

3-4- IN MEMORIAM. 1881

When the news of Mrs. Whitcomb's death was learned, there were very many who felt, "God hath visited us and hath taken our friend." It is fitting that tribute should be paid the memory of one whose life has so blessed and whose death has so pained this community.

Mrs. Mary Fisher Whitcomb was born in Chester, Vermont, July 18th, 1825. She was the fourth in a large family of brothers and sisters, eleven of whom reached mature years and eight of whom survive her. Her home life and training were of the old New England type,—in which the mental and moral faculties found early development and earnestness and thoughtfulness characterized even the children. At eight years of age, with the three older children, she became a member of the Chester church. Her intellectual tastes were strong, and as a young girl she was ready to make any sacrifices in order to gain an education. The Academies of Chester and Perkinsville afforded advantages for a substantial education, and she improved them to the

most, building further on this foundation by constant reading in subsequent years. Two or three years preceding 1846, she taught school in the vicinity of her home. In that year, like so many hundreds of the noble New England girls of the generation back, she went west to preside in a log school house on the frontier. For the first winter she taught near Crawfordsville, Indiana. The ensuing Fall, she went to Tennessee with her brother Selden, and taught through the winter, returning to Vermont in the Spring. In September (1848), she was married to Mr. Abram Whitcomb of Chester, Vermont, and resided there just six years, when it was decided to move west. Their attention had been directed to Mr. Grinnell's project of an Iowa colony, and on Oct. 1st, 1854, about six months after the site had been chosen, they became residents of Grinnell. This pioneer movement did not permanently separate her from her kindred, for there came a time when she could count among her neighbors her brothers Charles, Edward and Herman Fisher, her sisters Mrs. White, Mrs. Shaw

and Mrs. Howard, and her cousins James Thomson and his sister. In August of '78 she entertained at her house a family reunion of about forty of her relatives. The concentration of so many of these kindred families in the same neighborhood would not have been, but for her. Six of the eight surviving brothers and sisters followed her remains to their resting place last Tuesday, from that home across whose threshold the angel of Death had never passed before.

Mrs. Whitcomb was one of the original twenty who constituted the membership of the Congregational Church of Grinnell, as organized nearly twenty

six years ago. It is a remarkable fact that fourteen of the twenty are still living, and that twelve of them remain in this church and community, to testify to the unwavering faithfulness of their departed friend and to witness the visible fruitage of these good enterprises in which she helped so bravely and patiently. These friends remember her early usefulness in the church, her many years in the choir, her important place in the social and religious life of the community. Some of them know that through all these twenty-six years, except for two or three brief intervals, her willing hands have prepared the bread that has been broken at the Lord's table in the Communion service. She will be especially remembered and missed in the gatherings of that band of praying women, which for many years has been the center of spiritual life in the church.

Her chief mission was in the home. In her were united all those qualities of self-forgetfulness, tenderness, and devotion which make the word "Mother" the sweetest and most comforting word in any language. Her daily life was a lesson in the art of living; and her influence was a continual stimulus toward high attainments of heart and of mind. Many a student, in many a successive class, could bear grateful testimony to the fact that this influence shone, directly or indirectly, far beyond the family circle. That she lived to see her children enjoy educational opportunities of a kind which had been denied to her, and to see her daughters using their knowledge in teaching others, as she and her sisters had done thirty years before, gave her deep satisfaction. Her life was in the lives of her children.

(Abram)

The time and manner of Mrs. Whitcomb's death have already been mentioned in these columns, but some who read this may not have seen that notice. She was taken, late Saturday night, Feb. 26th, with the attack of apoplexy, which it was feared must sooner or later follow her paralysis of five years ago. During the early hours of the illness her pain was intense, but by four or five o'clock Sabbath morning she found relief in profound sleep. Twelve hours later she awoke, in Heaven. It was literally true that she "fell asleep." It is said of David that "after he had served God in his generation, he fell asleep;" and on this passage Dr. Sturtevant based his remarks at the funeral. No words could have been chosen more fittingly. Mrs. Whitcomb had indeed served God in her generation. No broken column should mark the spot where she lies; her life was full and complete. In the light of a success like hers, we know that life is worth living; we see fresh reason to hope; we gain new inspiration to duty. "So others shall take patience, labor, to their heart and hand, from thy heart and thy hand and thy brave cheer, and God's grace fructify through thee to all."