

MINNIE GRAY

or, Sought & Found



By X.

*Author of "LIGHT at EVENTIDE,"
"SNOW-WATER," Etc., Etc.*

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MINNIE GRAY; OR, SOUGHT AND FOUND

MINNIE GRAY'S cup of earthly happiness was filled to the brim, when first the Lord spoke to her soul. Possessed of much that the world values highly, it smiled its sunniest smiles upon her, and she knew not that its favor was deceitful, and its smiles bestowed rather upon what she possessed than upon what she herself was. It all looked bright and fair to her, and she knew of nothing beyond to eclipse its brightness.

Minnie had been left an orphan at too early an age to know how great had been her loss; and the aged relative under whose care she had grown up had but one object in life,—the happiness of her charge; and this she thought to secure by giving her her own way in every thing.

It was early in the summer of 1865 that, accompanied by several young friends, Minnie went one evening to a quiet-looking building, half chapel, half meeting-room in shape. The whole party went at Minnie's suggestion, out of curiosity, wondering what could attract so many people to spend a bright summer's evening in what seemed to them so gloomy a way.

"We will just go in for a quarter of an hour, and find out what the magnet is," said Minnie ; "we can sit close to the door, and easily slip quietly out again ;" and, as usual, what Minnie Gray proposed was seconded by her friends, and they entered.

Her plan, however, of sitting close to the door and slipping quietly out was defeated : the building was already well filled ; and though the strangers were shown seats, yet they were necessarily separated, and Minnie found herself away from all her friends, and directly in front of the preacher's desk.

For a moment she was disposed to be amused at the novel circumstances into which she had drawn her companions, as she pictured to herself their dismay at being compelled to spend an entire evening in this manner. But soon her whole attention was fixed. First, the manner—the deep-toned earnestness, then the words of the preacher arrested her ; and as he reasoned of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," Minnie, like one of old, trembled. She had heard of prayers and alms ; she had never heard of righteousness and judgment after this fashion. The eye of the preacher seemed fixed on her, and she sat spellbound. Every thing else was for the moment forgotten, save the thought that this was truth, and how could she escape this terrible judgment, so near, so imminent. The fact forced itself on her soul that there was a hereafter, about which she had never yet thought.

a God whose claims she had never yet recognized

She knew nothing beyond earth and its delights, and suddenly eternity was unfolded before her soul's gaze.

The preacher warned the young, the gay, the careless, and such she felt she was. The terrors of the Lord made her afraid and long to flee from them. She almost asked aloud, "Preacher, is there no escape from this fearful judgment—this awful hell?" But even as the thought filled her mind, the preacher turned from God's strange work of judgment to speak of the love of His heart,—of the way of escape He Himself has devised and provided through the blood of His own Son,—of Christ, the open door—the way in, for the vilest, to the Father's house—the only way in for any who would enter there—the only way to escape from the wrath to come. The preacher grew more and more enamored of his subject. It seemed beyond measure sweet to him to speak of the attractiveness of Christ; to dwell on His altogether loveliness, to hold Him up that other eyes and other hearts might gaze on Him too, and be attracted to worship and to follow Him.

But Minnie saw no beauty in Him that she should desire Him. The eleventh of Matthew had been the speaker's theme, and he closed with the touching invitation from the lips of the Saviour Himself, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." But Minnie felt no weariness, no

need of rest ; the world had been only a fair bright scene to her, yet the words rang in her ears, as words she had heard before and would hear again, though they had no sweet sound for her.*

She wanted to be sheltered from judgment, but she did not want Christ. To her, heaven seemed a dreary place, to which she only cared to go in order to escape the horrors of hell, when at some time she must die and leave the world; and that time she hoped was far distant. To be a Christian after the preacher's fashion seemed to her such a gloomy thing. Was there no resource—no middle ground between this and the fearful eternity he had pictured, and which something told her was a true picture?

Satan whispered to her that there was "Time enough; that the preacher was an enthusiast; and that there was no need to be in such a hurry, or to be distressed and anxious." She welcomed the suggestion, and, her conscience being lulled for the moment, she turned with quick eager glance to scan the faces around her, to see if she saw in them the reflex of her own terrors or the preacher's anxiety. In one or two of all the number could she discover any traces of either. By their looks, by their very air, she fancied that most were, as she expressed it, "regular attendants there ;" but though some were attentive, others showed signs

*Long after, she was told they had been her dying mother's last words, when she as a little child had been taken to her bedside to kiss her for the last time.

of weariness; some were restless, some pulled out their watches and seemed impatient; little knowing they were watched by a soul who was measuring the truth of God by their actions.

