

## Memorial Sketch of Mrs Hannah Elizabeth Lawton (nee Symm)

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By Miss Butterworth

Hannah Elizabeth Lawton was born in the year 1845. She was the daughter of J Robinson and Elizabeth Symm, of Oxford. As a child she was chiefly characterised by docility and warm love of truth. She had a strong will of her own, but her occasional outbursts of temper would be followed by repentant tears and a quick longing for the kiss of forgiveness. If she had grieved her parents ever so slightly, she knew no rest until satisfied that reconciliation was perfect. The fact of her being her parents' only surviving child, and thus secluded in an unusual degree from association with other children, gave her a quiet, thoughtful manner beyond her years. Her mind developed and matured early, and it is difficult to say at what age her religious life really began. When she was a very little girl, her mother had an alarming illness, and Hannah was greatly distressed. Stealing to the bedside, she asked, "Are you any better Mamma?" "No dear" was the answer, "I am very ill; have you prayed for me?" "No, Mamma, but I *will* pray for you." Next morning, she came again with her usual question, "Are you better now, Mamma?" "Yes, dear, I have slept comfortably." "Then, Mamma, it must be because I have prayed for you; for I did pray, and now you are better."

Thus early did faith begin to reason rightly. Little need be said of her school life and girlhood. She was an apt scholar, and a general favourite among her companions; many surviving her can bear testimony to little deeds of kindness and loving sympathy, which will never be forgotten. At about the age of sixteen, she fully gave herself to the service of Christ. The ministry of Rev. Philip B Wamsley was much blessed to her; and during his residence in Oxford she became a member of the Society and an avowed Christian. After a while she evinced a desire for active service in the Lord's vineyard, and became a Sunday-school teacher. Her gentle, winning manners made her beloved by every girl in her class, and many can bear witness to the enduring power of her words. Her heart was in the work, and it was a deep sorrow when her failing health compelled her to give it up. She remarked to a friend that it seemed very hard now she longed to do more for Christ, she was cut off from all service. After a time, partially regaining strength, she again began to exert herself to the utmost in the work of the Lord. A number of troublesome lads in the Sunday-school were without a teacher, and she felt a heart-yearning to do them some good. Her influence proved powerful; the worst boy in the class, when she laid her hand on his arm, was quieted in a moment. These were happy seasons. She induced the boys to visit her occasionally at home, that she might talk and pray with them, and thus try to lead them to the Saviour.

In the autumn of 1869, she showed signs of extreme delicacy of constitution. It was decided that she must not brave the winter in England, but sojourn in the south of France. For seven months she was absent from her home and parents. On her return, her health appeared fully restored, and all serious apprehensions were dismissed. About this time she began to take an active interest in the choir at the chapel, and

was glad to consecrate her voice to the service of God. The winter of 1871 was spent in Penzance. Here, together with a friend, she devoted one evening in the week to holding a Bible-meeting with the fishermen. The little work thus commenced has been successfully carried on from that time. The winter of 1872 was spent in the south of England, and subsequently the balmy air of Torquay seemed to give her renewed vigour. In 1873, she again wintered in Torquay, and in August of 1874 she was married to Joseph Lawton, Esq., surgeon, of that town. Every earthly happiness was now in prospect; she often remarked that her cup was "brimming over with joy". But the Lord saw fit to gently break the cup and scatter its contents to the ground. Her health began to fail rapidly, so that in November of the same year a sojourn in Mentone was deemed her one hope of life. Her parents accompanied herself and her husband, and for six months was watched with ceaseless anxiety. She however grew worse, and grave fears were entertained that she would die in a foreign land. But she herself could not give up hope; even when other hearts gave way, hers kept up courage. In May 1875, with great dread and difficulty, the journey back to England was accomplished, and amidst much thanksgiving, she reached her father's house in Oxford. For a time hopes rose of a partial recovery. The longing for life and the dread of death were equally strong. For a month or two she was able to take an occasional drive. But slowly her weakness increased, till she became to see that the dread fiat had gone forth.

