

*Duplicate*

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*L. E. Christie*



CHRISTMAS EVE.

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FOR THE PUPILS

OF THE

South Parish Sunday School.

DEC. 25, 1853.

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PORTSMOUTH,

N.H.



## CHRISTMAS EVE.

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THE sun had already set, and the clear, cold, north-west wind drifted the newly fallen snow in every direction, piling it in strange fantastic heaps by the road side, covering the rough stone walls with its white drapery, hiding every blackened and time-worn dwelling in its own pure and spotless robe, and mantling field and forest with a beauty all its own. Colder and colder blew the wind, as we rapidly hastened along the road to the merry music of the sleigh-bells, while from time to time a sudden gust would drive the large flakes of snow into our faces, making us glad to seek a momentary shelter beneath the old "buffalo," which "Auntty" was sure we should need before seeing the bright warm fire that awaited us at our journey's end.

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On and on we went, the open fields were past, and now we drove through the dark pines, where the white snow lay in soft beauty upon every tree and shrub, and the noble hemlocks bowed their green and graceful branches beneath their soft burden, as if in quiet homage to the Power that silently clothed the earth in such new and wonderful beauty.

"Every pine and fir and hemlock,  
Wore ermine too dear for an earl;  
And the smallest branch of the elm-tree,  
Was fringed inch deep with pearl."

And now a heavier gust swept through the narrow valley, and as the grey old trunks were swayed hither and thither, and the wind murmured in wild and fitful cadence through the dark boughs, it seemed to say, "Aye, Christmas is indeed coming,—the storm has past, and robed are we already in our festive garments." And then as the wind died away, and for a few moments a perfect stillness reigned through the dark old woods, and the evening star beamed upon us through the opening boughs, in its calm and quiet beauty, a deeper and holier

voice whispered to our souls, of Him who hushed the raging of the waters amid the fearful storm, saying, "Peace, be still;" and of that Star of Bethlehem, that led the shepherds to the infant Saviour, whose birth this night we were to celebrate.

And now the cheerful lights from the distant village beam upon us, glancing fitfully hither and thither as we glide along the winding road. Nearer and nearer they come, and now we hear the sound of distant voices, and as we slowly climb the steep hill, on every side we see that active preparations are making for the glad festival of the morrow. Beautiful arches of evergreen are thrown across all the principal streets, standing in striking contrast with the soft white carpet of the earth beneath, while almost every window is wreathed in evergreen and holly, the poorer dwellings having at least a branch of spruce placed against a single pane. Bright fires blaze in rooms that seldom rejoice in such cheerful light, and groups of children flit hither and thither, eager and animated, preparing Christmas boxes or ornamenting Christ-



mas trees, surpassing, in their estimation at least, all that even fairies' magic wand could ever devise.

And now we drive more rapidly forward; only one turn more, and there stands the dear old house and the large elm in front, whose icy boughs glisten in the clear moonlight, just as in the days of childhood,—and there too is the dark pine that shaded the chamber window, seeming to my childish imagination to “rest close against the sky.” And now the well known gate, with its heavy hinges, swings wide open,—there is a momentary hush within, and then a sudden shout from a dozen merry voices, and the joyous exclamation, “Cousin Mary’s come! cousin Mary’s come!” And the old hall door is thrown open, and happy faces beam upon me, and laughing voices shout, “Merry Christmas, merry Christmas! welcome home, dear Coz!” And the great wood fire blazes brightly on the old-fashioned hearth, shedding its own cheerfulness upon the time worn walls and the dark heavy furniture of the apartment, consecrated by so many dear associations.

And in the same easy-chair, with its dark, chintz covering, by the side of the fire, sat my dear old Grandmother, looking as tranquil and loving as ever, and enjoying the merry sports of the little ones as highly as the youngest. But the opposite seat was vacant, and the unbidden tear started, when I recalled the last family meeting a few years before, and those who *then* met around the festive board.

“Ah, cousin, just too late for tea,” said Lizzie, “it’s too bad!”

“But you shan’t lose your supper,” said dear little Nell, as she sprang into my arms, “for I’ve saved my best cake on purpose for you,—and the *next* best for Kitty.”

