



CATHARINE HELFENSTEIN.



—32—

PUBLISHED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

CATHARINE HELFENSTEIN.

CATHARINE HELFENSTEIN was born, March 29, 1817, at Carlisle, Pennsylvania; where her father, the Rev. Albert Helfenstein, afterwards pastor of the German Reformed congregation of the city of Baltimore, then resided.

When about ten years of age she joined an institution for young ladies in Baltimore, then under the care of the writer, where she manifested a deportment the most unassuming and amiable, and a diligence that, associated with a natural quickness and comprehensiveness of mind, gave the fairest promise of her ultimately attaining a high degree of mental accomplishment.

The influence of parental instruction was apparent at school, and whenever reproof became necessary, the slightest reference to the pleasure of her beloved parents would cause her to weep. But this influence was exhibited more particularly in relation to divine things. With the first lisps of her tongue was connected the name of her

God and Saviour; and to him she was taught to raise her infant voice in praise and supplication. Nor was she taught in vain. She never would retire to her bed without having first engaged in private devotional exercises; family prayer commanded her cheerful attention, and in the devotions of the nursery, when prayer was offered and the Bible read before the children retired to rest, she found peculiar delight.

Her parents frequently observed that she had a remarkable veneration for the name of the great Jehovah, and always appeared to view its use, on any other occasion than that of solemn conversation or devotion, as exceedingly irreverent and sinful.

Attached to the female Sabbath-school of her father's congregation from its commencement, she soon learned to estimate its importance; she was always found in her place, attentive to her lessons, respectful to her teachers, and solemn in her deportment. Such was the general tenor of her course, that she gained the affection of the whole school; and if tears may be allowed to furnish any evidence of that affection, the tears of her companions and teachers, when they learned she was dead, spoke its influence in a language more powerful than words.

Her friends anticipated in her an ornament to society and the church of God on earth, but the divine purpose was otherwise concerning her.

From a very early period she had a deep conviction of her sinfulness in the sight of a holy God. When sick, about the sixth year of her age, she feared she should die, and said it was *because she was a sinner*.

About eighteen months before her death, at the conclusion of prayer in the nursery, the mind of Catharine appeared to be under deep conviction. For a few weeks she tried to conceal her feelings; but the sword of the Spirit was piercing her heart. She tried to pray, but she feared that the Lord did not regard her prayers. The Saviour of sinners, able to save to the uttermost, the promises of the gospel to every penitent believing soul were clearly set before her, and especially our Lord's gracious assurance to the young, "They that seek me early, shall find me;" and she gave the most cheering evidence that she was enabled to give her heart to him, and take him as her everlasting portion.

From this period, but especially within the last year of her life, she appeared to be devotedly attached to all the exercises of religion, and to desire above all things a conformity to the precepts

of her Lord and Master. She loved to read the word of God, and was also very fond of religious publications. But she was conscientiously opposed to the reading of novels, tales for children, or any light productions. These afforded her no gratification; but, on the contrary, she viewed them as decidedly injurious in their tendency. Perhaps she judged from her own feelings, but she judged righteous judgment.

She had a great fondness for sacred hymns, and amid the multitude she was in the habit of repeating and singing, one seemed to be a peculiar favorite. It is founded on Luke 19:41, and was composed by Mr. Beddome.

“Did Christ o’er sinners weep,
And shall our cheeks be dry?
Let floods of penitential grief
Burst forth from every eye.”

She manifested a peculiar interest in the success of the gospel. Her heart appeared to expand with love to all who bore the image of the Saviour; and it was the delight of her soul to hear that persons were changed from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to the liberty of the children of God. The increase of her father’s church gave her special joy. Such was her view of the loveliness of religion, and the excellence

of all its devoted advocates, that she took particular pleasure in the society of the pious, and seemed to love her fellow-creatures in proportion to their love for the Saviour of sinners. She felt a great anxiety for the spiritual welfare of her brothers and sisters, exhorting them to attend the meetings of the church, and appeared greatly grieved whenever they showed a want of inclination.

Her parents, in the providence of God, were deprived of two of their children; events which made a deep impression upon the mind of Catharine. The death of one of these, an infant, which occurred during the last year of her life, affected her very deeply. She was the first to discover that he was dying, and was greatly agitated; but having kneeled with her mother by the side of the departing babe, and offered a prayer to the Lord for resignation and strength, she became composed.

Her resignation to the will of God, as well as concern for a preparation of heart to meet him in peace, are obvious in the following fact. A few days after the decease of her little brother, seeing her mother grieve, she attempted to offer consolation by saying, "He is gone to rest! Mother, if it had been one of us, and we had not left evi-

dence of having-gone happy, then you might have cause to grieve."

About this period her mind seemed to be absorbed in the contemplation of divine things, so that surrounding objects almost ceased to attract her attention. This was particularly the case during the season of nursery devotions, when she frequently remained a long time upon her knees, engaged in prayer and praise.

Her attachment to divine things was now exhibited in a constant desire to attend all the religious meetings, especially the female prayer-meetings of the church, in which she frequently raised the tunes of the hymns that were sung.

Her conscience was peculiarly tender in regard to sin, and she seemed anxious to avoid the very appearance of evil. She asked her mother one day, whether it was right for Christians to sing songs. But not having her question positively decided, she said, "Mother, would you sing songs?" "No," replied her parent, "I should not think it right to do so myself." "Then," said Catharine, "I think it must be a sin, mother."

