

LYDIA STURTEVANT;

OR,

THE FATAL RESOLUTION.

LYDIA STURTEVANT was the name of an amiable young lady of my acquaintance, who died at the age of sixteen. She was the daughter of respectable and pious parents in one of the New-England states. On the cultivation of her mind considerable attention had been bestowed. Buoyant in spirit and beautiful in person, she was the pride of her parents, the ornament of her circle, and the admiration of all who knew her.

To what extent her mind had been imbued with religious truth in childhood, I have not been able fully to learn. It is certain that from her earliest years she had regarded religion with respect, and had entertained the expectation of becoming a christian before she died. It is not known, however, that her conscience was much impressed until the summer of 1824. During the months of July and August of that year her mind was under deep conviction of sin, and she felt that it was unsafe to continue in the neglect of religion any longer. One morning, especially, the first impression as she awoke was, that she must embrace religion then; and that her soul was in imminent danger of being lost if she any longer delayed. She then professed that she saw herself "to be a great sinner, in the hands of a God of justice"—saw that there "was no hope but in Jesus Christ—that He was ready and willing to receive her then, and that delay would probably be fatal to her soul." She deliberated; she reasoned; she called on God; and finally, as she thought, made

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up her mind to the deliberate resolution that she would repent and accept the offer of salvation before the close of that day. This resolution was, as she would fain have quieted herself by believing, the solemn and fixed purpose of her soul; and she felt a degree of satisfaction in the thought that the question of her eternal salvation appeared now so nearly settled. But the day had its cares and its pleasures; business and company filled up its hours; and the night found her as thoughtless, almost, as she had been for months.

The next morning her religious impressions were renewed and deepened. She thought she saw more clearly than before, the danger of her condition, and the necessity of immediate repentance. She reproached herself for violating the resolution of the previous morning, and in agony of soul, better conceived than described, she formed another resolution, as she expressed it, "to begin religion before the close of that day." And with this the anxiety of her mind again subsided. The violated vows of the previous morning gave her some uneasiness; but she had now, as she supposed, formed her resolution so firmly, she was so fixed in her purpose, that the issue could hardly be any longer doubtful; and her anxiety gave way to the soothing reflection that she should soon be a christian. She had now taken, as she imagined, "one step"—had formed a solemn purpose, and had given a pledge to repent that day. She felt, as she expressed it, "committed," and hardly had a doubt as to the accomplishment of her purpose. This day also passed away as before. She did indeed several times during the day think of her resolution, but not with that overwhelming interest which she had felt in the morning.

The next morning her impressions were again renewed, and she again renewed her resolution; and it was dissipated as before; and thus she went on resolving, and breaking her resolutions, until at length her anxiety entirely subsided, and she relapsed into her former state of unconcern. She was not, however,

absolutely indifferent: she still expected and still resolved to be a christian; but her resolutions now looked to a more distant period for their accomplishment, and she returned to the cares and pleasures of the world with the same interest as before, forgetting the admonition of the Holy Ghost, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts," Heb. iii. 7, 8.

About this time she went to reside in a neighbouring village, and I did not see her again for about three months, when I was called at an early hour one morning to visit her on the bed of death. Her last sickness was short—of only five days' continuance. So insidious was its progress, that no serious apprehensions were entertained as to its issue until about eight hours before her death; and no anxiety for her salvation up to this hour appears to have occupied her mind. About day-break on the morning of the day she died, she was informed that her symptoms had become alarming, and that her sickness would probably be fatal. The intelligence was awfully surprising. It was an hour of indescribable interest to her soul. A solemn stillness reigned around. It was at the early dawn of day, just about the hour at which she formed, what she emphatically called, "that fatal resolution," a short time before. The opening twilight, the chamber in which she lay, every object around, brought to mind her former resolutions, and in a moment all the horrors of her situation filled her soul. She now deemed herself a sinner, in the hands of God—impenitent, unpardoned—without hope—at the very gate of death—the Saviour slighted, the Spirit grieved, and the judgment, with its tremendous retributions, just before her.

