Why, Maggie,” I said, “you did not think I should forget you?”

“No, no, it wasn’t that,” she answered; “I knew better than that; but I thought maybe you mightn’t find out where I was, and it wasn’t so much myself I was thinking of either, glad enough though I am to catch sight of a bit of your dress coming round the door; but there’s a poor young thing in this ward that I want you sorely to speak to; maybe she’ll listen to you.”

The Lord had opened Maggie’s heart to receive the glad tidings of His love only a few weeks before, and now she was very anxious that others should know the precious Saviour whom she had found. Since my last visit, a few days previously, my poor friend had been removed from a ward in which I knew the occupant of each bed, to the present one, into which I had never before been, and this accounted

for her fear that I might not find her. I looked round as she spoke. The ward was a very large one, with beds ranged each side, beds across the top, and a double row of beds, turned head to head down the middle. Oh, the tales of want, of sorrow, and of suffering, written upon the faces of the occupants of them! Nearly all were comparatively young,—few had reached the age of thirty; and my heart ached as I asked, "Which bed is your friend in, Maggie?"

"She is not a friend of mine," she said; "she is much above me, and it's little I know about her, for she has not been in here many days, and she does not talk to the nurses or the other patients as most do; but I know she has seen a great deal of trouble. She came in here because she couldn't bear that her husband should see her dying of want before his eyes, and she thinks she'll be well in a month and able to go out again; but the

doctor says she will not live much more than a month, and there is no one to tell her that, or to speak to her of Jesus, and I am afraid she hasn't much thought about him herself. Many a time I've longed to go to her in the night when her bad times came on, if I were only able."

Maggie's illness had left her partially paralysed and quite unable to move. I was waiting till she ceased speaking, to ask her again which was the bed, when a half-cry, half-moan, followed by such a distressing cough and seeming struggling for breath, made me look up. In a bed at no great distance, and half sitting up, was a lovely girl, who, from her appearance, could scarcely have seen twenty-one summers. I needed not Maggie's "That is she" to tell me it was the one of whom she had been speaking. A more complete contrast to the scene in which she was could not be imagined. You could only pic-

ture such an one in a home of luxury, with every loving care being lavished on her, instead of lying on a little workhouse bed in a crowded ward, a tin mug with water in it by her side the only refreshment for her parched lips, and dependent for all her care on the kind feeling of the pauper nurses. These, though rough in appearance, seemed really kind-hearted. At that first half-cry two of them had gone quickly forward to her, and one raised her in her arms, while the other gently put back the masses of beautiful hair that had fallen over her shoulders, speaking evidently soothingly to her.

Well I knew that the colour of her cheek and the bright light in her eye were no signs of health, even if the cough had not told too plain a tale, and yet it seemed impossible to look on her and believe that death was as near as the doctor announced. I longed to go to her,—to be a sister to her,—above all, to tell her of Jesus;

but the nurses stayed by her side. A patient too from the next bed—the only one in the ward able to be dressed—was standing at the foot of the bed, and I feared to add to her distress by going forward. I could think of no excuse for seeming to intrude. In vain! I searched my pockets for a little bottle of eau-de-Cologne that I generally carried when I went to the poor-house, and had often found useful and refreshing to one and another; this day I had forgotten it. I had given away in other wards all the grapes I had brought in with me; how I longed for a few of them now!

Presently I heard her say, “Am I *very* ill? I can’t be so *very* ill. If I were dying, nurse, what should I do? oh, what *should* I do?”

Though really addressing the nurse, her large dark eyes fell on me, as if speaking to me, and instinctively I half rose to go to her; but the devil whispered, “You could not speak to

her with those three women standing round, and while she is so suffering; you are just throwing away an opportunity by being so hurried; you are a stranger in this ward, even the nurses do not know you; you would only provoke them and frighten her by intruding now. Better come back to-morrow, and bring anything you can think of; she may be alone then, and you may be able to get her away from here and to see her often while she lives; you will only defeat your object by being in such haste."