In the month of December, 1829, at the age of twelve, she became a teacher in the Sabbath-school where for years she had been an exemplary scholar. Here she was as faithful in the

instruction of others as she had been attentive in the character of a pupil. That her class should love the Lord Jesus Christ was the first desire of her heart, and feeling her own weakness, she frequently solicited her mother to come and converse with them; and nothing, in all the process of her laboring in the school, appeared to afford her so much gratification as her mother's visits.

The great change in her was very apparent. This I could not fail to remark, as she was almost every day, for three years, under my immediate tuition. For the last year, I do not recollect that she required a solitary word of correction. All was kindness and gentleness, combined with the most diligent application to her studies. It was impossible to know her as intimately as her teacher did, without cherishing for her the most sincere affection. At home it was also observed that her temper was not so easily ruffled as formerly, and that whenever she was opposed in her wishes or disappointed in her expectations, she submitted with a patience and meekness not exercised at earlier periods.

Catharine was doubtless ripening for glory, but we then knew it not. In May, 1829, she was sent to Carlisle to spend the summer with her

relatives, with the view of establishing her health, which was then delicate. When her parents sent her thither, and uttered the parting farewell, they little supposed that they should never again on earth behold their beloved child.

For several days before her decease, she complained of earache and swelling in the neck; but it was not until Saturday, the 12th of June, that her symptoms excited any alarm. On the evening of that day she was afflicted with a sore throat and difficulty of breathing, and in the following night her mind was greatly exercised about her eternal state. She asked her aunt to pray for her, and at the conclusion of the prayer, repeated a hymn, and then herself broke out into a prayer distinguished by language of the most appropriate character, and by a spirit of fervent and heavenly devotion—supplicating the Almighty in her own behalf, in behalf of all in whom she felt a particular interest, and for the whole world.

At this period she had no thought that her end was rapidly approaching. She frequently entreated the Lord to restore her to health, if consistent with his sacred pleasure; but on the day following, which was the Sabbath, she was informed that her disease would, in all probability, terminate in death. She seemed at first reluctant

to admit it, and ardently to hope that the means employed for her recovery would prove successful. But the Lord had determined other things for her. Her sufferings continued to increase, and she was enabled to endure them with fortitude and apparent resignation.

On Monday morning it was apparent to all that her departure was at hand. Her aunt was sitting by her bed, when she requested her to come and lay her cheek by the side of hers, expressing at the same time the great affection she felt for her. Her aunt observed, "Catharine, you love your Saviour." "Yes," she replied, "and all his dear people." Her aunt then remarked, "You know what he has done for us." "O yes," said Catharine, "he bled and died."

She was asked if she did not feel herself to be a sinner. "O yes," said she; "but there is the Saviour, hanging and bleeding on the cross—Oh, I am going home to him—I am going to glory—I am going to Moses and the redeemed of Israel." Here, under the consolation of divine grace, she repeated these lines, and doubtless felt their force:

"Jesus can make a dying-bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are,
While on his breast I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there."

She then asked some person to pray for her, and afterwards called her relatives and friends around her bed, and exhorted them to meet her in heaven. She requested that her love should be given to her dear father and mother, and that they should be informed of her happy death. She observed, "They often told me, that if I loved and served the Lord, I should die happy; but tell them they cannot conceive of my present happiness." Hers was "a joy unspeakable and full of glory."

About this time Mr. G—— entered the room, and seeing the triumph of her soul over death and hell, he sung the hymn,

"Jesus, my all, to heaven has gone," etc.,

and added to every verse the chorus,

"O had I wings like Noah's dove," etc.

Catharine joined with him, and assisted to sing the whole hymn; she made a pause at one of the choruses, saying, "Soon shall I have wings like Noah's dove," and then resumed the singing of the hymn.

At a time when the room was filled with visitors anxious to catch the glowing language of this happy child, she exhorted them all to seek the salvation of their souls, saying, "If there be any here that have not experienced religion, let them

pray; for Jesus is here, and he will bless them." With many more words did she exhort all around, and call them to the standard of the cross.

Rev. Mr. E—— offered prayer, in which she expressed great delight; but when he supplicated that, if it were consistent with the divine will, she might be restored to health, she quickly said, "Oh, I don't want to live." At the conclusion of prayer she lay for some time composed, apparently in sweet intercourse with heaven. She seemed to be aware that in a little period she should join the general assembly and church of the first-born; and therefore prepared to depart, by bidding her earthly friends farewell.

To her brother and sisters, mentioning them by name, she desired her love should be given; that they should not forget her, and especially, that they should seek the Lord.

To the colored girl living at her father's house, and whom she had been in the habit of instructing, she also desired that her love should be tendered.

The same mark of attention and regard she requested might be sent to the Sabbath-school with which she had been for several years associated.

The world faded from her view—heaven opened

its glories to her mind. She repeated the much-admired words,

“Vital spark of heavenly flame,
Quit, O quit this mortal frame;
Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying —
Oh, the pain, the bliss of dying!”

Her bodily sufferings were great indeed; she felt the pain of dying, but she felt its *bliss* also, and she laid a peculiar emphasis on this word, as though the pain were not worthy to be compared with that “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” revealed in her soul.

Angels were standing prepared to convey her departing spirit into the bosom of Abraham, and while they sweetly whispered, “Come away,” she responded aloud to the joyous message, “Glory to the Lord. Hallelujah!”

These were the last words of praise she uttered on earth; the golden bowl was broken, the silver cord was loosed, and her spirit returned unto God who gave it.