Reader! for a moment suppose her case your own. Time that was given her to prepare for eternity, was gone. Health, strength, flattering hopes were gone. The insidious disease had made such rapid inroads, that her blood was already beginning to stagnate, and her lungs to falter in the work of respiration. Feeble and faint, and racked with pain, just sinking in death, she

must at once obtain the mercy of God, or in a few short hours it would be for ever too late. At one time her distress became so intense, and her energies so exhausted, that she concluded her soul to be lost. That word, LOST, was a living scorpion to her deathless soul. Her whole frame shuddered at the thought. She struggled again for life—raised her haggard eyes, and seemed to summon every effort to pray. Oh what agony did that prayer express! She called for mercy, until her weak frame gave way, and she sunk into a partial swoon. A momentary delirium seemed then to distract her thoughts; she appeared to dream that she was well again, and spoke wildly of her companions, and her employments, and her pleasures. But the next moment a return of reason dissipated the illusion, and forced back upon her the conviction, as she several times affirmed, that she was just sinking to hell.

At this awful thought her soul again summoned strength—again she cried for mercy with an agony too intense for her weak frame, and again she fainted. It was now nearly noon. Most of the morning had been employed either in prayer at her bedside, or in attempting to guide her to the Saviour; but all seemed ineffectual; her strength was now nearly gone, vital action was no longer perceptible at the extremities, the cold death-sweat was gathering on her brow, and dread despair seemed ready to possess her soul. She saw, and we all saw, that the fatal moment was at hand, and her future prospect seemed one of unmingled horror. She shrunk from it. She turned her eye to me, and called on all who stood around her to pray once more to the God of mercy on her behalf.

Turning at one time to her distressed father, as he sat beside her, watching the changes of her countenance, she said, with a look such as parents alone can understand, “O, my dear father, can’t you help me?—can’t you keep me alive a little longer? Oh! pray for me—pray for me.” We all kneeled again at her bedside, and having once more commended her to

God, I tried again to direct her to the Saviour; and was beginning to repeat some promises which I thought appropriate, when she interrupted me, saying with emphasis, "I cannot be pardoned—it is too late—too late." And again alluding to that fatal resolution, she begged of me to charge all the youth of my congregation not to neglect religion as she had done: not to stifle their convictions by a mere resolution to repent. "Warn them, warn them," said she, "by my case"—and again she attempted to pray, and swooned again.

Her voice was now become inarticulate, the dimness of death was settling upon her eyes, which now and then in a frantic stare told of agonies that the tongue could not express. The energies of her soul, however, seemed not in the least abated. The same effort to pray was manifestly still continued, though it was indicated now rather by struggles and expressive looks and groans, than words. She continued thus alternately to struggle and faint, every succeeding effort becoming feebler, until the last convulsive struggle closed the scene, and her spirit took its everlasting flight.

As I retired from the scene of death, I was led to contemplate and write down this brief history of that lovely female, whose state was now unalterably fixed. But a few weeks before she was within the reach of hope, and promise, and gospel influence, a subject of deep and solemn conviction. The Saviour called—the Spirit strove; she listened—deliberated—resolved. But, alas! her resolution fixed on a future period; and although it was but a few hours distant, it afforded time for "the wicked one to catch away that which was sown in her heart." The circumstance which quieted her convictions, and perhaps prevented her repentance, was her resolution that she would repent; or, as she more than once expressed it, "that fatal resolution." Had she then repented truly and scripturally, and embraced salvation as freely offered in the gospel, instead of simply resolving that she would

repent, her death, though in the morning of her days, might have been peaceful and triumphant, and her immortality would have been glorious.

