ST. CLOUD DEMOCRAT.

JANE G. SWISSHELM, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."—Exodus, Chap. xiv Verse 15. EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

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ST. CLOUD DEMOCRAT

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THE LITTLE BOY that DIED.

The late Dr. Chalmers is said to have been the author of the following beautiful lines, written on the occasion of the death of a young son whom he greatly loved:

I am all alone in my chamber now,
And the midnight hour is near;
And the fagot's crack and the clock's dull tick
Are the only sounds I hear,
And o'er my soul in its solitude,
Sweet feelings of sadness glide,
For my heart and my eyes are full when I think
Of the little boy that died.

I went one night to my father's house—
Went home to the dear ones all—
And softly I opened the garden gate,
And softly the door of the hall,
My mother came out to meet her son—
She kissed me and then she sighed,
And her head fell on my neck, and she wept
For the little boy that died.

I shall miss him when the flowers come,
In the garden where he played;
I shall miss him more by the fire-side,
When the flowers are all decayed.
I shall see his toys and his empty chair,
And the horse he used to ride,
And they will speak with a silent speech,
Of the little boy that died.

We shall go home to our father's house—
To our Father's house in the skies:
Where the hope of our souls shall have no blight,
Our love no broken ties.
We shall roam on the banks of the river of peace,
And bathe in its blissful tide;
And one of the joys of our life shall be
The little boy that died.

THE STEP UPON THE PATH.

I heard it first. We were sitting around the fire, one cold clear autumn evening—Elsie Russel, my mother and I. Elsie was reading aloud to us from a quaint old book, full of dwarfs and giants, enchanted ladies, and valiant knights; and every now and then, as she paused to turn a leaf or make some merry comment, the murmur of the wind among the branches of the old elms around the house came faintly to our ears, and made the inner comfort more intense. I could not see the cheerful room, or the shining of the firelight, or the bright young face of Elsie Russel, or my mother,s smooth, white forehead, and clear thoughtful eyes, although I could remember them well, oh! how well, of old. I might never hope to gaze on any of these things again! Yet, I was happy with that clear voice falling on my ears, and that tiny hand resting on the table, so close that I could touch it with my hand, as I did, now and then, by accident. I was often very mis erable; but just then I could have said, had I been called upon to do so, that sight was nothing when compared with such a home and such a mother, and that it was better to be led about, and read to, by Elsie Russel, than to be independent of aid and unblest by such a sweet friend and comforter. In a word, I had forgotten past and future, and was living only in the present, when a step, one that I had never heard before, broke upon the quiet of the little room, dispersing it utterly—so it seemed to me at least. The others scarcely noticed it.

"There is a strange footstep upon the garden path," I said; and I spoke suddenly, with an unquiet fluttering of the heart, and an undefined prescience of sorrow, for which I could have given no reason, or rather, for which I was ashamed to give one to myself.

"It is Tom, my dear; I sent him out upon a message before dark," said my mother kindly.

"It is not Tom, mother. I have never heard *that* step before," I persisted.

"It *is* Tom, in new boots. What stranger would grope his way through the Woods to this out of the way place after nightfall? laughed Elsie. "Be quiet, Paul Blair, and listen to the story, as you value my approbation. The knight is about to deliver the enchanted lady from her traldom.—Attention?"

Ere she could resume her book, however a loud peal of the bell announced the fact that the steps of which we had been speaking, and to which I had been listening all the while, had ascended the porch; and in another moment Elsie read from a card, which the servant handed to her, the name and title of Doctor Claymore.

"Whom I met at the Irvings,' last week. I—I believe I mentioned him," said Elsie in a somewhat confused explanation.—"Show the gentleman in, Dinah."