On one occasion she turned to a friend who was staying with her, and said, "Do you honestly think I shall never get better?" "Perhaps a little better" was the answer, "but I cannot hope for a recover." After a pause, she rejoined quietly, "Will you pray with me? I want to be quite willing to die, and I do not feel so yet." After that day, she asked for daily prayer that her will might be brought into entire subjection to the will of God. Most graciously these prayers were answered. From this time she never indulged a wish for life, a regret for or longing after the world. She entirely relaxed her hold of earth-born love: the chain was broken, and she was able to give up husband, parents, friends, and patiently to wait the summons of her Lord. She had still at times a slight fear of the act of dying, and often remarked, "I should like to feel more joyful about it." But a fortnight before her death, the clouds were swept away; the full sunshine of Christ's face was turned upon her, and her sick room became the very gate of heaven. A friend was praying with her at one time, when she suddenly burst forth in an ecstasy of praise and joy, "O!" she cried, "How He loves! What a precious Saviour is mine! I can see Him now by Faith. Blessed, blessed Jesus!"

She spoke most earnestly to all who were permitted to visit her. She remarked that she had been far too timid in speaking for Christ, but now she must make up for lost time. The kind medical man who had attended her from childhood she addressed with touching pathos; holding his hand, she said, "you have been always good and kind to me and I want you to be sure to meet me in Heaven. I am so happy! And all through the blood of Jesus. Good-bye I shall look for you above."

To another friend, who had been inclined to question the Truth, she said most forcibly: "All theories fail in death, everything but a practical trust in a living Saviour." To each servant she spoke lovingly, thanking all for their services, bidding them serve as faithfully the Lord Christ. During the last week of her life, her

sufferings were most intense; but were endured with “the patience of the saints.” She often remarked, “I cannot work for Jesus now; but I can suffer. He bore more than this for me.”

On the morning of the day before her death she appeared to be dying, and her beloved ones gathered around her. She sweetly smiled, and said, “How nice to lie just like this, whose those I love best on earth around me, and know I am only going from your arms to those of Jesus. It is *all just as I wanted. How good God is!*” She looked from one to another, and exclaimed, “I am so happy! There is light in the valley, mother. Death is only a shadow.” Seeing her father’s deep distress, she said, “Don’t grieve so, dear papa, it is so glorious to go to Christ, and it won’t be long before you come to me.”

But it was not the Lord’s will to take her just then; she revived, to her own disappointment. “Back again!” she said, “I was almost home, but am tossed back on the shore for a little more suffering.”

During the day, her sufferings were extreme, and when, from time to time, her husband felt the beating of the pulse, she looked up eagerly. Her longing to depart was so great, that she checked herself, and said, “I do hope this desire to go is not selfish, I’m half afraid it’s wrong.” On being assured that Christ was equally ready to receive her, she replied, “I seem to see Him by my bed waiting. What a change, for poor suffering me to be in heaven!” Her consideration for those attending her was most touching. She insisted on each taking food and rest in turn, and would ask most earnestly, “Have you been resting?” or “Were you able to take a good meal?” She would turn lovingly from one to another, and say “How tired you must be, doing so much for me!” and for the slightest attention, would smile and say, “Thank you!” The next morning at four o’clock she woke from a short sleep, and looked smilingly round, and said in answer to the eager and anxious faces, “I feel no difference; it is so quiet and peaceful! O! How much better off I am than any of you - Blessed Saviour!” Shortly afterwards, she looked up quickly, with a gaze as if the glories of heaven had burst on her sight, then turning to her loved ones around her, she said, most solemnly, and with gasping breath “Always remember! ‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be.’”

Life was ebbing away rapidly, but she was heard praying softly that Jesus would come quickly, and once or twice it seemed as though the Lord Himself spoke, and she answer His voice, saying “Jesus, I am coming.” For several hours her breathing was very painful and laboured, but she was still able to say, “O the preciousness of the Saviour! He has been ever so good to me all my life long. A glimpse is so precious!”

Consciousness remained until the last moment. Those who held her hands felt the pressure tighten when precious promises were repeated; and even when her “voice was lost in death,” every mental and spiritual power was alert to the very end. Soon after eight on the morning of September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1875, her blessed life breathed out; heart and flesh failed, and she was with the Lord.