But how was it that a resolution to repent and become a christian—a resolution so solemnly adopted, and to be executed so soon, could have led to a result so disastrous! The answer is clear. We see in this case the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the dark devices of Satan. Instead of yielding to conviction, and repenting at once, she was quieted by her resolution, until the cares and pleasures of the day had time to come in and take possession of her soul. She thought her resolution was so firmly made and so soon to be accomplished, that she felt in a measure secure, and her anxieties subsided. The resolution that she would repent that day calmed her apprehensions, and thus removed from her mind the most powerful stimulant to do it now. The effect upon her conscience was that of a deceptive and deadly opiate; it lulled to a deceitful slumber, to be broken only by the summons of death. And it should be observed, that Lydia neglected to seek the influences of the Holy Spirit by earnest prayer. She also appears to have thought that she could repent at any time she pleased, and might therefore delay,—a most unfounded opinion which has soothed many souls into perdition.

It is not for us to say, whether or not the cries of Lydia Sturtevant for mercy, in her last moments, were actuated by godly sorrow or by mere remorse; it is not for us to decide on her state in the eternal world; but it is our duty to learn from this painful case the utter folly, the awful guilt, and the dreadful danger of delay.

How many, as we have reason to fear, are going down to the pit under the same delusion! Impenitent reader, is not this your case? Why are you so unconcerned? Is it not that you are purposing to repent hereafter? Would you, could you be content to live one day, one hour, in this unprepared state, if you had not some such opiate to stupify conscience

and perpetuate its slumbers? Suppose it were now revealed, that in a few short hours death would be upon you, would you not be awakened? would you not with great earnestness seek the Lord while he might be found? But what real difference is there between the condition here supposed and your actual condition now? Death is sure to come. Why then, when the fact that you must die ere long is so certain, why do you feel so little solicitude to be prepared? With the tremendous alternative of heaven or hell appended to your decision, what awful delusion holds you in fatal slumbers?—what but this delusive purpose to repent hereafter? Take away this, and the vain hope which hangs upon it, and would you slumber? No more than you would slumber under the trumpet of the last day.

The deceptive influence, then, of this resolution, this mere purpose to repent, can at once be seen. It perpetuates that insensibility which threatens, even now, your soul's eternal ruin. No matter how firmly you may resolve to repent hereafter; the more firmly you resolve, if in your own strength, without believing prayer, the more imminent your danger becomes, for thus conscience will be silenced. No matter how short the period before your resolution is to be accomplished. Though it were merely "to go and bury your father," or "bid them farewell that are at home at your house;" if it admits a single half hour of delay, it involves a hazard for which the wealth of kingdoms would not compensate. It is a wilful delay of repentance, now commanded; it may lead to diverting company or care; it may grieve away the Holy Spirit; it may prove the ruin of your soul. This mere purpose to repent has been long enough peopling the world of perdition. It is one of the most successful temptations of Satan. It is not to be trusted, even for an hour. It is like the pilgrim's "enchanted ground;" he who sleeps there sleeps in the gate of death. If religion will ever have any value, it has that value now. If its sanctions ever will be binding, they

are binding now. If the Most High ever will have a claim to your obedience, he has that claim now. The business of religion is not to be trifled with or delayed. God requires not simply your purposes, or promises, or resolutions, but a cheerful submission of your will to the word, and Spirit, and holy will of God: a cordial acquiescence in the method of salvation through Jesus Christ. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance and remission of sins," Acts v. 31. As a "Prince," he gives repentance, and commands you instantly to repent; while as a "Saviour," he declares himself willing to forgive, "able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," Heb. vii. 25. "And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him," Acts v. 32. Seek, then, the influence of the Holy Spirit, to melt your hearts to godly sorrow, by the view of Christ crucified, and seek without delay. This is a concern in which no man's word can be taken, even for an hour. Not even the most solemn vow, if it fix only on a future period, can meet that high and holy injunction which "now urges all men every where to repent;" it is the requirement of God, and to delay is to treat him with contempt. O then, by the awful majesty of that God who thus "commands"—by the tremendous decisions of his last tribunal—by the amazing worth of your own soul—and, above all, by the infinite love of Him who died for sinners—**REPENT NOW.**

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