“Oh,” she thought, “my case is not so desperate; it is clear others do not think all he is saying is true, or they would be as earnest as he; he is *evidently* an enthusiast, led away by the subject; there *is* time enough; I need not decide yet; I will think about it. If they all seemed as concerned, I should feel as though it were now or never.”

Still the words “Come unto Me,” “Depart from Me,” rang in her ears, and made her bright face unusually clouded as she left the building, and her friends rallied her on her silence, till one, more observant than the rest, said, “Surely, Minnie, you are not thinking there was any truth in that man’s words.” Minnie colored, but made answer, “Suppose, after all, they are true, it is solemn for us.” There was a general exclamation, and the one who had spoken before said, with a laugh, “Fancy Minnie Gray numbered with the Methodists! what will H—— say?” Satan had been on the watch to catch away the word out of her heart lest she should “believe and be saved,” and he knew well the right shaft to use to displace the arrow of conviction that had begun to rankle there. Minnie did not answer her friend’s last remark, she too began to wonder what would H—— say, ‘or in less than three months she was to be his wife.

For a moment, in her anxiety about the future, earth had been distanced, but now its hopes and joys began to crowd in again on her heart with the thought of the one in whom they were centred, and the words that had so impressed her grew less powerful. In the stillness of the night, and alone, she could not quite so easily get rid of them, but again the devil whispered, "There is time enough. You are so young ; do not decide now ; you would have to give up so much,—it *might* have to be H—— for Christ ;" and she listened to what he suggested to her ; resolutely she put aside the words she had heard, refused the call of Him who would have drawn her by cords of love to Himself, and chose earth as her portion ; her heart was too full to make room for Christ.

But He would not give her up ; she refused *His call*, He stretched forth His hand, and took from her the one who had come between her soul and Himself. Scarcely two months from the night when she deliberately stifled the voice of conscience, made her choice, and turned her back on Christ, and just when every thing looked brightest and fairest, in a moment all was changed. A telegraphic message with its terrible brevity was her only preparation for the sorrow that changed her whole life, and she sat stunned and bewildered. She had never dreamed of death coming to him. It was sorrow too deep for earthly comfort ; and she knew not the One who alone could heal the deep wound.

An aged Christian who had known her mother in her youth was passing through her town and went to see her, trusting that in her hour of distress her heart might be opened to hear of Him who is the sorrow-bearer as well as the sin-bearer. But she had wrapped herself in her grief, and refused all attempts at consolation. Not knowing what had passed between her soul and God two months before, her aged friend quoted once more to her the words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest," and spoke to her of the love of Him who had uttered those words; but she listened with a shudder; she could see no love in the stroke that had made her life desolate; she knew not the heart that was yearning over her in tenderest pity, saying more beseechingly than even His aged servant could, "*Come, and I will give you rest.*" She was weary enough now, but she let her very weariness and sorrow shut out Christ, and harden instead of soften. Her mother's friend left her with words of prayer and deep pity; but though his visit seemed to have no effect on her, his words were blessed to the relative with whom she lived, and who soon after went peacefully home to the Lord, leaving her charge to Him, in confidence that at some time and in some way He would bring her to Himself.

A year or two passed on, the world did its utmost to draw her back again into its charmed circle; she was still courted and caressed by it, but she was weary and

restless. Then the fatal disease, consumption, that had taken from her both father and mother, began to manifest itself in her too. Others saw its symptoms plainly enough, but she would not believe they were any thing more than the effect of long nights of wakefulness, and a cold. She did not care to live, but she feared to die, and entered into every thing to shut out thought. Speaking of this some time afterward, she said, "I would not *come* to Jesus, so in His love for me He *drove* me to seek the shelter of His arms."

