Mary Jordan White

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1859-1909

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Mary Jordan White was born near the village of Belvidere, Perquimans County, North Carolina, 12 mo., 12th, 1859. She was the daughter of Jeptha and Ann M. White, valuable members and elders of Piney Woods Monthly Meeting of Friends. Her father was a man of sterling character and sound judgment, one whose life commanded the respect of all classes: he was social, genial and kind, and made this his motto, "Speak of the *good* qualities of a person, but not of the bad." And with such qualities, it goes without saying that he was greatly loved by those who knew him. Her mother possessed a modest, gentle nature, was an excellent housekeeper, one of whom Solomon could well say, "She seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands, she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."

On her father's side only three generations removed from sturdy Scotch ancestry, and on her mother's from the Jordans of Virginia and more remotely of England, Mary (in her childhood and youth she was familiarly known as "Minnie") could

but inherit much, and her character seemed a happy blending of the many good qualities of both ancestral lines.

She was blessed in having the careful training and gentle influence of both parents until she was about twelve years of age, when her mother died; only three years later, her father too received the summons, leaving her and two younger sisters, Adelaide and Julia, orphans indeed. But there was one who took the places of father and mother,

"A guardian angel, in truth."

This one was their half sister, Elizabeth, now the wife of Josiah Nicholson, then unmarried. This sister, according to the wish and by direction of her revered father that the children should not be separated, faithfully carried out his wish and the four sisters remained in the homestead, "happy tho' sore bereft", until it was destroyed by fire. When the new home was built on the very spot of the old,

* * "All came back again,
But not as they were of old,
For they had each grown older
And life was asking of each
A task neither heavy nor irksome,
But beyond the home circle's reach."

Elizabeth's home has always been, and still is, the home of her younger sisters, even after her marriage to Josiah Nicholson, and surely no fatherless ones were better cared for, neither were bonds of sisterly affection more closely knit than with these.

Mary was a bright, intelligent child. Strange to say, she was very fond of dress. When some restraint was thrown around her in regard to it, she resolved that when grown up she would have "all the flowers that she wanted on her hat." One night when her father thought his children asleep, Mary heard him praying that his little daughter might be kept from the pride and vanity of the world and that she might not have too great a love for dress. The prayer was most truly answered, for ever after that her love for dress was kept in control and her apparel was of marked simplicity, though always manifesting good taste and exquisite neatness. She would wear no gold or outward adorning, keeping to much of the former simplicity of the Friends, possessing always the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit."

Never a wayward child, she made public acknowledgement of Christ as a personal Savior when about twelve years of age. But that she was not altogther satisfied with her spiritual condition is proven by such entries in her diary as follows: "Make, O Father, the constant breathing of my soul, 'Thy will be done.'" Her early interest in others finds expression also in her diary where she says, "O, the number of souls who are living without the Savior, who are living in the pleasures of the world, unconcerned about the immortal part! Would that I did feel a deep yearning for their salvation and could pour out my soul before the mercy seat in their behalf."

Her early school days were spent at Belvidere

Academy. Later she attended Westtown Boarding School, Pa., where she applied herself diligently, and by her studious habits and good conduct completed the course (1881) with a higher average than any who had previously graduated from that institution—an honor any one would be pleased to possess. During the last two years of her stay at Westtown, she was an assistant teacher in the girls' department. She won for herself while there some warm friends, both among her schoolmates and her teachers, that with Ann Sharpless continuing until the time of her death.

Soon after graduation, Mary began her life work in the school room. Gaining experience in smaller schools, in 1884 she and her sister Elizabeth began what proved to be a seven-year term in the home school at Belvidere Academy. A teacher's first grade certificate obtained in '89 has the following note accompanying it: "Your papers were decidedly the best that have been returned to me in *any* county." This was signed by our present Superintendent of Public Instruction, J. Y. Joyner.

