

DEATH OF MRS. E. J. NICHOLSON.

The Famous Proprietor of the Pleayune Passes Away,

A Few Days After the Demise of Her Husband.

An Attack of Grippe Develops Into a Serious Malady,

Which Grief Aided in Making Potent to Destroy.

Distinguished as a Poet Before She Entered Journalism,

She Won Laurels at the Head of a Newspaper,

Which Her Energy, Skill and Judgment Made Potent in Southern Progress.

Pearl Rivers is dead. The gentle poet, the brilliant journalist, the loving mother, the true and loyal friend has passed beyond our knowledge and our reach over to the other side. Yesterday, at her home on Jackson avenue, just as the golden sunshine drifted into her window, death kissed her eyelids down, and she fell into that sleep that knows no waking.

Mrs. Eliza J. Nicholson, owner of the Pleayune, died Saturday morning, at 8:30 o'clock. Ten days ago her distinguished husband passed away. Loyal and devoted to each other in life, they are now reunited in heaven.

Until Friday her death was unexpected. She had a slight attack of grippe when Mr. Nicholson succumbed to the rapid attack of a similar malady. The shock of his going hence, the mother's anxiety for her bereaved children, the naturally delicate constitution, combined to make the attending physicians and devoted relatives and friends especially watchful. There was no lack of skill and care by day and by night, and it was hoped that she would soon be strong enough to leave her bed. But disease had taken a firm hold, secretly it strengthened its grasp upon her weakened faculties, and Friday morning Drs. Hickham and Pratt found themselves confronted by congestion of the lungs and complications which defied their skill and made her recovery a matter of extreme doubt. Although she retained her clearness of mind, spoke cheerfully to those about her, and seconded the efforts made in her behalf, she had a premonition of the end. Her thoughts turned to those who had fought bravely and faithfully at her side through life, and the mother's heart invoked the fealty of her co-workers for the orphans she was to leave, adding thanks for the zeal her staff had always displayed in her service. She rallied several times, but after midnight she sank rapidly, and she knew, as well as those about her, that God would soon send an angel to close her eyes. Death came peacefully, with gentle step and with tender touch, and framed a lullaby fit for a poet's rest.

The history of Mrs. Nicholson's life—so short in years, so great in achievements—is almost as strange as a story of romance. She was the daughter of Captain J. W. Poltevent, and comes of a fine old Huguenot family who early settled in Mississippi. She was born at Pearlington, Hancock county, Miss., in 1849. On account of the extreme ill-health of her mother, Mrs. Nicholson was reared by her aunt, Mrs. Leonard Kimball, who survives her, and to whom Mrs. Nicholson always gave the devoted love of a tender daughter.

At Mrs. Kimball's plantation home, in the heart of a somber pine forest that skirts the banks of Pearl river, Mrs. Nicholson's childhood and girlhood were spent. She was the only child on the place, so lonely that she made friends of all the wild creatures of the woods. Birds would eat out of her hand, and the mearest creeping thing knew that in her tender heart was sympathy and love and protection. She knew the secrets of the forest, she heard voices in the whispering of the pines and the streams spoke a sentient language to her. This love for nature and communion with it never changed. Often in after years, when destiny had carried her far from those quiet woodland retreats into the haunts of fashion and wealth, she would turn wearily away from the brilliant society she always drew about her and say that she must go back to nature for rest and peace and comfort. She loved to wander through the woods with a friend to whom she could translate the hidden lore of the forest. A thousand tender poetic fancies would suggest themselves to her, and she would say that the way-side daisies were the notes God had set for the birds to sing by, and that the coming of the spring was the A B C of poetry.

With such a poetic heart it was inevitable that Mrs. Nicholson should find her voice and begin to sing. This she did in a tentative fashion at first—a sweet, tender little poet laureate of the woods. She sang of the birds and streams, and wrote fables as airy and delicate as a spirit's dream about the coming of the seasons. By and by these songs began to reach out into the world and the gray heads of other poets were bent to listen to the sweet woodland voice. She called herself "Pearl Rivers," after the silent stream she knew and loved so well, and so her first venture in a world of letters was made. Her first published articles appeared in papers of a city, and soon

afterwards she became a constant contributor to the New York Home Journal and other high class periodicals.