I did not recognise the voice; the advice seemed good, and yet I knew not how to leave the ward. I had already long overstayed my time, but yet I lingered and lingered; but the three women still stood there, and my coward heart, beguiled by Satan's suggestion of "expediency," won the day. I will come back early to-morrow, I thought; and, saying this to Maggie, I rose to leave.

Many times before reaching the end of the long ward I nearly turned back, for the eyes of the sick girl seemed to follow me, and deep down in my heart the words still sounded, "If I were dying, nurse, what should I do?" but the devil's "to-morrow" again triumphed.

All through a restless night the words rang in my ears, "If I were dying, nurse, what should I do?" In vain I tried to comfort myself with the doctor's words.

Next day, as early as I could gain admittance, I went to the poorhouse, taking with me the finest grapes I could procure, and other things that I thought an invalid might fancy. As I opened the door of the ward, I saw the nurses all engaged at a long table near the door. I was glad. "She will be alone," I thought; "I will go straight to her, without waiting to see Maggie first." I felt that I had no message, no words, and yet

I must go to her, and I could only ask the Lord to do with me as He would. Without speaking to any one, I walked straight up the ward towards her bed. A screen, which sheltered it from the fire, also hid it from the lower half of the ward. And oh! the sight that met my gaze, as I passed that screen, I shall never forget. Was it the sight of suffering and weakness, the sound of a tearing cough, or restless moaning, that thrilled me so? No, no; even these could not have produced such a pang of anguish. All was still! A clean coarse sheet was drawn up over the bed. Too well I knew the meaning, too well I knew that the still silent form underneath that slight covering would never listen to human voice again, had gone beyond the reach of human aid for evermore,—and oh! where? where? The agony of that moment was unutterable. I stood rooted to the spot, till one of the

nurses took me by the arm, and, leading me to a seat by Maggie's bed, said kindly:

"You are over tender of the heart for sights like this, my poor young lady; though even we, who get pretty well used to them, have been sobbing like children over that young lady that's gone. I've never seen the like in my time here."

I could not answer her; the very kindness of the woman only bowed me down afresh, for she was one of those before whom I had feared yesterday to speak of Jesus to the one now in eternity. Presently she spoke again:

"The men are going to bring in the shell just now to remove her," she said, in a hurried tone; "and you look fit for your coffin already; let me take you into another ward till it is over."

"No, no, nurse; it is not fear of the sight of death that has upset me so," I said; "but oh! where has her soul gone? Did she know Jesus? Was

she saved? That is my trouble."

The woman looked still more solemn.

"Eh, but that's the great question for us all," she said, and the door opening at the moment, she turned my chair rapidly round, that I might not see what followed, and hurried away to her duties.

There was absolute silence in the ward. Never had I so realized eternity, or the value of a soul, as then; and my own failure looked blacker and more hideous. I leaned my head on my hand and sat motionless. As soon as I could speak, I asked Maggie, "When did she die?"

"It was just at daybreak that she got all of a sudden much worse," she said, "and the doctor came in to see her. He did not think there was any great danger, but an hour or two after she died just quietly, so the nurse told me, and a little before she died she thought she was better. I heard the night nurse—that's the

woman that spoke to you—repeating the Lord's Prayer to her, but she isn't sure if she had her senses then." Some strange feeling prompted me, and I asked:

"Has the woman from the next bed, who was up and dressed when I was here yesterday, gone away?" for I had noticed that the bed was empty, and made up as for a new patient. The hesitation in Maggie's manner made me look quickly up. "What is it, Maggie?" I said, for tears filled her eyes. "She cannot surely have died too?"

"Yes," she said, "she died in the night; when the other one got worse she jumped out of bed to go to her, as she often did, but fell on the floor. They thought it was a faint at first, but it wasn't,—she was really dead. It was her heart, they say, but no one knew there was anything wrong with it; she had been ill with rheumatism most all the winter."