At the marriage of the sister Elizabeth, Mary began her work in the mountains, spending five years, first at White Plains, N. C., and then at the Friends' Blue Ridge Mission. Returning to Belvidere in 1896 as principal of the Academy, she remained in this position fourteen years, that is, until the time of her death, 12 mo., 1909. In all these twenty-eight years of teaching she had missed only one-half of one day on account of sickness.

As a teacher she showed rare ability, for she not only inspired her pupils with a thirst for knowledge but with aspirations for a nobler and purer life. At the recent unveiling of an oil painting of her, placed in the Academy by her students, one of the speakers—a former pupil—called her "an ideal teacher." Another said of her: "She is not dead, but lives. Her good work in the hearts and lives of those who knew her will live on and on, beautifying and ennobling their lives."

By actual count at a Summer School held at Edenton, N. C., in 1905, it was found that thirty per cent. of all the *teachers* present had at some time or other been pupils of Mary White. Through her influence many have determined to secure a college education. Says one who knew by experience: "She was also the means of helping many a poor boy or girl to get a better education. * * * It seemed to give her a great deal of pleasure to help poor and honest pupils to obtain an education." She loved her pupils and her kindness and assistance won their love and esteem for her in return. She worked faithfully and incessantly in their behalf, and the last words upon her lips were a message of love to them.

Nothing pleased her better, and she sought no greater reward, than that those for whom she had labored should be found well prepared when they entered college and should maintain a high rank. That such was true, one needs only to examine the records of the colleges which her students have entered. How she entered into the life of her stu-

dents is best shown by quoting some verses of her own —struck off at white heat, on scraps of paper—which by some good fortune have been preserved for us:

Ring, ring, ring,
  With thy merriest tones, O bell,
If only of well spent hours
  Thy cheerful notes can tell.

O, well for the student boy
  That he shouts with his mates at play,
O, well for the student girl
  That she sings at her work each day.

For over our well-spent moments
  We ponder with naught of pain,
But oh, our lost, lost hours
  We never can have again.

Ring, ring, ring,
  With thy saddest tones, O bell,
If only of wasted hours
  Thy echoing notes can tell.

And again, showing that the primary grade was not overlooked in larger interests:

In a green and pleasant pine grove
  To the village school house near,
Gathered a group of little maidens
  When the days were warm and clear.

And they raked away the pine straw
  Which had lost its tints of green,
Laid off rooms for playing housekeep,
  Cleared and swept each opening clean.

Opened up a pretty pathway
  To the tiny stream near by,
And beneath a thrifty willow
  Laid the foot bridge wide and dry.

Soon the work was fully finished,
  House was ready for the keeping,
And in midst of things that followed
  There must needs be Quarterly Meeting.

Not a meeting, but an eating,
  And in active imitation
Little hands and feet were busy
  Making general preparation.

Table fixed and spread with paper,
  Food brought out of various kinds,
And when everything was ready
  Teachers sure must come and dine.

So unto the woodland table
  Went they, both, without delay,
And with the cheerful group about them
  Helped to clear the food away.

There were peanuts, cheese, and biscuit,
  Doughnuts showed among the rest,
Cake, potato, bread and muffin,
  Candy last if not the best.

O, sweet and happy children,
  Life hath both its joys and fears;
May *your* joys but grow more real
  With the adding on of years.

Mary was always interested in lines of moral and Christian activity; the subject of Peace lay close to her heart and she rejoiced at the advance the nations of the earth are making toward settling their disputes by arbitration, and she would have hailed with delight the day when they "shall learn war no more."

The following are what she terms thus:

"Thoughts suggested by the celebration held at Guilford Battleground on 7 mo., 4th, 1891." [This was the first celebration.]

Wherefore, O men, go you with drum and trumpet,
With martial music and with stately tread,
To hold a fete-day with glad rejoicings
Where flowed the precious life-blood of the dead.

O, lift the veil that hides the bitter anguish,
O, tear the wound the passing years have healed,
And look once more upon the wreck and carnage
That strewed so long ago this battlefield.