“And here’s a good warm seat by the fire,” said Georgie, “and do pray thaw out those frozen hands of yours, for I declare you are colder than my snow man in the garden.”

“And only see how funny you look, all speckled with snow; why, I should think you had been turned into a snow-drift on the way!” said Annie laughing.



"Not quite that," I replied, shaking cloak and boa and muff, and scattering the flakes upon demure old pussy, who quickly escaped to the protection of little Nelly's apron.

"But, dear cousin, I am *so* glad you have come," said Helen's gentle voice, "for I was afraid you would be too late for our happy celebration this evening, for we are all going to the church, to have a service appropriate to Christmas Eve."

"Yes," interrupted Frank, "and all the Sunday school children are to be there, and to sing instead of the choir, and O, you can't think how Mr. Clinton has drilled and drilled us; and now suppose we should make a mistake, or hold our books upside down,—what say you to that, sis? But just please not shake your wise little head so solemnly to me, as if I couldn't be as dignified as the best."

"Hush, hush," said Helen, "but cousin, you must be quick and get nice and warm, for the bell will strike soon, and I should be so disappointed not to have you join us."

"What! and leave Grandmother all alone; that wouldn't seem quite fair, said I, seating myself on the little cricket by her side.

"Ah! but Mary dear, you know I love sometimes to be alone," she replied in gentle tones, "and strange indeed would it be, if this evening, at least, I could not have happy thoughts in remembering those so very dear to me, now at home with their Saviour; with Him whose birth-night shed such light and peace over all the darker scenes in life. And now, children, leave cousin Mary to me for a few minutes, and run and get ready for your walk, and remember and wrap up warm."

And just then old Jane came into the room, looking the same picture of neatness and order, as twenty years before, with "best" dark gown, clean checked apron and white muslin handkerchief, crossed and pinned so very exactly,—and cordially greeting me, placed on the side-table a waiter covered with the whitest of napkins, bearing a cup of hot coffee, drop-cakes, Nelly's precious Christmas cake, and all that could possibly tempt an appetite, which needed little



tempting, after a cold ride of thirty miles in an open sleigh.

Doing full justice to these, just as the old clock struck the hour of seven, we heard the distant bell, calling us to the evening service, and then the little folks came running in, fearing we should be too late, and warmed and refreshed, we gladly started on our walk.

A happy group we were, of uncles, aunts and cousins, the old and the young, as we wound along the village street, and ascended the steep hill, on which stood the old church, that had weathered the storms of more than a century. There stood the pointed spire as in days gone by, and well did I remember the fearful thunder shower, when the lightning played around it, as if sporting in its wild glee—and then the sudden crash that announced its dread descent. For many weeks it stood a blackened ruin, and when at length it was repaired, I gazed upon its towering height with a deeper reverence, for then it seemed to me to have been consecrated by the very finger of the Most High. And now the bright moon glis-

tened and sparkled on its snowy roof, reminding me of the golden roof of that nobler temple of old, to which a great and mighty nation went up to celebrate their solemn feasts; and as I gazed into the clear depths of the starry sky, I thought of that night, when on Judea's plains the shepherds gazed with wonder upon the opening heavens, and angel voices chanted their glad thanksgiving over the birth of the Prince of Peace.

But now the church was reached, and beautiful was the sight that greeted the eye, as we entered its time-worn walls, showing now no traces of the ravages of time, but wreathed in evergreens and flowers, fit emblems of the happy hour. As we passed along the aisle, each pillar that supported the heavy gallery was garlanded with flowers, interspersed with appropriate mottoes. "I am the Good Shepherd." "Suffer the little children to come unto me." "Ye are my disciples if ye have love one toward another." "The Prince of Peace." "Whosoever will, let him freely come, for he that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."



"I am the vine, ye are the branches." The altar too was festooned with beautiful wreaths, and covered with flowers, surmounted by an evergreen cross, bearing the words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life;" "One family in Heaven and on earth." And as I looked upon that speaking emblem of our faith, I thought of the many who had joined in worship within these earthly walls, now uniting in nobler songs of praise, in the felt presence of Him, through whom they had received pardon and redemption. There was the very seat where, year after year sat my venerable Grandfather,—and in the short winter afternoons, when the setting sun shone through the western windows and rested on his silvery locks, how truly did they seem as a crown of glory! His benignant smile seemed yet to rest upon me, and when I remembered his loving spirit, his words of kindly greeting, the respect and deference ever paid to him by every class in our community, I felt how serene and happy may be the sunset of a well spent life.