The talented work of Miss Poltevent, or "Pearl Rivers," as she was generally known, attracted the attention of Colonel A. M. Holbrook, and he invited her to come to New Orleans and take the position of literary editor of the Pleayune. This was a new departure in New Orleans journalism that excited much comment at the time, and it was much against the wishes of her family that she accepted the position. But though reared in luxury and surrounded by all that wealth could give, she felt an irresistible desire to undertake a work so in harmony with her taste, and which she felt she had the ability to so well perform. She was, the pioneer woman journalist of the south, nay, more than that, her frail hands battered down the wall of conventionality that made women dependent on the grudging support of others. By the brilliance of her work she made work respectable and honorable, and it was a red letter day in the history of southern womanhood when Eliza Poltevent broke through the shackles of conventionality and sent up her first "copy" in the Pleayune office. Miss Poltevent went on the staff of the Pleayune with a salary of \$25 a week. The work suited her and she the work, and she found herself possessed of that rare faculty in woman—the journalistic faculty. After a time "Pearl Rivers" married Colonel A. M. Holbrook, the owner of the Pleayune. When he died, she found herself with nothing in the world but a big, unwieldy newspaper, almost swamped in a sea of debt. The idea of turning her back on this new duty did not occur to the new owner. She gathered about her a brilliant staff of writers, went faithfully and patiently to her task and desk, worked early and late. She was both economical and enterprising, and, after years of struggle, won her battle, and made her paper a foremost power in the south, yielding her a handsome, steady income.

In 1878 Pearl Rivers married Mr. George Nicholson, then the business manager of the Pleayune, and thereafter the life of the gentle poet and her sturdy and noble husband was an almost ideally happy one. Together they had weathered the journalistic storms. They saw the paper they had fought for side by side, like good comrades in battle, grow in strength, and prosperity, and influence. Two fine boys, Leonard and Yorke, came to bless their home, and the happy years rolled on, full of honors and peace and plenty. Suddenly, hardly more than a week ago, death put a full stop to this happy life. Mr. Nicholson, full of years and honors, fell asleep. The story of his sudden death has hardly yet been told. One day he was about the office, with a cheery word and a genial jest for all, the next day he had passed into the great beyond, calmly, peacefully, happily, like one who draws the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams. Loving hearts and tireless hands strove to comfort the bereaved widow, but the blow of losing one who had been her stay and comfort was too sudden, too shocking for the frail woman, and again the angel of death spread his dark wings over the stricken household.

Mrs. Nicholson's place in journalism was unique. She was the only woman in the world who owned and personally managed a big metropolitan daily, shaping its course, suggesting its enterprises and actually holding in her slender hands

the reins of government. By the exercise of pluck, patience, and that fine, unconscious courage that is akin to genius, she succeeded in lifting the paper from the slough of debt in which she found it, to its present standing among the good and able newspapers of the country. Of late years Mrs. Nicholson has not worked so laboriously on the paper as she did in the early days of her management of it, but there was no part that did not undergo her daily scrutiny. No other eyes were so quick to see a lapse or an error, or an opportunity for improvement. She possessed the journalistic faculty to a remarkable degree, and her ready wit suggested almost every new and striking feature that has been added to the paper from year to year.

The grandest reign in the history of England was that of Elizabeth. She was surrounded by the very ablest men in war, finance and statesmanship that any age or nation could produce. They rallied around her with the devotion that men can feel alone for a woman, and they carried the name of England to the heights of glory. In some sort the administration of the Pleayune by this lady has been like this. Her writers and assistants have been devoted to her and have always given her their best work, and she was quick to appreciate the fact. He staff have served her with fidelity and enthusiasm, and given of their best to make the Pleayune daily the ideal of journalism Mrs. Nicholson always held aloft.