O, who can tell how many hopes were blasted,
How many hearts were that day crushed and torn,
Or count the homes, o'er which the shadow rested,
The broken households left to weep and mourn?

How small to these appeared the old oppression,
How very small Old England's greed of gain!
How gladly would they've yielded every treasure
To have their dear ones with them once again!

O, life is sweet, however mixed with sorrow;
And down the passing years there comes to me
The thought that pierced each dying soldier's bosom,
O, why should wars and battles ever be?

Listen! from out the soldier's dust ariseth,
From out the dust of those who mourned them slain,
A solemn voice, all silent, yet impressive—
The voice of bygone agony and pain.

Rejoice not, O our friends, our brothers,
In that which to *us* so much sorrow bore,
But lift on high your manly arms and voices,
To banish wars and fightings evermore.

Teach ye with growing zeal the sacred lesson
That war *takes* more than it can ever yield,
It sucks the very lifeblood from the nation
And gives it wounds which never can be healed.

Let nations learn to meet their wrongs in patience,
Oppression's cry still riseth up to One
Who'll ever bring His own just retribution,
Though oft to men He seems to tarry long.

She was "a most efficient temperance worker", working in the State and local W. C. T. U., but more particularly in the Total Abstinence Society of Perquimans and Chowan Counties, one of the oldest temperance organizations in the State. Her chief part in this was as a member of the Executive Committee, of which she was a faithful and helpful member for many years. But she will be most widely remembered for her many chalk talks given before large and interested audiences, pressing home through both eye and ear the truth she would teach.

Her heart went out in pity toward the criminal, sentenced for crime. Many were the letters she wrote to Governors of different States asking them to substitute life imprisonment for the death penalty in cases then pending. Although she often received very kind and courteous replies, she never knew any visible results from her missives of mercy—but none can tell what was the effect upon the minds and hearts of those with whom she plead.

In no department of her work was her faithfulness more helpful and more appreciated than in her church duties. She was a birthright member with Friends.

She always used the "plain language" as spoken by Friends and bore a testimony against using the names of the months and days, which were derived from heathen gods. While this seems unnecessary to most Friends in this day, yet with her it was strictly a matter of conscience. She was a faithful attender of all her meetings both for worship and business, and would not absent herself except for circumstances beyond her control. Many were the times that her heart was pained because a member or members of the meeting who were perhaps otherwise consistent, would plan a business or a pleasure trip just at the hour of the midweek meeting. In the forenoon of the day on which she was taken sick, she and her sister attended our midweek meeting, and although she had no vocal service, the humility and reverence with which she sat at the feet of her Master was an example and an inspiration to those who sat with her.

She was not only a worker in her home meeting, but also in the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings. She served the Yearly Meeting on many important committees and was clerk of Eastern Quarterly Meeting of Women Friends for several years; she was an elder of Piney Woods Monthly Meeting for nine years and at the time of her death was clerk of the Quarterly Meeting of Ministry and Oversight. By a member of the Yearly Meeting's "select" body she is characterized thus: "She was quiet and self-distrustful in many ways, but when there was any question of principle involved, she was as immovable and fearless in

her stand as any hero on the field. She stood for the spirituality of religion in heart and life and was an example of sincerity and simplicity. * * She was continually serving, using all of her powers to draw others into the kingdom of her Lord, whose she was and whom she served."

Just in the midst of all this activity, and just eighteen days after she had completed her "half century" as she herself termed it, our Father said, "It is enough", and promoted her to a higher and happier field of service. She closed her school on the 22nd of the month (12 mo., 1909,) for the Christmas holidays, the spirit of the festive season pervading the occasion and none dreaming that when the children next gathered it would be to look upon the lifeless body of their teacher.

On the 23rd there came the chill which was the beginning of the end. That night, despite a fever, she spent with a friend recently widowed, and feeling on that account little of Christmas cheer. The morning found Mary hardly able to return home, and thus her last act was but typical of what her whole life had been—self-forgetful and sympathetically kind.