There too was the old pew, where, Sabbath

after Sabbath, we sat together in the house of worship, a little band of brothers and sisters,—now a divided household; and just beyond, was the seat once occupied by one deeply loved, but who passed on in the gladness and beauty of early childhood, leaving only the gentle memories of her loving spirit, to refresh the soul in the sterner trials of maturer years.

But my thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a sweet, soft strain of music, and then a hundred youthful voices united in that beautiful hymn:

"Hark! what mean those holy voices,  
Sweetly sounding through the skies?  
Lo! the angelic host rejoices,  
Heavenly hallelujahs rise.

Listen to the wondrous story,  
Which they chaunt in hymns of joy:  
'Glory in the highest—glory!  
Glory be to God most high!

'Peace on earth, good-will from heaven,  
Reaching far as man is found;  
Souls redeemed and sins forgiven;  
Loud our golden harps shall sound.

'Christ is born, the great Anointed;  
Heaven and earth his praises sing!  
O, receive whom God appointed,  
For your prophet, priest, and king!"



As the last strain died away in perfect stillness, the Pastor, so deeply loved by his little flock, arose, and in earnest tones read the account of the infant Jesus, of his humble birth at Bethlehem, when

“ In lowliness forgotten,  
A manger for his bed,  
On his young mother's bosom  
The Saviour laid his head ;”

and of that angelic song that arose on the stillness of the night, and was wafted over the hills of Judea, announcing to the watching shepherds that the Saviour, the Redeemer, was born.

Then looking thoughtfully around upon the many youthful and happy faces turned towards him, he continued in an impressive and earnest manner :—“ To commemorate that joyful night, my young friends, we have now assembled within these consecrated walls. To remember him whose life has blessed and sanctified every scene of daily duty and joy, we have here met together ; to offer up our heartfelt thanksgiving and gratitude to him through whom alone we have the glad assurance of pardon and immortality, and to commune anew with that Saviour

who has taught us alike by his life, his teachings, and his death, the true meaning of all trial and sorrow, and who now enables us with a happy faith and a cheerful trust to remember those once with us, the young and the happy, as well as the more advanced pilgrim in life's race, whose voices are indeed silent to the outward ear, but who now, in holier and more joyous strains, swell the choral song of the redeemed.

And shall not ours be the prayer this night,

‘ Thou star of glory, lead us,  
Thou music, deep and sweet ;  
Lead us unto the manger,  
Lead us to Jesus's feet.’

My young friends, *have you* truly come to him, and chosen him as your only guide and teacher? Do you love him as your Saviour, and have you given your hearts to him in their early freshness and strength? Were he on earth, would you go to him, and sit at his feet like Mary of old, and seek his divine blessing and guidance? Why, then, come not to him *now*? He is here this night, with each one of



you, speaking to you, pleading with you thus to come. Not afar off, in the distant heavens, does he dwell; for he promised to *abide* with those who loved him; and it is *his* voice that says to the youngest as well as to the oldest present, 'Come unto *me*, for he that *cometh* to me, I will in no wise cast out.' More truly does he love you than any earthly parent or friend, for he left his heavenly home, and the glory which he had with the Father, to live, suffer, and die for you; yes—for each one of you, that you might be saved from sin, and receive the forgiveness and acceptance of God. Delay no longer, but come to him now, and seek his presence and blessing. He is waiting to receive you—he stands with open arms to welcome you—his spirit pleads with you. When tempted to sin, to anger, petulance, or impatience, see his calm, reproving eye fixed upon you; when struggling against temptation, watch his smile of encouragement; when discouraged, or anxious, or sorrowful, hear his words, 'Be of good cheer; lo! I am with you always;' when tempted to sloth and indolence

and negligence, feel the thrilling touch of the Master's hand, bidding you arouse to action and noble exertion. Come to him as your Saviour; look up to him trustingly and sincerely; ask him to help and aid you, to teach you more and more of the Father, to be ever with you, and to make you his true, child-like disciples.

