

LITTLE MOTHER STORIES

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Little Mother Stories by Maud Ballington Booth

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MAUD BALLINGTON BOOTH

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By

MAUD BALLINGTON BOOTH



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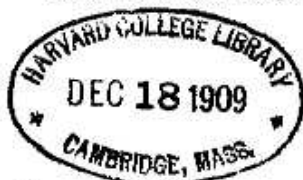
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Little Mother Stories

"ALL'S WELL"

THE clear silvery notes of the cornet ring out on the still air, sweet, sad and yet inspiring. It is "taps," the farewell to a soldier whose life's battle is over. How often this last good-by to a soldier comrade has thrilled the hearts of those who stand around an open grave, and brought to them the realization that it was well to die bravely. As the last notes melt away a hush falls on the group. Instinctively they have looked upward as the call rang heavenward, and the clouds that had shrouded the sky as with a gray pall have been suddenly riven and a bright ray of sunlight smiles down upon them, touching each face as if to make a rainbow of promise in their very tears. The end has come; we must go and leave him, there in the quiet graveyard, all that is left of our comrade. The breezes blow through the tiny green leaves overhead; a song sparrow trills out his first spring notes of joy; and all nature speaks, not of dust to dust, but of the sure and certain hope of the glorious resurrection that is to come. One last look

at the casket covered with pure white blossoms, and then we turn away to gaze into the glory of the setting sun and up into the clear blue of heaven, for the clouds have now rolled back, and in our hearts the bird's song echoes, and at this Easter-time even beside our dead our hearts can truly say, "All's well." The note of the cornet, the song of the bird, the glory of the dying sun and the memory of that life just passed out into the brighter world, call from our hearts the words triumphant, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

It is not a death scene that I would dwell upon. From every grave a life story is sent back to the world. Sometimes it is a story of failure and sorrow, of talents and chances flung away, or of wealth and opportunity hoarded and squandered on self, a sowing that has brought no harvest of sweet memories. From this quiet grave on the hillside, where a plain block of gray granite now marks a soldier's last bivouac, comes a message of a life redeemed and used with whole-hearted devotion for the helping of others. The inscription on that stone is very simple. It reads, "Alexander Skelly, V. P. L. All is well." Upon his death-bed he chose the words that should speak his message to the passer-by, and we added on the other side the inscription, "Faithful unto death." I have begun, you may think, at the end of my story; but I want the story to be read from the grave, for has it not been said that a man may lose his life that

he may find it again? Many a sermon has been better preached by dead lips than by the living.

Alexander Skelly was born in a beautiful home, and his start in life was all that could be wished, from the standpoints of wealth, education, and social position. A gentleman by birth and training, he had the added gift of a bright mind, blessed with many of those talents that can turn education to the best advantage. Many a fair ship, however, that sails out of the harbor of promise into life's sea with the sunshine on its white sails and flaunting colors, is swept into dangerous shoals and battered by unexpected gales until it becomes a broken, storm-tossed wreck before the tide of life has carried it far from the starting-point. Perhaps life was too easy for him; too much money was his to spend. Anyway, before he had reached his majority he had flung his fair chance to the winds, taken the helm into his own hands and made a most dismal shipwreck of fair name and fortune. Realizing that he had brought disgrace upon his family, and having no hope of retrieving his wrong acts, he left the land of his birth, determined to begin over again among strangers.

Speaking of this period of his life, he says: "I found myself in a strange country with all the tastes and ideas of one who had been gently raised and without the means to gratify them. To work I was not able, to beg I could not, so from being a lamb I gradually became a wolf. I realized that in order to succeed I must learn to keep cool, I

must face life desperately. As I lived in the far West mostly, I had to acquire skill in the use of weapons, and I was also an expert horseman. There was no career open to me but the army. To my nature and character there was no other safe place except prison. I did well while in the service, but the dissatisfaction in my heart drove me often to excesses that gained a hold over me and that constantly threw me down. Yielding to evil and despising myself for it had the effect of hardening and embittering me; though I committed many lawless deeds, I generally managed to protect myself from consequences."

Many years passed in that far Western country, years thrilling with the experience of frontier warfare against the Indian, for it was at the time of those uprisings of the red men that cost Custer his life. Later Sergeant Skelly, now a seasoned and hardened soldier, sought his fortune in South America, Mexico and Central America, fulfilling his duties with courage and ability, despite the evil temptations to which he was gradually yielding his soul. The life of a soldier of fortune is one that brings with it much of the dare-devil recklessness that makes a man hard, calloused and indifferent to the sacredness of human life. Though possessing a courage and manly strength that made him a good soldier—separated from tender associations, thrown with the roughest and most desperate companions and exposed to the worst of temptations—Alexander Skelly gave over his soul