For six days she was scorched by fever, and the complication of pneumonia, pleurisy, and bronchitis, baffled the skill of two physicians. In her suffering she prayed that the Heavenly Father might "Glorify Himself through her, either by life or death." Sometimes *seeming* better, those who watched at her bedside could not realize that there was not ground for

hope. Though racked by pain, and necessarily restless, she could but feel and even remarked about what a quieting effect the presence of her brother-in-law, Josiah Nicholson, had upon her. During what proved to be the last day of her life, the snow storm was *very pretty* and, always a lover of nature, she wanted to have the curtains drawn so that she might see it. and while *she* was noting its beauty, her loved ones could but feel the stern reality of the line from Longfellow,

"In the snow a grave they made her."

The night was a restless one, yet the physicians, no less than the family, were surprised to be summoned to the bedside with the dawning of the morning (30th). For about two hours life and death contended for the mastery—her breathing became shorter and shorter. She remarked about her shortness of breath and asked for more air. Elizabeth, true to the last, sat beside her. Finally Mary turned to her and said, "It seems I must go, but I want you all to know 'My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Then again, "I want you to give my love to my pupils, all of them, everywhere." Without a struggle, calmly, sweetly, her purified spirit took its flight. We watched her as she passed over the river and went with her to the very brink: on the other side the gates of the city were opened to her and she passed in, while we must needs take up life's duties again, but without her who had been so helpful to us all.

"Her life was in its perfect stage,
No weakening waste had time begun,
Here was no need of lingering age
To sorrow that her work was done.

A longer life to her were sweet,
But immortality was best."

The funeral was held in the auditorium of Belvidere Academy, and the room was packed to its limit with a large company of relatives, friends, neighbors, present and former puipls, all desirous to show their love for one so suddenly taken from them. The simple service of the Friends, in which many took part, was much in keeping with the life which had gone out. A life-long friend said that ever since he had known of Mary's death these words had been with him, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him."

As the sun was sinking in the west, already well nigh hidden by the moaning pine trees, we laid the body to rest in the White Cemetery. Thus, with the waning of the year her life had waned, and with its passing all that was mortal passed from our sight. The mound above was strewn with the many floral offerings of loving friends, and we would thus have hidden our aching hearts, but the mound was too deep. Time, the great healer, alone can bind up our wounds and make the vacant places seem less vacant. With Mary there, the spirit world seems so much nearer and so much more real and at most it can but be a "little while" till we shall join her.

[The poem appended here is given to show Mary's keen observation and fine appreciation of nobility and true greatness.]

"Thoughts suggested on seeing the shadows of the bust of Dr. Rhodes thrown on the sides of the niche in which it is placed at Bryn Mawr College."

It was a bust of bronze,—no living soul within,
From whose fixed eye no light flashed forth,
Upon whose open ear the sound waves fell in vain,
And from whose moulded lips there breathed no word of
power,—
Moulded with delicate art, but silent evermore.

Yet, as the light shone on it from above,
The shadows fell upon the circling niche on every side,
A fitting type methinks of him
Who, though his living form is seen no more with mortal
man,
His life gone out and silent evermore.
Yet the character stands forth
Illumined by the everlasting light
And throws its influence on every side,
And souls who never knew the living man
Do yet receive the touch of his illumined life.

The following are extracts from a few of the scores of letters received. There are many more from which we should love to make extracts, but these seemed to embody the variety of expression in regard to "Our Mary."

Hon. John H. Small, U. S. Congressman from the First District of North Carolina, to Josiah Nicholson:

"I have just learned through the Albemarle Inquirer of the death of Miss Mary J. White. Miss White had been very kind to me, and her gentle disposition and lovely, and at the same time forceful, character made an impression which time cannot efface. I feel constrained to write to some one in her community who knew her well and express my condolence to those who were nearer to her, and, therefore, loved her best."