Many of you, my young friends, are anticipating with gladness the festivities of the morrow, when parents, brothers, sisters, and friends shall be reunited in the homes of their childhood. But have you remembered a more *certain* celebration, a larger and more joyous Christmas gathering, a more emphatic and joyous welcome, in store for each and all? This day—this week—before the old year closes, some of you may be called to that larger reunion of friends and home. But are you making the *needed preparation*? Are you anticipating with glad joy that happy day? Have you ever given as many or as earnest thoughts to that day certainly in store for you,



as to the preparations for this evening and the morrow? Are you earnest and untiring in preparing for your only true home—that home where you shall see the Saviour face to face? And when called thither, will the first strain from the eternal melodies of heaven be the glad greeting, 'Welcome, good and faithful servant?'

To some of you, we fear, these words seem all vague and meaningless. Would that you might know and feel their deep Reality!

Heaven lies before you, with all its joys, its strains of welcome, its words of invitation, its blessed voices of encouragement and hope—heaven, with God the Father, with Christ the Saviour and Mediator, with the spirits of the just made perfect—heaven, with its beauty and gladness and peace—heaven, with its large home gathering, its festal joys and happy greetings, its nobler and wider duties, its purer faith and unceasing progress.

And before you, too, lies the downward path—the world of woe, of suffering, and of death, with all its dread retributions, of which

the quenchless fire and the undying worm are but faint images. Which path have *you* chosen? Have you ever thought seriously enough *to* choose, solemnly and deliberately? Can that young lad, think you, have chosen the one only true and narrow path, whose tongue so often takes the name of the most holy God in vain, whose angry lips utter the words of swearing and blasphemy? Can that boy, so often wilful and disobedient, unkind and petulant at home, negligent at school, and rude to his companions—can he have chosen the one narrow path? Can that youth, who is so ambitious and self-confident, so eager for riches, distinction, and pleasure, who seldom prays, and regards the Bible with indifference and the Sabbath as a weariness—can he, think you, have ever thought seriously of making *one* in the great home-gathering of the heavenly Christmas? And that bright and lively girl, so full of plans and schemes, of thoughts of dress and beauty and fashion, has she earnestly and truly chosen for her guide Him who said,



'Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness; take up thy cross daily, and follow me?' Has she remembered the day when everything outward and earthly must be laid aside, and her spirit alone and by itself must appear before the judgment-seat? And that little girl, perhaps the pet and plaything of her home, yet who is so often angry or selfish or unkind, has she remembered that none who cherish such feelings can be admitted to that joyous festival to which we are all invited, to which she may soon, very soon be called? And that daughter, seeking only her own pleasure and gratification, negligent of home duties, and regardless of a mother's cares and anxieties, can she have chosen Him for her guide and example, who 'pleased not himself,' who came not to be 'ministered unto, but to minister,' and who gave his life a willing sacrifice for man?

Come then, once more, we would earnestly beseech you; come with sincere and earnest hearts to him who blesses your homes, who

sanctifies this festival by his loving presence, who waits to welcome you now to his undying love, and will admit you hereafter to those nobler joys promised even to the youngest disciple. Choose this night whom ye will serve. Come to Christ, and give your hearts wholly to him. Here and now is he with you—invisible, indeed, to the outward eye, yet it is *his* hand that is stretched forth to welcome you, *his* voice that bids you come, *his* love that pleads with you.

And to his earnest words of invitation may many of your hearts respond this night, 'Yes, we *will* come, and give ourselves to him; henceforth he shall be *our* Saviour and guide.'

And when the things of earth shall have passed away, may his hand unfold to you the gates of immortality, and place upon your brows the crown of life eternal. 'And the spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him who is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. Behold, I stand at



the door and knock ; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me. And to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.'

A silence, deep and heartfelt, followed these words, and a hushed solemnity pervaded the entire church. Then a few sweet voices sang that hymn, ever to be associated with the gladness of the Christmas Eve,

"Calm on the list'ning ear of night,  
Come heaven's melodious strains,  
Where wild Judea stretches far  
Her silver-mantled plains.