In the autumn of 1869, her health failed considerably, and at the same time she lost almost all that she possessed, and was left with a bare pittance. Now she found out the value of the world's friendship. She could minister no longer to its pleasures, and she found the very ones who had most flattered and courted her were the ones who held most aloof from her now in the time of her need. A distant relative offered her a home for the time, and to her she went. Now she began to look back with agony of heart to the night when she had heard the preaching on the eleventh of Matthew. She longed again to hear words like those, and yet she feared to open her Bible and try to find them, for they seemed to condemn her. She could not pray, and there seemed no one to whom she could turn; she was far from the place where she had heard that servant of God, and she knew neither who he was nor any thing concerning him. The weeks rolled by, and her strength failed

perceptibly ; the proud spirit, too, that had struggled against every thing, seemed broken at last. She felt herself a burden in the house in which she was. Minnie Gray with health and brightness and youth and beauty and money as her possessions, and Minnie Gray the fretful invalid, were two very different people to those who looked on with the world's eye ; and when one day her relatives said something about the hospital, she was almost glad to be removed there, and rather to accept the care of utter strangers than remain an unwelcome guest.

She had been in —— hospital some weeks when I saw her first ; and then was scarcely four-and-twenty, beautiful still, but with an expression of suffering and trouble and care on her face that made her at times look much older. I had been staying for a time in ——, and had often passed the hospital, and as often felt a great desire to go in ; but unless to see a patient whom you knew, and then only at regular visiting-hours, no visitors were allowed in. It was a gloomy-looking building outside—so gloomy that it all the more made me think, as I passed, of the sorrow and suffering that must be inside. Often I told the Lord of my wish to get in, and asked Him if He pleased to open the door. I had just given up asking, when one night very late I received a message from a lady whom I knew by name only, begging me to go to this very place for her and see a dying girl who was very anx.

ious about her soul, as she was too ill to go herself. She sent me the name of the girl, and the number of the ward, and also told me that I might go at any hour, for the permission to visit her at any time, so full of sad meaning to loving hearts outside, had been granted in this case.

When I reached the ward to which I had been directed, early the next morning, I stood for a moment just inside the door, looking round for a nurse to tell me which was the bed of the girl I had come to see, when a voice said to me from the bed close to the door, "You have come to see me, I know." I was astonished, and asked, "Is your name Ellen H——?" "No," she said, "it is not; but do not say you have not come to see me, for I have been praying all night that God would send some one this morning, and when I saw you, I thought He had sent you to me." "I trust that He has," I said, "and I will come back to you shortly, but I have first to find Ellen H——, for I have promised to see her at once." "Do not leave me," she murmured, "it will be like every thing else, —snatched from my grasp; I hoped God had sent you, and oh, I am *so* weary." "Do you not know the One who said, when He was on earth, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are *heavy-laden*, and I will give you rest,' and who says the same from heaven now?" I asked.

I was startled by the effect of my question. She

trembled violently; then raised herself quickly up, and looking very eagerly at me, said, in a very excited tone, "Now I am certain it is to see me you have come; for I asked God all night long to send some one to me this morning who would speak to me of Jesus; and I thought if He did, I should know there is really a God, and that He does hear. And I have watched that door since early morning, almost since daylight, though of course I knew no one could come to the wards as early as that, to see if my prayer was answered, and when you came in just now I felt sure you were a Christian, and I found myself actually praying again that if you were the right one, you would quote those very words to me. I have not said a prayer, till last night, for five years. I did not think God would hear *me*, but He must have." She was quite exhausted from the effect of speaking so rapidly and from the excitement, and I left her to recover from whatever the remembrance was that was agitating her so, and I turned to find Ellen H——.

Her bed was just at right angles to Minnie Gray's, near enough for every word spoken to the one to be distinctly heard by the other.

Death from the same disease was fast approaching this poor girl, and her mind was wandering, but all her cry was that she was *lost*—too great a sinner to be saved—Jesus would not have her. It was distressing to hear her. It seemed as though she could see some-

thing which filled her with terror. "I know I am lost!" she kept crying, and then with a fearful shudder, "It is awful to go to hell!" For some minutes I stood irresolute; it seemed useless to attempt to speak to her, for she appeared quite unconscious of all that was taking place around her. Then this word came to me: "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

I thought, "If it can divide between soul and spirit, enter between joints and marrow, what is to hinder its entering even here?" So I sat down by the bed, and as clearly and distinctly as I could, though in a low tone, repeated these three verses again and again. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin." Jesus said, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

The woman in the next bed said, "It's no use talking to her, she has not been conscious since last night; and they do not expect her to be again, though indeed she has done nothing but rave about these things ever since she came in."

I knew well it must seem useless; but still, with the strong conviction that God's words could find an entrance where man's could not, I still repeated them a great many times—how many I do not know. She

grew quite composed and quiet, and though she never was conscious again, the look of agony and despair went away from her face, and she kept on murmuring now, "To seek and to save—to seek and to save from all sin." She died that night, so I never saw her again; but the woman in the next bed told me that just before she died she opened her eyes, and said quite clearly, "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin," and then never spoke again.

