

3/- per 100

His Last Night on Earth.

By X.



Edinburgh:

J. K. SOUTER and Co.,

Publishers and Booksellers.

Office of "The Gospel Messenger" and
"Loving Words."

2 and 3 Bristo Place

FIFTH MILLION

This Last Night on Earth.

IT was evening, and the "chief" in a large city hospital had paid an unusually late visit to the ward. He had just quitted it accompanied by the house surgeon and the sister, when, pausing a moment at the open door of the sitting room, he said to her, "It is a pity, sister, about that splendid young fellow at the top of the ward. We have all done our very best for him but he will be dead before morning."

Startled out of her usual calm the sister answered, "Oh! is that possible, doctor? But you told him he was 'doing fine.' And he is quite expecting to live."

"Well, he has put up a grand fight for life and there was no use in depressing him, sister. He will probably

be unconscious in a few hours and never know he is dying." With these words the great surgeon moved on down the corridor.

The sister stood for a moment hesitating, then she said to the house-surgeon, "Will you not tell him, doctor? His friends are all far away in the North and there has been no time for anyone to come down, and he may have something to settle, or some last message to send. It is hard for them that he should not know. 'Do tell him.'"

"No, no, I shall not tell him. It is easier for him not to know," said the house surgeon. Then as he also passed on, he looked back, and said, "You can tell him if you like, sister."

"Then I must, I must," she said aloud, but within herself she thought "How can I? Will he ever believe me in face of the doctor's cheering word? Is it of any use after all to upset him?"

Still once more her first thought returned to her. "He may have something to settle, some message to send." Very pre-occupied she finished her evening duties, and then with slow steps made her way up the ward, pondering how she was to impart her dread tidings.

The night nurse was already at her post and the lights had been turned down in the ward when she took her seat by the side of one who, she now knew, was dying.

"This is kind of you to come and pay me another visit, sister," he said, "You heard what the doctor said, I am 'doing fine.' Does he think it will be long before I can be moved? You will write to my mother, won't you, sister, and make the best of it to her?"

The sister was silent a moment or two, then she said gently, "I am afraid the doctor made you think what is not true, Andrew. You are very

gravely hurt. There is more danger than any of us thought at first.”

It was Andrew's time to be silent for a full minute, then, as a look of fear and dismay came into his eyes, he said, “You do not mean I am dying, sister?”

There was no need for words, her grave look and the tear that rolled silently down her cheek answered him.

Again there was a pause. He had been a strong, brave man, had faced death over and over again without flinching, but that was on the battle-field, but this was different, it was night in a hospital ward, all was quiet, there was nothing to distract and take off the solemnity of knowing he had God and eternity to face. Presently, with quivering lips, he spoke only three words. “How long, sister?”

She dared not hide from him the stern truth.

And then came a low despairing cry, “But I can't die, sister. I can't

die. 'I am not ready to die.'" And then the momentous question was eagerly asked, "What must I do to be saved?"

She had said to the doctor, "He might have something to settle," but she had thought of earthly things, the things of time. He had indeed something to settle, and it meant for all eternity, and all she could say was, "I don't know Andrew, I am not saved."

Then a pleading voice, now very low, said, "Won't you pray for me? do pray," and the sad answer came, "I can't. I don't know how to pray."

What a moment for both of those souls! Both lost, and both having just found it out, but in the case of the one the last grains of sand in life's hour-glass fast running out; and still this question was unsettled.

The sister was scarcely less agitated than the dying man. At last surely a Spirit-given thought came to her, as she said, "I will tell you what I can

do, Andrew, if it will be any comfort to you. I will sit up with you to-night and read the Bible to you.”

Andrew caught at the suggestion as a drowning man might catch at a rope thrown out to him, and said, “Oh, do, do.”

She turned up the light just above his bed, enough to enable her to see to read and took up a Bible that was lying on the window-sill quite near. She hardly knew where to begin but the Bible fell open at the Gospel of John and she read in a low, clear voice of one who came to the Lord Jesus by night and got his questions answered. She read of the need of man and of God's love and His promise to meet that need. She read slowly, distinctly, and he listened eagerly, intently, trying to grasp something to answer the now all-absorbing anxiety of his soul.

Pausing a moment she read on of the woman who got her thirst quenched and her heart satisfied. Still there was

no word from the suffering man, and a grey look was stealing over his face, a look she knew so well, and yet his eyes besought her to go on and read of the One who went about doing good, of His Person, His works, who He was and who sent Him. Finally she came to John v. 24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." She looked up as she finished reading it, and saw a change in his face—the haggard look of agony—the struggling to grasp something that was unattainable—was fast disappearing as he said, "Stop there, sister—light is coming in. I see—I see." Very weak the voice was as he said "Leave me alone, sister, but come back soon. Thank you. Oh! thank you!"

She left him for half an hour—alone with God. When she returned his face

was radiant. "I have heard His word—I believe the Lord Jesus Christ bore my sins when He was lifted up, and He has received me—just as I was—all guilty, all unprepared—it is not death for me, sister, it is everlasting life—He has given it to me—I have passed 'from death unto life.' "

The words came with difficulty, but quite clearly and distinctly. After a minute or two's rest he spoke again: "Sister, promise me you will meet me in heaven. You can never say again you do not know the way. Promise me."

"I promise, Andrew," she said, "not to rest till I know, but I cannot grasp it as you have. It is not clear to me."

"He knew I had no time left, and so He let the light in quickly," the dying man said, "but He will make it clear to you, I know—good night, now sister. You must go and rest. Thank God it is settled and you have been the means. Thank you—thank you. Tell

—my—mother Christ saved me at the eleventh hour. Peace, peace.”

These were his last conscious words. The grey look deepened on his face, and very soon, as the surgeon had said, he had a slight convulsion, and then sank into profound unconsciousness only to waken “with Christ”; with the Good Shepherd who had sought and found His lost sheep and carried it home on His shoulders.

And what of the sister, do you ask?

The enemy plied her with doubts and difficulties of all kinds. She wanted to feel something, to see some change in herself. She wondered how Andrew had got such assurance so quickly, and could meet death so calmly without a doubt that his sins were forgiven and his heaven secure, while she tossed with doubts and fears.

She did not recognise that he had looked to the Lord Jesus Christ, got a sight of Him and that had changed everything for him in a moment, while

she was looking into herself and finding nothing but sin and misery.

In this state four years rolled away with her from the night in which Andrew died and the arrow on conviction had entered her breast. Four dreary years—a ray of hope coming sometimes to be quickly followed by darkness and despair.

At the end of that time she became acquainted with a visitor to the hospital, to whom she opened her heart, and told all her sad experience and the full story of Andrew's conversion and peaceful home-going. This friend invited her to meet a servant of God, who was being much used in speaking peace to troubled souls, and to hear him preach.

She accepted the invitation. The preacher she thought was good but it did not meet her case. She waited behind afterwards while prayer was going on, and, struck by her face of weariness and distress, the preacher

asked her into a side room, trusting the Lord might give him the right message for this troubled soul.

At first nothing seemed to touch her. Finally he turned to John v. 24;

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

Suddenly the light broke in, and, like Andrew, she too said, “I see. I see.” And peace possessed her soul. The very same words that had met the dying man four years before now calmed every fear and doubt in her heart and she went away a new creature to praise and thank God that for her also all was settled.

Reader, is it settled with you? John v. 24 is as much a message for you as for Andrew and the sister. Will you not receive it?