Celestial choirs from courts above  
Shed sacred glories there ;  
And angels, with their sparkling lyres,  
Make music on the air.

The answering hills of Palestine  
Send back the glad reply ;  
And greet, from all their holy heights,  
The dayspring from on high.

O'er the blue depths of Galilee  
There comes a holier calm ;  
And Sharon waves, in solemn praise,  
Her silent groves of palm.

'Glory to God !' the sounding skies  
Loud with their anthems ring ;  
'Peace to the earth, good-will to men,  
From heaven's Eternal King !'

Light on thy hills, Jerusalem !  
The Saviour now is born !  
And bright on Bethlehem's joyous plains  
Breaks the first Christmas morn."

\* \* \* \*

A quiet and happy group, we again assembled in the large, old room, around the cheerful fire. Even the merry tones of the little ones were somewhat subdued in their eager whisperings of Christmas boxes and presents, as if they, too, had felt the heavenly influence of the hour ; but when I looked into Helen's sweet and thoughtful face, I knew how deeply she had entered into its true spirit, and I felt assured that she had indeed known her Saviour's love, and received his holy blessing.

But when in tremulous tones our dear



Grandmother gave to each her parting blessing and kind "good-night," adding with earnest voice and manner, "may we indeed meet an unbroken family above; may not the youngest be wanting on that heavenly Christmas, when the Saviour himself shall lead us among the green pastures and beside the still waters,"—little did we think that one had even then received the summons to enter into that higher home.

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Not brighter did the first Christmas morning break over "Bethlehem's joyous plains," than greeted our eyes as we arose after a peaceful and refreshing slumber. Not a cloud obscured the golden rays of the sun, that shone with unwonted brilliance, and was reflected from the white, snow-clad earth. Every tree and shrub, and even the little twigs of the honeysuckle and sweet-briar, that twined around the porch, were cased in their clear, transparent covering of ice, while the noble elm that waved in graceful beauty before the door, seemed

literally robed in diamonds and pearls, sparkling so brightly in its rich and gorgeous beauty.

The Father's smile, indeed, shone around us; but did it beam less brightly in that darkened chamber, where lay the suffering child, hopefully and patiently awaiting the last summons that would forever release her from suffering and sin—calmly expecting that heavenly messenger, who came to lead her with a gentle hand "into the land of the great departed?" Suddenly stricken, our dearly-loved Helen was passing from the earthly to the heavenly home—from communion with her Father and Saviour on earth, to their more conscious and nearer presence in heaven.

Much as we had loved her gentle, sweet, and unselfish spirit, the thought had hardly occurred to us, that so soon, faith, to her would be lost in sight, and hope in glad reality. For several weeks she had seemed, if possible, more loving and thoughtful than ever, and though the shortened breath and the rapid pulse might have betrayed to the careful eye the insidious



working of some fatal disease, the cheerful voice, the happy smile, the constant thoughtfulness for others, the ready sympathy in others' joys and interests, at once chased the anxious thought and inquiry from even the mother's watchful spirit. But the sudden and severe cold of the previous evening had proved too great for her delicate frame; and now with throbbing brow and feverish pulse, but with a childlike, christian trust, she turned from those so dear and loved on earth, to pass to that eternal home whose light had ever blessed her earthly pathway.

"Good-bye, dear Frank; be a good boy; and O, do not forget last evening—our *last* Christmas Eve together; love Jesus, and be *his* disciple. And Lizzie, too, and darling Nell; remember that I shall wait for you. Annie, we shall soon all meet. Mother, dear Mother! one kiss more; do not weep; O, how happy will be that heavenly Christmas, when there shall be no more parting! Cousin Mary, lay your hand on my head; here—it throbs so!

Hark! do you not hear that soft, sweet music? it comes nearer and nearer. Father! Jesus calls me. I see him now; he bids me come; he smiles upon me. I go!" And suddenly starting up and stretching forth her hands, she exclaimed, "how beautiful!" then gently sunk back in quiet slumber.

"The room was full of angels  
When we laid her on her bed;  
We gathered round with tears and smiles,  
We could not call her *dead*."