When I returned to Minnie Gray's side, I was struck with the changed expression on her face. She did not wait for me to speak, but began eagerly, "Those words were all for me that you have been repeating. I was lost, and so He came to seek and to save *me*; I am full of sin, but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin. I have come to Him this morning, and He will not cast *me* out. Tell me more about Him. I was so unwilling you should leave me and go to that girl's bed, but perhaps you might not have read those very words to me. Do read me more."

I asked if she had any thing special she would like me to read. "Yes," she said, "read me the chapter where that verse is, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' It is the chapter the preacher spoke from that night five years ago. I have never opened a Bible since, for fear I should see the verse again, and now I long to see it." I thought she too must be wandering, as I

knew nothing then of what she was referring to, and evidently she guessed my thought, for she said, "You think I do not know what I am saying, but it is not that." And then she told me of that evening, five years before, of the solemn preaching, and how deeply it had impressed her,—how she was "almost persuaded," but deliberately turned away from Christ, and yet how she could never quite get rid of what she heard that night. I read to her the eleventh of Matthew, read many times the last verses at her desire. "It is rest to trust Him," she said, "but will He never let me go?" We turned to Jno. x. 28, 29,—“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.” “I see,” she said, “it is He who *keeps* fast hold, not we.”

“What brought you here to-day,” she suddenly exclaimed. I told her I had been asked to come. “When?” “Late last night—about eleven o'clock.” She thought for a moment, and then said, “That was just the time when I began to ask the Lord to send some one to me to-day who knew Him.”

It was only little by little I learned her history. Weeks passed, and I had seen her very often, before she referred at all to the past, save to the night of the preaching, and what she evidently avoided I did not feel I could touch upon. I saw she was naturally proud

and sensitive, and very refined, and I waited till she wished to trust me. As she grew worse in bodily health, her faith, and her peace too, deepened. It was never exactly *joy*, but deep, deep peace and rest, with ever such a sense of the grace that had met her. The expression of care and trouble left her face, and she looked even younger than her twenty-four years, almost childlike at times, save for an expression in her eyes which seemed to tell of calm *beyond* the storm.

Bit by bit, now a little and then a little, she told me her past history, a few of the details of which I have given, though she never referred to it save to magnify the grace of Him who had sought her *until* He found her,—who had, as she said, never let her alone until He “drove” her to rest in Himself. “He might have said to me,” she once added, “that because He had called me and I had refused—had stretched out His hand and I had not regarded, that He would laugh at my calamity, and mock when my fear came. I only deserved that; but instead, He received me just as I was, in all my wretchedness, when I had nothing to bring Him but a wasted life, almost run out. *He* received me, when nobody else cared to. What a friend Jesus is! This ward has been like the gate of heaven to me. I would not change it now for my old home and my old health and my old prospects, to be again a Christ-rejecter. If I could only go back five years, and give Him my best! I only would like that, because I love Him. I know He wants nothing at my hands, and I delight to owe every thing to Him. I think no one in heaven will owe Him quite as much, not even the thief on the cross.

“’Twas the same grace that spread the feast
That sweetly *forced* me in,
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin.’”

Next to her Bible, there was no book she so delighted in as “Meditations on the Song of Solomon.” She used to say it always brought Jesus Himself nearer to her, and that it reminded her of “that evening’s preaching.” I had lent it her, and she asked me to let her keep it till the last. I left before the end came. She had so wonderfully rallied that even some hopes were entertained of her being able to go out again, but the improvement was very temporary. Two sweet letters I had from her, full of Christ, and some touching verses she had written, on our first meeting. Then came a penciled message directed by another hand : a week or two more, and Minnie Gray rested with Him who had loved her and washed her from her sins in His own blood, who would not give her up till He had her by His side forever.

“Do,” she often said, “tell all those you meet who are *almost* persuaded, but who fear quite to decide for Christ, because they think, as I did, it is a gloomy thing to be a Christian, and they would have to give up so much,—tell them they lose every thing and gain nothing by their indecision. Tell them, to belong to Jesus is the brightest thing even for this life ; tell them how I drank at every cistern of this world and always thirsted again, but at last I drank of the water that Jesus gives, and have never thirsted more, and never shall for all eternity.”

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