

**STRUGGLING UP TO
THE LIGHT: THE STORY
OF A WOMAN'S LIFE**

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Struggling Up to the Light: The Story of a Woman's Life by Bella French Swisher

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BELLA FRENCH SWISHER

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UP TO THE LIGHT.

The Story of a Woman's Life.

BY BELLA (FRENCH, Swisher
ED. "AMERICAN SKETCH BOOK."

CHICAGO,
W. B. KEEN, COOKE & CO.,
113 AND 115 STATE STREET,
1876.

1876.

TO
MRS. MARY R. FOWLER,
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HER
KINDNESS AND ENCOURAGEMENT,
AND TO ALL OTHERS
WHO LEND AN AIDING HAND OR GIVE A
CHEERING WORD TO THOSE WHO ARE
STRUGGLING UP TO THE LIGHT,
THIS VOLUME
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR.

on 3 July 1926

STRUGGLING UP TO THE LIGHT.

INTRODUCTION.

I've seen a plant that might have raised
A form of grace, the world had praised,
Encumbered by some foreign thing,
Until, in reaching for the light,
Its shape became distorted quite,
While meager was its blossoming.

THE Bright family was poor. It had never been anything else. It was not only poor, but ignorant, from the standpoint of rich and learned people. Mr. Bright was naturally a man of genius, and might have made his mark in the world, if he had had an education; but when he should have been at school he ran away from home and went to sea. There he formed bad habits. He drank a little, chewed and smoked a good deal, and swore whenever he got angry, which was very often. But he was kind and even generous when in a good humor,

and he bore the name among his fellow men of being a good, jolly fellow. He was not a good provider for his family, though he worked hard, and (being an architect by trade) made considerable money. The reason of this was, all the means which could possibly be spared, after providing the merest necessities of life for his family, were spent on inventions which proved useless, because he was not rich enough to perfect them and bring them before the world.

Mrs. Bright had been born a poet, and in her childhood's years had had romantic dreams of her future. But, like many other foolish girls, she married while yet a child, and at an early age found herself encumbered by a family, awakening when it was too late to the knowledge that she had talents, wasted because she had neither time nor education requisite for their cultivation. With the discovery, she grew cross, fretful, and impatient of her lowly life and the hard work which she was obliged to do, bequeathing these qualities in a greater or less degree to her children, all of whom were smart, high-tempered, proud and self-willed. The oldest child was John, a mischievous lad of fourteen, at the opening of this history. Martha came next. She was a strange little girl, misunderstood and

wrongly judged by both her parents, who showed very little affection or sympathy for her; in consequence of which she grew up with a wild longing for love never to be satisfied. In fact, the parents were not as demonstrative to their children as they should have been. The father was wrapped up in his inventions, and took little notice of any of his family, beyond finding fault with them when things did not go to suit him. The mother was strongly orthodox, deeming pleasure a sin, and demonstrations of affection a weakness. Her partiality fell first to the share of James, the third child, and next to May the youngest, whom she favored at the expense of the two older children, whose lives were barren of guiding, sustaining love. John did not care for any; he would give blow for blow and frown for frown, and rejoice in so doing. But Martha thirsted for it exceedingly.

Both parents wished to do about right, but like many another, they kept resolving to do better, but failed. They attended church on Sundays, on each secretly resolving to begin anew and have a model household. But Monday was sure to bring its cares and temptations, which would blot out for the time being the late good resolves. Then, too, both parents were firm in the belief that to "spare

the rod is to spoil the child," and as far as the elder children were concerned it was seldom spared. Thus the mother's religion cast a withering instead of a refreshing influence over her children's lives. Both parents expected the little ones to reach a standpoint which they themselves failed most miserably to reach. Neither did their failings give them charity toward others. They never admitted by word or look, a consciousness of having failed in duty. They were too proud to do so. Neither did the hard battle with poverty, the wearisome labor which they had to undergo, and the ceaseless wish to step a little higher up, have a refining and softening influence on their lives. While trying to see the hand of God in their afflictions, they were rebellious, letting their ill feelings have vent in finding fault with their children, their neighbors and the world.

Such was the atmosphere, breathed from her infancy, by her whose life these pages are to portray.