The strange step fell upon my ear once more. Across the hall, up the stairs to the parlor door it came; thence, smothered by the velvet softness of the carpet, into the room itself, and there paused, very near me. I heard that alone of all the the other sounds; words of welcome and introduction which accompanied it. Only when all was quiet again and all were seated, could I bring myself to listen to the voice of its owner, and try to discover, in my own way, what he was like. A handsome, gentlemanly man, with that peculiar dashing frankness of manner which captivates all women and men, and a voice clear and firm enough to match his step—this was what I made of him. That he was possessed of intellect and refinement, and that he could, at least, express excellent sentiments, was evident from his conversation. The man of all others to charm Elsie Russell, I thought, and following this came a long train of other thoughts, wrong and selfish beyond measure. I knew them to be so, and yet I could not drive them off. My head ached and burned intolerably beneath their weight, and I lingered for my opportunity to slip out unperceived. At last I heard their voices recede to the cool open air. I knew the path by heart, and feeling for the little paling fence, turned my steps towards a small building spoken of rarely, and then in whispers, by the members of our family, as the "burnt summer-house."

I will tell you a story of that burnt summer-house. It was a momentous one to me, at least.

Elsie Russell was an orphan. In our richer and happier days, my mother had adopted her. I was many years older than the child, and she had been my pet and plaything from the first hour of her arrival. I was not blind then, and many a long holiday I spent in amusing and caressing the shy little beauty, to whom kindness had been an unknown thing until she came among us. With my own hands I had planted vines around the bare walls of an ancient summer-house in the garden, and fitted it up with cushioned seats and tiny tables for her express delight; and here, on hot, midsummer days, she loved to read and sew, and sometimes would fall asleep among the cushions, curtained by the floating vine branches.

One afternoon I had left her thus, and gone to fish by the water side, my mother being away upon a visit. There was no one in the house but a stupid black servant; and partly to be assured of her safety, and partly that she might not be disturbed, I locked the door of the summer-house, and placed the key in my pocket before I started. I had not idled away half an hour, when casting my eyes in the direction of our house, I saw a faint blue wreath of smoke curling up into the air. As I watched it, it grew denser, and I felt assured that it came from some burning building. Trembling with apprehension, I flung away my rod, and made with all the speed I could muster toward the spot, dreading I scarcely knew what.

How it ever happened, no one knew; but ere I reached the garden, the truth was too evident; the summer house was in flames, and Elsie was fastened within the burning walls. I sought in my pocket for the key vainly. I had lost it. Oh, Heaven! what a feeling of despair came upon me as I realized the fact. The black woman stood near, wringing her hands and screaming helplessly. The nearest house was a mile or more away. There was no mortal aid at my command, so I prayed to God for help, and he strengthened me.—The building was of strong, well seasoned wood; but I strove with all my strength against the door—how long I knew not; it seemed to me an age—but at last, just as the flames scorched my face, and threatened to envelope me in their red embrace, the door gave way, and staggering in, I saw my darling lying upon the rude bench, and bore her forth unscratched, unhurt from out the fiery furnace. But in coming out, I had to force my way through a sheet of lurid flames. I remember that it scorched my forehead and dazzled my eyes; but I became unconscious, and when I recovered I found myself lying, with bandages about my head and eyes, upon a soft, cool pillow, and heard through the darkness, which seemed deeper than any I had ever known, some one weeping softly close behind me. Enough; there is no use of painful detail. It had been night to me ever since; but I had saved my darling—yes, my darling. From that moment, even as a woman loves the babe for whose birth she suffers, so I loved Elsie Russell, for whose sweet sake I had lost the greatest blessing man possesses; and from that moment she had repaid my sacrifice by care and kindness the most devoted. The only pleasure of my life had been in her presence. Since the hour I knew the sun would never rise again to me, her little hand had led me tenderly and cheerfully as though it had been a sister's.

"And now—now," I murmured aloud, as I felt for the scorched relic of the bench—"now a stranger's step must come between us!" The sound of my own voice, the cool air, the quiet, brought back my reason. I weighed my own actions in the balance of my conscience. "Paul Blair!" said I to myself, "you have not dared to hope that the young years of one so fair as Elsie Russell would be wasted for your sake; that no strange eye would spy out the jewel which you, blind and helpless as you are, could never hope to claim; that that love which comes sooner or later to every woman's soul, would never come to hers? Paul Blair you have not dared to think thus?" And even as I bowed in shame at the conviction of my own heart, I almost prayed, "Not yet—not yet; let her be ours a little longer! and I laid down upon the rude bench and wept as I had not wept for years, for from the inmost core of my sad heart I worshipped Elsie Russell.