The duties of motherhood and the cares of a big paper have not left Mrs. Nicholson much time of late years to write. She only published one small volume of poems, "Lyrics by Pearl Rivers," brought out by J. B. Lippincott Brothers. In this book is some of her most charming work, which caused Paul H. Hayne to write her from his home in Georgia: "Your own sweet poems (genuine lyrics, indeed) I have perused with real pleasure, and regret to understand that you have almost given up writing."

One of "Pearl Rivers'" most scholarly critics, Dr. W. H. Holcomb, writes as follows in a review of her Lyrics: "The most striking characteristic of this poet is her subtle and ethereal personification of natural forms and forces, investing them with human thoughts and passions, and thus spiritualizing, as it were, the whole world around us. This is the highest office of poetry, and distinguishes the genuine seer from the word-painter and musician. 'Pearl Rivers' has done well. She stands, by this volume, ahead of any other southern poet, and no female writer in America, from Mrs. Sigourney to the Gray sisters, has evinced more poetic genius than shines throughout this little volume."

This volume of lyrics are all tender idealizing of the buds and blossoms of her early life. They are the airy fantasies of poetic thought, so tender and pure they might have been etched on a white magnolia leaf that grew in her native Mississippi forest. Some two or three years ago she wrote two strong, dramatic poems, "Elegar" and "Leah," which were published in the Cosmopolitan Magazine, and attracted universal attention. Bold and strong, and filled with the fire of genius, they will live as permanent contributions to the gems of American literature. Mrs. Nicholson was fond of the very little folk, that live in the shadow world, and of fashioning their images out of clay or peannts, or whatever came to her hand. Out of popcorn she evolved a race of

Lilliputians, that might have been kin to the Brownies, and in the January number of the St. Nicholas Magazine they are pictured, with some clever verses she wrote describing them. For several years Mrs. Nicholson's friends and staff have begged her to gather together fugitive pieces, written after the publication of her volume of lyrics, and to give them the permanent form they deserved. It was never done, but in many an old scrapbook throughout the country the poems of "Pearl Rivers"—the tender, gentle, rippling songs that had ever a minor cadence in them like sweetest music, are treasured—and will be reread through blind tears when it is known that the hand that penned them is stilled, and the voice hushed forever. To write poems that live in the hearts of the people is to be a high priestess in the temple of song, and it is the reward that Pearl Rivers would have chosen.

Nothing was more characteristic of Mrs. Nicholson than the fine simplicity of her manner and character. Many honors came to her as poet and journalist, but such was the shrinking modesty of her disposition that she could never be prevailed upon to publicly accept any homage or compliment. The Press Club of New York and Sorosis delighted to honor her on the occasion of her yearly visits to New York, and probably the last message she ever penned was in response to a request for a sentiment to be read at the annual dinner of the Press Club of Boston, Jan. 29.

It is the custom of the Boston Press Club on these occasions to have sentiments from the leading newspapers of the country, and Mrs. Nicholson sent as her greeting the following sentiment, which was printed in the little book descriptive of the dinner which they issued. She wrote:

"Members of the Boston Press Club: Gentlemen—in response to your kind message, with advice of your annual dinner, I send you heartiest greetings, and will be with you in spirit, not forgetting that, as the woman proprietor of a newspaper, my position is, in a way, lonesome and peculiar.

"Under the disadvantage of being a woman, the work of a man is mine, with its wear and responsibilities. I miss the pleasure and encouragement men of our profession have in friendly association; yet here, in the south, I give wings for wishes—to reach you in the north—that you may have good appetites, good friends, long life and many joys.

"ELIZA J. NICHOLSON,
"Editor of the Daily Pleayune."