George W. Ward, Judge of Superior Court, First District:

Speaking of her death he says: "It is an irreparable loss to our community, and it goes without saying ing she will be sadly missed by all. * * I pay her the tribute to say she was the most pious woman I ever knew."

Timothy Nicholson:

"Our minds, hearts and prayers have been with and for you and for the Academy—her grand life work for the Lord. 'Faithful until death', she has

secured 'the crown of life'. Surely 'she did what she could' and this shall be her memorial. The following is appropriate to her:

'We live in deeds, not years,
In thoughts, not heart-beats,
In feelings, not in figures on a dial,—
He lives most who thinks most,
Feels the noblest, acts the best.' ''

Ella (Ricks) Winston:

"I have always thought of her as an embodiment of every good quality, and one who sat daily at the dear Master's feet and walked in obedience to His will. Truly a star of the first magnitude has gone from your midst,—but in person only, for her example and influence will live on and continue to bear fruit to the good of her fellow beings and to the glory of her living, loving Savior."

From Ann Sharpless:

"Your family seemed so tenderly united that I know you have felt this parting intensely. I loved Mary—she was so good and gentle and conscientious, so admirable in so many ways. * * I have been reading Whittier's 'Gone' and it seems so applicable, so nearly all of it:

'Hold her, O Father! in thine arms,
And let her henceforth be
A messenger of love between
Our human hearts and thee,
And grant that she, who, trembling here
Distrusted all her powers,
May welcome to her holier home
The well-beloved of ours.' ''

From Mary M. Hobbs:

"I at once sent a telegram, but neither by it nor by any written or spoken word can I convey to you my own sorrow over the dear one's death. * * Mary was so staunch and true that her presence and influence will be greatly missed. I shall never forget her resolute stand at last Yearly Meeting after I had simply exerted myself to the limit of my strength. But that was only a small manifestation of the strong, brave spirit which was herself. With her we know it is well, and while she would doubtless have wished to stay and work, we may confidently believe that *now* her soul is satisfied and she would not have it otherwise. I can seem to see you all in your grief and sorrow. I go about the house and see you gather and separate and the grief clinging to your hearts. With hushed feet and tearful eyes I go into the silent room where she is laid, and how I wish I could help you bear its unremitting sorrow and the loneliness which must abide with you."

From Edith Sharpless:

In commenting on the picture which appeared in the Friends' Messenger, she says: "I hardly believe any picture could show how beautiful her eyes were. There are some eyes that you *know* could not deceive you. It would be fine to have truth look out from you that way."

Margaret W. Symmes:

"How she will be missed everywhere, not only in her home and home meeting and schools, but in the Yearly Meeting and every place. She was a useful woman—faithful, and loving, and helpful in every place, and yet so modest. We have a beautiful life to think of and to comfort us in our great loss."

Lillie Cartland:

"She came and went in the home so quietly and calmly, always where she was most needed. Her spirits were not easily ruffled and she was always sweet and serene."

Ralph Parker to Adelaide:

"I know *you* must miss Aunt Mary *so* much. She was dear to us all and we feel her loss keenly, but to you who were so intimately associated with her, the loss I know is overwhelming. * * Aunt Mary was always so busy doing good and always so quietly cheerful in her work that the thought of her being taken never occurred to me. And there is sweet comfort in the assurance that she has gone to receive such an emphatic 'Well done'. She was a *great* woman and I am proud to have been her nephew. She was such a remarkable woman, so purposeful, so sincere, so forgetful of self."

Marion (Darden) Cronk, of Pickering, Ontario:

"But what a beautiful life, and in death the same: the passing was so peaceful and as quiet as the life had been. It was

> 'Such a tide as moving seems asleep,
> Too full for sound and foam.'

How I wish Aunt Mary had visited us once; we would have been the better for it. I know her presence was a benediction, for her life was so unselfish. She set a noble example and wielded an influence for good always, and think of this as going on and on. I really think a lovelier character could not be found."