A low trembling voice aroused me.

"Paul!" it said, "dear Paul, why do you stay in this sad place alone? Come in, we miss you, my son."

It was my mother. I wiped away my tears, laid my hand within her arm, and thus went back into the house. I had nerved myself to bear the sound of the strange footstep before I reached the parlors. I was right when I thought it would come between us. Elsie was as kind as ever; but somehow, whenever she was singing to me, or reading to me, or whenever we were walking in the garden, or chatting in the parlor, I would hear the ring of that sootstep upon the path, and it was all over for the day. By and by, I almost grew to hate it.

One evening when she had gone to walk with him, as she often did of late, my mother, pausing in a cheerful click of her knitting needles, said pleasantly:

"I shouldn't wonder, my dear, if Dr. Claymore seriously admired our Elsie. I hope it is so, for he is a fine man—is he not, Paul?"

I answered in the affirmative, and she went on:

"I was afraid that living here in this lonely house, Elsie would lead a dull life as she grew older. It is not as though you could pay her those little attentions girls are so fond of, you know, and really Dr. Claymore is quite———What is the matter, Paul?"

What pain the best people will give unintentionally! It was a pang at my heart, not in my head, although I told my mother that it was, which made me start and abruptly close her speech. Only for the present, however, I was doomed to hear of Dr. Claymore's attention and Elsie's beauty, and the little signs by which my mother augured that the happy climax was approaching, until I could have prayed to be deaf as well as blind

All this was wearing out my soul and body; and my brain seemed to be on fire, I could not think collectedly, yet I grew only more silent and sad; although my mother saw that something was amiss, she never guessed the truth. Her greatest pleasure was to make me lie upon the sofa, with a pillow underneath my head and talk to me about Elsie and Dr. Claymore. She said she "saw it did me good."

One day I awoke with a strange giddiness and fever upon me. It was late, and the first news I heard was that Elsie had gone to ride with Dr. Claymore.

"And I shouldn't wonder, my dear, if he was going to propose to her. He looked rather agitated, and certainly had something on his mind," said my mother.—"Just let me get you a pillow on the sofa, and I'll tell you what he said to her, so that you have her interest almost as much at heart as I have, my dear, and it will cheer you to talk it over."

I could not bear it any longer. I said something about headache and the air, and managed to escape out into the garden. There I wandered wearily up and down, feeling delirium rapinly clouding my mind, and struggling wildly against it, until, as the clock struck twelve, I groped my way, faint and trembling, to the wreck of the burnt summer house, and sat down once more upon the little bench where Elsie h d been sleeping when I rescued her from the flames. I struggled no longer with my reason, but muttered wildly with myself: "Here, here—yes, here, where she slept—I will die, and she shall never know that I died for her love. Ha! ha! ha! how they would laugh at the idea of a blind man in love!

"Master Paul, come to luncheon! Don't sit there looking so wild-like," said Dinah, who was close beside me.

I knew the voice—I heard what she said; but I went on talking.

"Why don't you laugh, Dinah?"

"What at, young Massa,' asked the woman.

"At me—at a blind man in love!"

"Oh, Massa Paul, what ails yer?" sobbed Dinah, "what has happened yer?"

"Hush!" I whispered. "You have heard the step coming, night and day—that has killed me; but do not tell her, for he will be her husband then, and she would grieve.

"Tell her how I loved her, though, and how I would have cared for her, if I had been like other men. She will not laugh then, for I shall be under the sod, and we never laugh at the dead! Hark! the step is coming!"

Firmly it came along the path; and as I stretching out my arms, seemed to spring from a black precipice into a gulf of deepest, profoundest darkness, where hearing and motion were buried in oblivion, I heard her calling out:

"Oh! Massa Doctor! Massa Doctor! her's young Massa Paul gone dead along o'you as I knowed he would!"