She had indeed gone *Home*, and her's was a joyous Christmas with the children of heaven. Loving and trusting her Saviour on earth, she passed without fear to his immediate presence. And when we gathered the sweet flow-ers she had watched and loved, and twined them around her peaceful brow and placed them in her clasped hands, and gazed on the sweet smile that lingered on her happy countenance, as if she still heard the heavenly and joyful strains that welcomed her home, we felt as never before the power of those divine words,



"They who seek me *early* shall find me;"  
 "Whosoever will, let him freely come."

\* \* \* \*

My young friends, many are the solemn as well as the joyful voices that come to each one of *you* at this season. And as the old year fades, and the remembrance of the Sabbath hours we have passed together comes back to you, are there not voices of peculiar earnestness that bid you *pause and think*, ere commencing another stage on life's pilgrimage? Is there not *one* voice of peculiar power, one to which you cannot but listen, as it speaks to you from the spirit-land, urging you in earnest tones to remember the Reality of these things, to remember your Creator now in your youth? Does not that voice, which so loved to guide and direct your earliest steps, and almost whose last words were addressed to you, now, in deeper and more emphatic tones, urge you indeed to follow your Saviour, and to be faithful disciples of him who has assured us, that

'whoso liveth and believeth in him shall *never* die?'

And to most, if not all among you, are there not other voices, unheard indeed by the outward ear, but which whisper gently and earnestly to your inmost spirits, bidding you remember that the things which are unseen are alone Real and Eternal? Cannot some of you hear the gentle tones of a loving Mother's voice, which blessed your earliest infancy, now doubly dear and sacred, and whose daily prayer it was, that you might be in early life true disciples of your Saviour? Are there not those who are conscious of a Father's angel-blessing, and who hear yet again a Father's earnest prayer, that the divided earthly household may again and forever be reunited? And do not some among you listen in the hour of silence and solitude, or even in the busy school-hour, to a loved Brother's animating voice, or hear a gentle Sister's words of sympathy and affection? And do not all of these voices echo and re-echo through the secret chambers of your souls, and



blending in one united strain, ever say, 'Come up hither?'

But are there not some among you who listen not to these heavenly invitations, who have never entered upon that narrow path which alone can lead you Home? Are there not some, heedless and thoughtless, to whom prayer is a mere task, and the thought of death a dread and fearful thought? And are there not some, too, still hesitating and waiting as to the choice they shall make, hoping to follow their own pleasures and schemes for a season, and *then* to give to God the feeble remnant of their days and the faint service of their wasted powers? But, my young friends, *know you* the number of your appointed days? Another Christmas sun may never rise upon you, and with your present feelings and characters, would even the *heavenly* Christmas be a joyous or a happy one to you?

O, delay no longer, we earnestly beseech you; but as the volume of another year is closed, with all its mingled records of good

and evil, joy and sorrow, life and death, may the Recording Angel inscribe upon the yet undimmed pages of the New-year, that *your* name, too, is added to the book of life; that thoughtfully and earnestly, with sincere prayer and a steadfast purpose of obedience, you, too, have chosen the one straight and narrow path of life eternal.

Come, then, and give *your* hearts to God in their youthful freshness and strength. Come to Christ as *your* Saviour, ever with you, ever ready and waiting to aid, to bless, to sustain you; and let not the joyful thoughts or the solemn voices of this season again plead with you in vain. Come, and be Christ's true and faithful disciples on earth, and in the great Home-gathering—the heavenly Christmas—may not one be wanting to swell the song of glad thanksgiving and gratitude, to Him over whose human birth the angel-choir rejoiced, singing, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good-will towards men."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Yes! I *will* come! my Saviour calls,  
His blessed voice I hear;  
Soft as the dew of heaven it falls  
Upon my list'ning ear.

Yes! I *will* come! for I to thee  
May all my griefs reveal;  
And thou a pitying friend wilt be,  
And for my sorrows feel.

In hours of sickness and of pain  
I'll listen for thy voice,  
Which breathes in tones of heavenly love,  
And bids my heart rejoice.

Yes! I *will* come! and when the hours  
Of life shall all have passed,  
Conduct me to my heavenly Home,  
To dwell with thee at last."



PORTSMOUTH, N. H.  
Dec. 1853.