Eunice (Darden) Meader:

"Someway the spirit world has seemed nearer to me today, because I knew that she was there and not so very far away. How tired she must have been with so many consecutive years of higher teaching and with very little rest * * in vacation time."

Laura (White) Parker:

"I'm sure thee was blessed to have such a sister and I was blessed to have such a cousin, and I am so glad I had the privilege of knowing her, for she left her impress indelibly upon my life. What a little way before us we can see and what a blessing for us it is so! I hardly suspected when we were *all* together that it would ever be again in this life, but little thought the circle would be broken so soon."

[During the summer of 1908, Mary and her two sisters visited their only first cousins, John and Robert White and Laura Parker, all of South Dakota.]

Henryanna White:

"It seems very hard to understand why a life so useful and beautiful in every way as was Mary's should be brought to so early a close, but we must try to believe He doeth all things well."

From Abigail Mendenhall:

"How very, very much you must miss Mary J. as the days go by, and how much she will be missed by the whole Yearly Meeting."

From Sophia Fry, of England:

"When a recent note told me that your sister had been taken from amongst you it seemed as if it could hardly be true, she seemed so well and the center of

so much activity when I was with you just a few weeks previously. She was so sweet, radiating round her a quiet grace and power, that I know you must feel her loss only too keenly. It is always difficult to understand why those who are living useful, self-sacrificing lives should be withdrawn. * * The Academy will not seem the same to you now and the young men will not have the same kind of influence, still I hope it may accomplish much good. Please accept my sincerest sympathy and let us together press on towards the goal. The days seem to pass so quickly and there are so many around who need help and sympathy of one kind or another."

From Marcia Albertson:

"Dear Mary looked so strong, I never thought she would leave us so soon. It is impossible not to grieve, but she was so good and true we really feel that she has just been promoted."

Isa (Costen) Harrell, a schoolmate:

"While I have seen little of Mary since I was at school at Belvidere, the memory of her quiet, gentle ways has lingered with me all these years. I can never forget the first day I was in school at Belvidere, just as homesick as a little girl could be—away from home for the first time. I was standing watching the others play; she came to me, put her arms about me and said, 'Is thee homesick? Won't thee come and play with us?' I have known and loved her from that moment. I expect to see her again, and in the strangeness of that other country she may give me another welcome."

J. T. Riddick, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Newport News, Va.:

"I feel a personal loss in her death. She was one of the purest characters I have ever known. I feel that the gentle touch of her cultured Christian life has been the means of inspiring many young men and women to strive for the best in life. I count myself richer by having sat at her feet as a student."

Samuel Marshal, of Mount Airy:

"Mary was a great woman. I never met a person in whom I had more confidence. She was cheerful at all times and always seemed to have a kind expression on her countenance, and a most conscientious person in every way. * * She is gone, but her spirit lives."

From Walter White:

"All who knew Mary are touched with sorrow at her removal, but are comforted and rejoice in the assurance of her blessed estate because of her life and faith and works."

David and Sallie Sampson:

"We were greatly surprised and much grieved at the news of dear Mary's departure, but as we feel sure it was a beautiful 'home going' to her, we cannot sorrow as do others of whom we have no hope. We feel that the loss to the church, her home, the school and the community is very great. * * There comes to mind this text, 'He that loseth his life shall find it', and dear Mary has for years been losing her life in Christian service in behalf of a countless number of young people—and in them her life is going on and will continue to live through all eternity. What a host there will be to rise up and call her blessed."

Eli Reece:

"The whole community will feel the loss, for no one else had such a hold upon every home and every heart there as she. If it were not for the great and glorious fact that 'Our Father is too wise to err and too good to be unkind', we would feel that the loss could never be met."

Julianna (Peele) Harvey:

"Her life bore witness to her love. * * She filled a large place in your meeting, in your school, in the community, and in the home. She *filled* them and is gone to reap her rich reward—a blessed reward."