The first of my after memories that is reality, is the sound of that very footstep which I so hated. It was very soft now and it came and went constantly, unweariedly. With it there came cooling draughts, soothing change of heated pillows, refreshing moistenings of parched lip and brow, and tenderness equal to any I have ever known; but I hated it, and drove it away still. I knew my mother was there, and Elsie; but that step destroyed my pleasure in their presence. Not until I lay so weak that an infant could have prevented me from making the slightest move, but nevertheless safe on the road to health again, did that step cease to haunt me. But that hour came at last, and for three weeks I never heard its echo; and Elsie never left me. As I grew stronger she sat beside me and read to me, as in the old times, until that day came when, propped with pillows, I sat in my old chair in the parlor, close by the open window. My mother had kissed me, and was singing over her household duties for very pleasure. There was no one in the room but Elsie Russell and myself. My heart was very soft and warm that day. I longed to thank them for all their care and kindness—even the remembrances of the step I hated was no longer terrible to me. Something of my first thoughts I tried to say, but Elsie placed her hand upon my arm as I spoke.

"Paul," she said, "I have not spoken of it yet, but you owe your life, so far as man is concerned, to Dr. Claymore. We could have done nothing. He did everything. He never left you for a moment, Paul, until you were out of danger. We can never forget any of us his kindness and devotion: but for that we must have lost you."

"It would have been a loss to deplore," I said, with something of the old bitterness. "Would you have grieved much, Elsie?"

"Paul! Paul!" she said reproachfully, with her little hand upon my arm again; "O, Paul!"

"And why should you?" I continued. "A blind mole, useless to you and himself—a sightless thing, to be led and tended and cared for, where he would give his life to guard and cherish instead! Why should you grieve for it, Elsie? You would not long."

"Paul, Paul, you break my heart? It is I who am the cause, the innocent cause of your blindness. It is I who have made you so wretched. Why did you snatch me from the flames, Paul? My death would not have been as terrible as this."

She spoke with a suppressed agony in her voice which I had never before heard from any human being, and I involuntarily stretched out my arms and wound them about her waist.

"Forgive me, my more than sister," I pleaded; "it is worth *all* to feel your sweet pity, to have you thus near me. Let me keep you thus awhile, Elsie, as though I were in reality your brother; and believe, from my soul I shall forever bless you and any one who makes your life happy, be he who he may. I have seen it all along, Elsie; and if at first bitter thoughts would come, when I remembered that as he would gain, so we must lose you, believe me, dear Elsie, they are over now, and I have no thought that is not kindness, no feeling that is not a brother's for him or you."

As I spoke I heard once more that ringing step upon the path, and she started from me. "The new step, Elsie! Go and meet it," I said.

She turned and paused. "Paul," she said, "do you think that any new step could be as dear to me as the old ones I have loved so long? Oh, Paul!"

"It is right, it is natural, Elsie; do not blush to own it," I said, for I had resolved to look my hard fate full in the face, and be unselfish at least for the future. I could say no more for she was gone, and he had come in her stead—he, the owner of that step which I had first heard coming up the garden path a year before

"You are looking better," he said.

"I thank you, Doctor Claymore; I find I owe it to your kind attention that I am thus far recovered," I answered. "I fear I have proven a very troublesome and very ungrateful patient. Accept my thanks and apologies; they are all the amends that remain for me to make."

He laughed frankly. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Blair," he said, "only your fever and delirium saves you from half a dozen challenges, and as many duels.—You appeared to have considerable animosity towards me, for some unexplained reason."

I felt myself color as he spoke, but could make no answer. He went on:

"I did not come to speak of this," he said. "Are you strong enough to bear a little agitation?"

"I believe I am," I replied.

The Doctor arose, and leaning over me pressed his fingers upon my eyelids very softly. "Pardon me," he said, you must have been blind a long time?"

"Ten weary years," I answered.

"And have you never thought of regaining your sight?—have you never hoped to do so?" he asked, in a gentle tone, still keeping close beside me.

"Thought of it? often, often! hoped for it, never! It is a blessing denied to me forever. I shall never see again."

"I think you may; I am almost certain of it," interrupted the doctor rapidly.—"While you were ill, I examined your eyes carefully. My dear boy. I think I may promise you that you shall see again, and—well, never mind; the rest will follow of itself."

