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At the Foot of the Cross.

A Story of Easter Eve.

Bayley

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A STORY OF EASTER EVE.

By L. M. LANING BAYLEY.



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“ Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee.”

At the Foot of the Cross.

AMBER and gold the sunset
At evening of Easter-tide;
Purple the shadows that darkened
The moss-grown mountain side;
Green were the crocus and lily,
Snowy the lilac's bloom,
And the air of the blushing spring-time
Was heavy with rich perfume.

OVER the winding hill-side
 Stood a homestead, old and gray;
And just beyond the brooklet,
 That rippled and flowed away
Like a beautiful ribbon of silver
 O'er the green and mossy sod,
Towered the stone church, old and massive,
 The ivy-crowned house of God.

IN the church-yard, green and quiet
 "God's-acre," solemn and blest,
Were the graves of the dear departed
 Who had entered their perfect rest.
Within the house of prayer
 Blossomed the Easter flowers,
Making of altar and chancel rail
 Wonderful fairy bowers.

BEAUTIFUL snow-white lilies,

 Ringing their waxen bells—

Pure as a dream of heavenly harps

 When their golden melody swells.

Green were the vines of the smilax,

 Crimson the passion-rose,

And over all in the sunset fell

 The hush of a soft repose.

THROUGH the beautiful storied windows,
With their colors so gay and bright,
The sun in his dying splendor
Flashed a radiant flood of light;
So peaceful the air, so holy,
It seemed as if God's own grace
Must dwell in the hearts of the people
Who entered that sacred place.

Ⓜ, how could a soul e'er wander
That had once found entrance there,—
That had grown in childhood's innocent faith
At that chancel rail in prayer!
But alike to castle and cottage roof
Too oft comes a day of ill;
And sorrow came with the Easter sun
To that homestead over the hill.

TEN years ago that Easter,
With guilt and sin in her breast,
A wondrously beautiful maiden
Had strayed from that haven of rest ;
Her face was a radiant vision,
Her heart ever throbbing in song,
'Till the tempter came, and she listened—
And life was forever wrong.

CLOSED was the door of the homestead,
Forbidden her once loved name;
The father grew stern and hardened,
The mother was crushed with shame;
Long were the years and dreary
In the homestead over the hill;
Never a sound of laughter,
But silence, solemn and chill.

LONG were the years and mournful :

Ten Easters came and went,
Before, bowed down in repentance,
Homeward her steps were bent.

Tattered and worn her garments,
Silvered the raven hair ;

With many a line on the sunken cheeks
That were once, alas ! so fair !



UVER the winding hill-side,—
Sick with her weight of sin,—
Up to the door of the homestead,
Praying, “Oh, let me in!”
But strangers stood at the portal,
And paced the familiar hall;
Never the voice of a loved one
Answered that pleading call.

OUT in the mossy grave-yard

Two mounds their story told;

A marble cross above them,

Straight, and stately, and cold.

In the dusk of the Easter twilight

She passed through the homestead gate;

Crying, "O Christ in heaven,

Repentance has come too late!

"**D**o word for me of forgiveness!
No word of the old-time love!
Dead and left me forever,
Resting in heaven above.
O mother, the mother that bore me!
O father, who gave me life!
Send me a message from heaven
To quiet my heart's wild strife!
O Christ, thou pitying Savior,
Who perished that souls might live,
Is there no peace, no pardon?
Great God in heaven, forgive!"

PRONE on the graves, all moss-grown,
Her face to the ground, she lay;
When lo! in the church she heard the choir
Chanting for Easter day.
Pure was the melody sacred
They sang in the organ loft,
And it fell like balm on the bruised heart,
Tenderly sweet and soft.

THEY chanted the Easter anthem—

Joy for the Lord set free;

Then sang that prayerful, pleading hymn—

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me.”

It brought to the listening mourner

A gush of repentant tears,

And dashed from her heart the stony mask

It had worn for ten long years.

"**H**OW dare I ask forgiveness?
How can I pardon gain?"—

Out through the open casement
Floated the tender strain:

"Could my tears foreever flow,
Could my zeal no languor know,
This for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

BREATHLESS the mourner listened

To the solemn organ strain,

While over her face the tear-drops fell

Like the early summer rain.