It was her last message to her contemporaries, and, in view of her death, acquires a peculiar pathos. Under the disadvantages of being a woman, the work of a man was hers, with its care and responsibility. How heavily these cares bore upon her at times was evinced in the speech she sent to Atlanta when invited to address the women there at the exposition. When the time arrived Mrs. Nicholson was unable to go, and so her speech was read, in which, among other things, she said:

"But often to us comes conditions that are not of our choosing. Women, as the world goes, are deprived of home and fortune and natural protectors, and they must bravely make the struggle for true lives and honest homes of their own. Years ago, when I dreamed and wrote verses, it was my ambition and hope that some day I could edit a literary weekly, or a fashion paper for women, or conduct a monthly magazine. I believed I could do such work and that it would be child's

play. I was much younger then than now; much less experienced, and not much stronger; and then came to me clouds over my sunshine, reverses and deprivations that left me alone in the world, with my sorrows to bear, and for my inheritance the most important daily newspaper in the metropolis of the south, the New Orleans Pleayune. There was no one to take the helm, and the paper was deeply in debt. With me it was sink or swim, and there were not too many friends on the shore trying to throw out life-preservers to save me. I swam out and floated the best I could, and have succeeded beyond all expectations. Worry and care did not kill me; but they have taken from me many weeks and years that should have been mine to be happy in. Let me say to any woman who wants to be and can be manager and editor of a great daily newspaper: 'Don't!' It is more than child's play; it is serious and hard work, carrying with it a care that cannot be entirely lifted by a devoted husband and the faithful and willing workers who aid me in the Pleayune's management. I am still a woman, and after my office day of work and worry I find my pleasure and comfort at my home with my two boys. They are my treasures."

Mrs. Nicholson's whole life was a benediction to those about her. She had the charity that thinketh no ill, and a love that was broad and tender as the love of heaven. Her generosity knew no creed or faith or color, and if all to whom she has done a kind deed should bring a rose to her bier she would sleep under a wilderness of flowers. She never turned away from the call of helpless age, or infancy; she did not even ask if the petitioner was worthy of her aid. She only asked are they hungry, or cold, or ragged, and if they were, she ministered unto their wants.

Her early life had made her peculiarly tender and sympathetic towards all dumb brutes, and she often said that no thought of what she had done in the world afforded her more satisfaction than the knowledge she had been instrumental in getting watering troughs for the horses in the city. Her home at Bay St. Louis was a hospital for all the disabled and afflicted animals in the neighborhood. She was the good Samaritan who never turned away from a suffering beast, and she pitied as much as a man in pain a writhing honey bee wet with rain.

In her home, by her children, by her family and by a large circle of acquaintances, Mrs. Nicholson was loved with peculiar tenderness. Never strong in health, it was the pleasure of all about her to surround her with a thousand little attentions, and mute observances that love only can suggest, and to save her every annoyance. So far as it is possible her every want and thought was anticipated. Never were nights of old more truly and loyally devoted to their lady than the staff who served her so long on the Pleayune, her faithful lieutenants, only scarcely less interested than she in making the paper all she wanted it. And so love begged her in on every side, and if she sometimes felt the burden of a great paper on her shoulders, that had not the physical strength to bear it, it was lightened by the sympathy and help of all about her.

What shall one say of the death of such a one? That she could no longer march when her faithful comrade dropped out of the ranks; that the tired hands have laid down their work, and the loving heart is learning new love in fairer worlds than ours; that she who loved the earth, has

"PEARL RIVERS."



MRS. ELIZA J. NICHOLSON.

longed her weary head upon her mother's breast and fallen asleep like a little child. The birds will sing to her, and the dews of night will weep over her, and the flowers of spring, grief-stricken, will shed their perfume for her, and somewhere, somehow, she will know.

For such as she there is no death, only a passing into peace and rest. She held this beautiful faith, and only last summer voiced it in this little verse, which she gave to her boys, and asked that they would have it inscribed on her tomb: Our mother is not dead; She is only sleeping. We will meet again where God has said There is no weeping.

It was her faith, and to-day she sleeps safe in the keeping of her Father.

In her last illness, which dates from the death of her husband, Mrs. Nicholson has been surrounded by all those she loved best in life. All that love and skill could do to alleviate her sufferings was done, but without avail, and so yesterday morning she fell asleep. She leaves two young boys, Masters Leonard and Yorke Nicholson, who were most devotedly and passionately attached to her, to mourn her loss; but on no one will it fall heavier than on Mrs. Kimball, her mother by adoption and in love, who is thus bereft of the comfort of her old age. Mrs. Nicholson's family are prominent and wealthy members of the community, Captain John Poltevent, the large lumber manufacturer, of Pearlington, being one of her brothers.