I could ask no more; the very room seemed whirling round with me. Oh, for that one day back again! oh, for that lost opportunity of speaking for Jesus! Two out of the four in and around that bed yesterday were in eternity to-day, and a third was willing to listen, and ready to own the deep importance of the Lord's salvation. I had thrown away the opportunity, and now it was *too late!* My poor friend seemed to enter into the agony of my soul, and attempted no words of comfort till after a long, long pause, when she gently touched me, and said:

"Did you not tell me once that *He* knew exactly all our weaknesses and all our failings, when He loved us so much, that He chose and died for us?" She was turning teacher and comforter now; her words came to me as from the Lord, and fell on my heart as the Lord's look of love must have fallen on Peter's; she had struck

the right chord, and the pent-up tears flowed freely. Maggie waited awhile; then, presently, very softly she said:

"There are many very ill in this ward; in the bed under the window in that left-hand corner lies one who can't last long, and no one goes near her; will you take her the message you brought to me? Maybe the Lord would like her to hear it from you." I could but recognise how divine grace had taught and refined her; she loved her Lord, and she knew I had failed in courage for Him, and she loved her earthly friend, and her heart was full of sympathy for the agony that failure had caused.

Almost reverently I took that poor, wasted hand that rested on my arm, and held it for a moment in mine, while my heart echoed Peter's cry of old, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee;" then rising, I turned towards the bed she had pointed out.

The same fatal disease—consumption—was fast hurrying the one whom I now saw to an early grave,—an early grave, I say, for I found out afterwards she was quite young, though a more experienced eye than mine might have failed to detect any sign of youth about that wan haggard face, with its deep lines and dull hopeless expression. There was nothing to deceive here, the hand of death was only too plainly marked.

As I neared her bed she feebly lifted her mug to her lips,—it was empty. I went closer, and said, " Will you try a few of these grapes instead of the water ? " She did not answer me, only looked at me as if half bewildered. I fed her with as many as she could take, then, as I put some more on the bed within her reach, she said:

" Who are you who will show any kindness to me ? "

" You would not know me if I told

you my name," I said, "but I am not the only one ready to show you kindness; I have a message for you from One who loves you."

"Ah, you've made a mistake; I knew you had," she said, and the wee glimmer of light that had come into her face died out again, leaving it more wan and haggard and hopeless than before. "Why, there's never a one in all this wide world that would do as much as you have done just now for Jenny, let alone love her."

"I have not made any mistake," Jenny," I answered; "the One I speak of is not in this world now. He was in it once, but now He has gone back again to heaven, and it is from heaven that He sends you His message; would you like to hear it?"

She shivered, and a look of terror came over her face. "Is it God or Jesus you mean?" she said. "Why, they hate me worse than all. The devil wants my soul, and he will have

it very soon, but he's the only one that wants me." And the look of hopeless terror deepened as she went on: "Lady, I tell you you don't know me, or you yourself wouldn't stand by my bedside and talk to me. Go away. You've been kind to me, and I wouldn't like any one to see you talking to the likes of me. Why, my own father and mother have forsaken me."

Silently I cried to the Lord for the right words to speak. Then I said, "Jenny, Jesus was the friend of sinners; when He was on earth Jesus died for sinners; He will be *your* friend if you will have Him."

"No, no," she said, "they always told me God hates sinners, and I've been wicked since I was ever such a child. I'm not very old in years now, lady, but I'm old in sin; it is too late now. I can't change my life,—it is past,—and *God hates sinners.*"

"It is you who are making two great mistakes now, Jenny," I said, "it is

not too late, and God does *not* hate sinners. Listen to this,—these are His words: ‘God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were *yet sinners*, Christ died for us’; and again, ‘For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the *ungodly*.’ Does that sound like God hating sinners? He hates sin, hates it so much that He gave His own beloved Son to die to put it away, that He might be able to show only love to the poor sinner.” I saw she was listening intently, and I went on: “It is not too late for *you*, either, Jenny, for God is still saying, ‘*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation’; and Jesus says, ‘Him that cometh unto Me I will *in no wise* cast out.’ *Jesus* wants to have you. The devil will seek to destroy your soul, I know, but Jesus wants to save it. Will you let Him? ‘The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth *from all sin*.’ Jesus is able, and

He is willing to save you,—will you come to Him? will you trust Him? Jesus is a Saviour, Jenny, a Saviour of just such sinners as you and I."