In a vision she heard the rustling

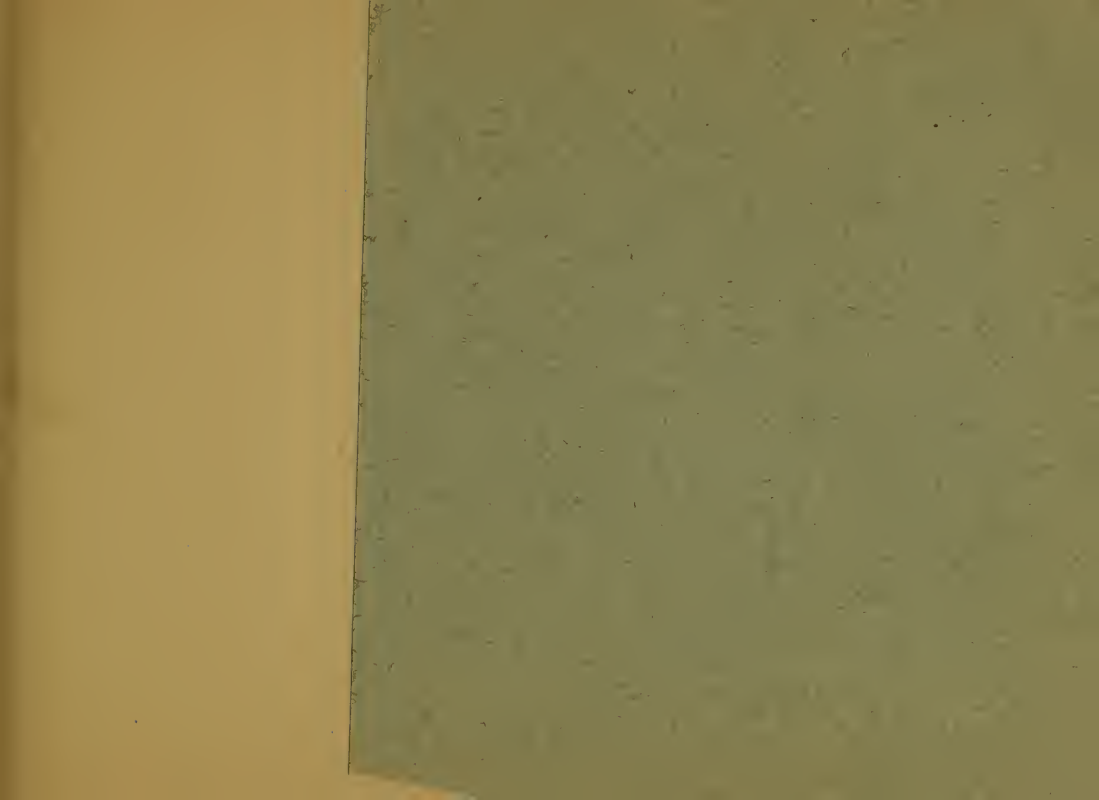
Of an angel's snowy wing:

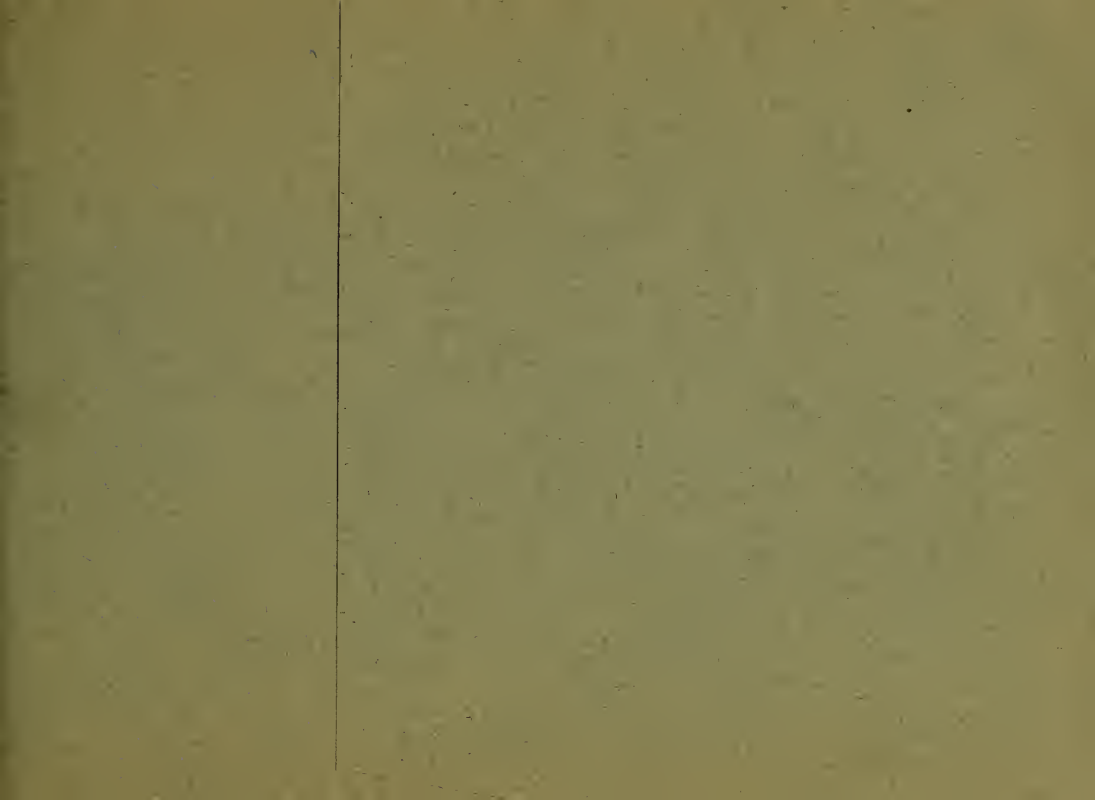
" 'Tis the message from heaven," she whispered;

" To Thy cross, dear Christ, I cling."

THE melody ceased; and the singers
Knew not that the words of prayer
Had gone with the sinner's soul to heaven,
And knocked for admittance there.
And out from the ivied casement
Fluttered a snow-white dove,
Poised on the cross above her head,
An image of peace and love.

DARKER the shadows falling,
Softer the summer air,
When the choristers came from their chanting,
Forth from the house of prayer.
'Neath the star-lit heavens they found her,
The dove of Peace on her breast;
With the arms of God around her,
She had entered eternal rest.
With her sins forever pardoned,
Purged from all earthly dross,
She had found, not death, but eternal Life,
There at the foot of the Cross.





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