The funeral will take place at 3:30 o'clock this afternoon. The similarity in the death of husband and wife will be borne out in their burial. The ceremony will be as simple, the grief as deep, the same active pallbearers will officiate, and the interment will also be in the receiving vault at Metairie.

The following poem, written by "Pearl Rivers" in 1893, is, in its tenderness and sweetness, characteristic of the songs that came simply and naturally from the heart that has been stilled forever by death:

THE ROYAL FUNERAL. THE BODY OF THE QUEEN LYING IN STATE.

Spring, the fairest of the seasons,
Spring, the Virgin Queen, is dead,
And a young voluptuous sister
Reigns upon her throne instead.

Royal June, with rosy fingers,
Softly closed her violet eyes,
And within the Court of Nature
Now in regal state she lies.

Brave old March, her veteran soldier,
Covered with a tattered fold
Of her banner borne so proudly,
Lies beside her, dead and cold.

Fair, capricious Lady April,
Sleepeth deep and calmly night;
Round her mouth a smile still lingers,
Still a tear drop in her eye.

On a bier of withered roses
Lies the tender Lady May,
And her constant lover, the Poet,
Royal honors to her pay.

Low and reverently kneeling,
'Round her lovely form they throng,
And embalm her precious beauty
With the costly myrrh of song.

Unto each she left a token,
As a dying pledge of love;
One she gave her azure girle;
One she gave her rosy glove.

One she gave her silver sandals,
Bright with shining gems of dew;
O'er the shoulders of another
She her holy mantle threw.

But to me the humble singer,
Leaning on my harp apart,
From her royal high-voiced Poet,
She has left a broken heart.

Through the reign of glowing Summer
Lies the royal dead in state;
High-voiced poets, humble singer,
Mournfully keep watch and wait.

Wait! the somber days are coming,
Sad pallbearers of the dead;
In the distant Autumn country,
Bear their slow and solemn tread.

THE PROCESSION.

With the incense of her glory,
Burning low and sweet and dim,
And the harps of all her minstrels
Tuned to chant a funeral hymn;

In a robe of fragrance, shrouded
By the spirits of the Flowers,
In a sable horse of sorrow
Drawn by weary-footed HOURS;

From the silent Court of Nature
Comes the fair, dead Queen of state,
O'er the road of Gloomy Weather,
Leading down to Winter Gate.

And her royal guard of Sunbeams,
Faint and falter through the day,
And at night her glow-worm footmen
Drop their lanterns by the way.

And the young Lord Zephyr, sighing,
Yields his life upon her bier,
While the diamonds of Sir Dew-Drop
Melt away into a tear.

And the trees cast down their garments
In the way where she will pass,
As the sad procession windeth
Through the ruined State of Grass.

Through the Autumn Country, slowly
Winds the royal funeral now;
And with rue and heavy cypress
Wreathed upon my thoughtful brow.

By the roadside I stand waiting
For the Queen, and in the dell
I can hear the solemn pealing
Of a dreary funeral knell.

She is coming, nearer—nearer;
Hark that solemn, mournful strain!
Fly to honor her, young minstrel,
Joining in the funeral train.

THE BURIAL.

There is mourning through the valleys,
There is wailing on the hills,
And I hear a broken music
In the voice of all the rills.

Nature's heart is sorely troubled,
And her grief is fierce and wild,
As she chants the funeral service
O'er her best beloved child.

Through the dreary realms of Winter,
Phantom Queens have led the way,
To the land of gloom and shadow,
To the kingdom of decay.

From the bier the strong young North
Wind
Quickly lifts the Virgin Queen,
While the soft wings of the South Wind
Drooping o'er her form are seen.

O'er the bride of his ideal
Young King of Winter bendeth low,
And around her tender body
Wraps a winding sheet of snow.

And his busy, silent workmen,
Frost and ice, have wrought with care
A royal crystal coffin,
Covered with jewels rare.

Now old Time, the biggared sexton,
Opens the deep tomb of the Past,
And my broken heart and lyre
On the buried Queen I cast.