"Ah, lady, you,—I believe He will save you, but you don't know all my sins. He *won't* save me. No, no, it's too late, too late, too late."

"Listen," I said, "God's own words are best: 'Though your sins be as *scarlet*, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' And, Jenny, your heart and mine are both alike bad in God's sight, and Jesus will receive you as willingly as He received me."

"Would He have me?—are you sure?" and for a moment a gleam of hope lit up that poor face; then it passed again, as evidently a fresh remembrance of her past life came before her, and she said, in tones of wailing despair, "No, no, not me; my sins are *too many*. He couldn't bear to have me near Him."

I turned to Luke vii., and began to read of the woman at the feet of Jesus. " ' Was a sinner, ' " she murmured; " *that's* like me. Did He turn her away ? "

" No, Jenny, He had only a welcome for her; He has only a welcome for you. Listen still." And I read on.

When I came to the verse " her sins which are many *are forgiven*," she gasped out, " Is that verse really there? You wouldn't deceive a dying woman. Does He really say that? You look true, and you've been kind to me. Read it again, and read it slowly; I didn't know that verse was in the Bible." I read it again. " That must have been some one just like me," she said, half to herself,— " ' her sins which are *many*. ' "

" Yes," I said, " and shall not this be like you too, ' *are forgiven* ' ? "

" Sins be as scarlet—are forgiven—precious blood—Jesus," she muttered, and her head, which she had tried to

raise a little, sank back on the pillow. I pressed the juice of some grapes into her half-closed mouth, and bathed her forehead with some eau-de-Cologne; then I said, "You are very exhausted, I had better leave you for to-day."

"Oh, no," she said, though she spoke with effort now; "don't go, tell me more—I shall be gone when you come back—tell me all now—all His message—read me that once more—you know—about all forgiven—did you say—that was me? My—sins—are—many."

"Jesus says it of every one who trusts Him. He says to you, if you trust His precious blood, 'Thy sins are forgiven.'"

"Which—are—many—are *all*," she put in. Her soul clung to that.

"Yes," I said, "that is it, and there is something more that He says: 'Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace.'"

"Yes," she slowly said, and her whole face changed and brightened,

though she could only speak in a whisper now, "that's all—for—me, all! God—does—not—hate—sinners; Jesus—died—for—sinners; my sins—which—are many—are *all* forgiven; I do—trust—Him; peace—peace." Her eyes closed. I sat in silence for some little time, then, thinking she was sleeping, I moved to go. She opened her eyes. "Good-bye," she said; "I can't—thank—you—now; next—time—I see—you I shall—be able—to."

I wondered for a moment did she think she would get better; but she added, after a pause, "Up there; with Jesus, the friend of sinners." She was right. I never saw her on earth again, but I look to meet her, as she said, "with Jesus, the friend of sinners."

Dear reader, do you know that your sins, be they few or be they many, are *all* forgiven? One single sin is enough to sink your soul in hell for ever; but the blood of Jesus is

enough to put away the guilt of a whole world. Oh, delay not to come to Him! to-morrow may be too late for *you*,—to-morrow *you* may be in eternity. Will you risk meeting God with all your sins upon you, and this crowning sin of all,—that you refused all His offers of mercy, despised the blood of His Son, would not have Jesus as a Saviour? The devil wants your soul to destroy it, and he says, "To-morrow"; Christ wants your soul to save it, and He says, "*To-day—now.*" Whose voice will you listen to? Whose friend will you be? The devil knows well how many a one his fatal "To-morrow" has lured on, till they have found themselves sinking in the black morass of eternal ruin, with *no* escape. Christ's "To-day" leads into life, and light, and peace, and joy unspeakable, for evermore; for "In Thy presence is fulness of joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."