What that last inexplicable sentence meant I did not dare to think, the promise of the first was too glorious to realize at once. We talked it over calmly, however, and it was arranged that I was to keep the whole a secret, and to accompany him to the city, when I was strong enough, that he might have it in his power to perform an operation in which he religiously believed. For my part I could not believe; I could only hope and pray.

I left home in a fortnight with Dr. Claymore; during that time I had been thinking and reasoning much with myself, and had grown very calm. If I had ever had any hope that Elsie could have been my own, it would have been harder; but I had always felt that I must some day lose her, and now, at least, I knew that the one she had chosen was worthy of her. I believed that when I heard that step on the morning of my journey, I listened to it as the step of Elsie's betrothed husband, without any thought of my helpless self, and thanked God that it was so firm and light—so fit a step to walk beside her through the toilsome march of life.

A month had passed; I was in town still, but was going home on the morrow. When I went, I should see the old house—my mother's face; I should look, at last, in Elsie Russell's eyes, and thank her for her kindness to the blind man, who almost seemed like some one else, so different did life appear to me, now that sight was restored. "And, for all this, I must thank you, Doctor Claymore," I said, grasping his hand and looking thankfully into his face; "but for you, I should still grope my miserable way through life.—You have given me the power to be a man. I can be my mother's protector now, instead of the burden I have been so long."

"And, Paul Blair, you can tell Elsie Russell that you love her," said the young doctor, quietly.

I started, and looked at him in astonishment.

"I understand," he said, "I know what you have thought, but that pure heart is free, Paul Blair, and it loves you."

Still I stood motionless and wondering.

"You were right," he continued, "I did love Elsie Russell; as a brother I love her still; but you, Paul Blair, I have read your heart from the first—I know all that you have borne, for something of its sorrow I have felt myself. When I first came to your home," he went on, "I saw that you loved Elsie, and knew that I came there as a rival; but what man ever considered another when he was himself in love. I wooed Elsie Russell, and hoped to win her, feeling all the while that I was breaking your noble heart. You remember the day when you were first taken ill?"

"Indeed I do," I answered," "Shall I ever forget it!"

"That day," continued the doctor, "I had ridden out with her upon the quiet river bank; I told her of my heart's love, and found that it was hopeless. The knowledge was very hard to bear, Paul; but when, in her innocent pity of my grief, she told me that she esteemed and liked me—that she had no friend she valued more, but that there was one whom she had always loved, who needed her more than I did, for whose sake she would remain single forever, if needs must be; then, Paul Blair, I felt that coming there I had come between a pure and holy love—seldom seen or felt on earth—and I prayed to God for pardon. When riding homeward by her side, I found you lying prostrate on the ground, and learned from your ravings and the words of the old servant, that my surmises were only too correct, Heaven knows that all the anger of my heart was for myself; for you I felt nothing but compassion. For that strength which made me strive to bring my rival back to health and happiness, which put it in my heart to pray for your restoration to sight, as though it had been my own, I thank the mother who taught me to pray and God who gave her to me. Paul Blair, if I did not know you had a noble heart, I would never tell you this; but knowing that it would make you yet happier by giving you the knowledge that my step can never come between you, save to your ears—that you have not to win a heart, but only to claim it. Good-bye! God bless you! Go home to Elsie and make her joyful."

I listened to his step as it faded away in the distance, and could have wept—how good and great he was.

At home they knew nothing of what had happened. As the carriage drew up at the gate, I looked out and saw a light form, that I knew must be Elsie's, tripping down the path. I stepped out and waited till she came up. As she drew close to me I shut my eyes.

"Dear Paul, you are at home again.—Your mother has just gone down to the villiage to meet you—you must have passed her," she said, taking my hand in hers.

"Then you are alone, Elsie," I said.

"Yes, Paul."

"I will go if you will lead me, Elsie."

She answered me by drawing her hand thro' my arm and walking on. We sat down together in the little parlor, and I ventured to steal a glance at her. She had altered a very little since her childhood. Her solemn eyes and golden hair were just the same. She was looking at

DEFECTIVE PAGE