

GROWING IN GRACE—
DAY BY DAY, TRIAL BY TRIAL



STEPPING *Heavenward*

ELIZABETH PRENTISS

This edition published 2026
by Living Book Press
Copyright © Living Book Press, 2026

ISBN: 978-1-76183-286-4 (hardcover)
978-1-76183-236-9 (softcover)

First published in 1869.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any other form or means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher or as provided by Australian law.



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

Stepping Heavenward

by

ELIZABETH PRENTISS





"What a magnificent picture Miss Clifford made!"

Contents

Still Stepping Heavenward	vii
A Sketch of the Author	xi
The Story of the Book	xxiii
Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	14
Chapter 3	26
Chapter 4	35
Chapter 5	51
Chapter 6	59
Chapter 7	71
Chapter 8	81
Chapter 9	89
Chapter 10	104
Chapter 11	116
Chapter 12	126
Chapter 13	137
Chapter 14	147
Chapter 15	156
Chapter 16	167
Chapter 17	177
Chapter 18	186
Chapter 19	197
Chapter 20	207
Chapter 21	217
Chapter 22	224
Chapter 23	234
Chapter 24	247
Chapter 25	254
Chapter 26	264

Still Stepping Heavenward:

FINDING GRACE IN THE MODERN JOURNEY

Renee Emerson, *Blossoming Through Books*

“What if you were the sum of the characters you’ve read?”

–Sarah Clarkson, *Book Girl*

This introduction is dedicated to the Blossoming through Books community, especially my own beloved book club sisters. For the past 7 years, we’ve journeyed heavenward together, and your kindness, friendship and faith have been an immeasurable blessing to me.

We’ve been anointed by one another’s tears and celebrated the wins with thanksgiving and praise. We’ve championed the death of sin and grieved the death of things we’d held dear and thought would last. We’ve prayed, we’ve hoped, and we’re still stepping heavenward, together. Three cheers to our sisterhood, that while not perfect, reflects the heart of Jesus, and comes pretty close! Each one of you is beloved.

Dear reader, if you desire this kind of community for yourself, head to the back of this book for details on how to start your own book club with Blossoming through Books.

Stepping Heavenward is a timeless treasure and an insightfully deep exploration of womanhood. I’m not sure there was ever a more heartbreakingly beautiful motherhood story told, and this book feels like a warm mug of tea, a hug from a friend, and a sweet gift from above to weary, grieving or suffering mothers who long to step heavenward in their daily lives.

When we meet dear Katherine at the novel’s beginning, in all her 16-year-old angst and glory, we see a girl who longs to live her

life well but is caught up in worldly things and ideas. As the story progresses, we hold both sorrow and hope in the same breath and find the inspiration we need as modern women to accept God's love and grace despite the sin that crushes us.

One of the many joys we discover while exploring the classics is that, in many ways, humanity never changes. 21st-century women are still seeking beauty, love, acceptance, friendship, and hope, and wondering what it means to be a godly woman; all while living in the reality of a broken world where our longings often go unmet, society attempts to dictate every aspect of our existence, and the suffering we go through is enough to want to opt out. However, it's this universal unity of grief and suffering that connects us profoundly to those who have come before us, and reminds us that we're not alone. This is one of many reasons why Katy's story is still so relevant today.

Good books are timeless in that they reveal what it looks like to be good or evil, courageous or cowardly, lovely or tragic. Good books take hold of us, filling us with new inspiration to learn, dream, and become the best possible versions of ourselves.

So, what impact do the characters and books we read have on our heavenward journeys today? As we wrestle with important questions such as: Who am I? Who should I be? What does it mean to be a woman or a good mother? We can find encouraging and truthful answers in the lives of the noble, honest, and pure characters we read about in our cherished books.

In a world where many of today's contemporary books feature characters who are at best morally grey or at their worst, overtly glorifying sin, it's even more important than ever to hold onto timeless heroines worthy of our admiration.

Katy, our delightfully imperfect and relatable heroine, is indeed worthy of our admiration, and her journal is a treasure trove of wise advice and helpful instruction. Here are five imperishable lessons

that she shares with grace, love, and hope, explored through my favourite quotes:

The Secrets of a Lasting Marriage

“Happiness, in other words love, in married life is not a mere accident... I believe that we owe it to constant prayer that we have loved each other so uniformly and with such growing comfort in each other; so that our little discords always have ended in fresh accord, and our love has felt conscious of resting on a rock – and that rock was the will of God.”

How to Joyfully Cherish the Blessing of Motherhood

“I want to see little children adorning every home as flowers adorn every meadow... I want to see them welcomed to the homes they enter, to see their parents grow less and less selfish and more and more loving because they have come. I want to see God’s precious gifts accepted, not frowned upon and refused.”

How to Surrender that which we most Love

“Could I refuse Him my child because she was the very apple of my eye? Nay then, but let me give to Him not what I value least, but what I prize and delight in most.”

Finding Comfort and Solace in Heartfelt Prayer and Lament

“How strange it is that when, through many years of leisure and strength, prayer was only a task, it is now my chief solace”

The Sanctifying Journey Heavenward

“As soon as you become the Lord’s... He will begin that process of sanctification which is to make you holy like He is holy, perfect like He is perfect... Remember that it is His will that you should be sanctified and that the work of making you holy is His, not yours.”

My minister once said that sanctification is not a linear line continually heading up, but more so a two steps forward, one step back sort of ordeal whereby the Lord slowly and steadily changes us from the inside out as we lean into Him. Because this journey is full of ups and downs, even the most faithful Christian can despair of their progress, but the important thing to remember is not how sinful we are right now, but how much sin God has already dealt with and eradicated from our lives.

On this anything but linear sanctification journey, we focus our hearts on true North, and we step heavenward with all the saints who have come before us, declaring, “Who have I in heaven but you, Lord!”

This tender and encouraging story is the counter-cultural, wholesome, and view-shifting tale of womanhood and motherhood that every 21st-century woman needs.

Friends, let’s allow our lives to be formed by the best stories and faithful characters who direct our wandering hearts and feet towards heaven.

“A book girl is story formed, shaped in her very concept of self by the characters she has encountered on the written page.”

~ Book Girl by Sarah Clarkson

A Sketch of the Author.

I.

Elizabeth Prentiss was born at Portland, Maine, October 26, 1818. Her father, the Rev. Edward Payson, D.D., is still held in remembrance as one of the best and most gifted men of his generation. He was a graduate of Harvard College, became pastor of the Second Parish in Portland in his twenty-fourth year, and died there, after a ministry full of spiritual power and blessing, in the forty-fifth year of his age. Just before his departure, in the midst of agonizing bodily sufferings, he wrote to his sister:

Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah. The celestial city is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me, its breezes fan me, its odors are wafted to me, its sounds strike upon my ear, and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears but an insignificant rill that may be crossed at a single step whenever God shall give permission.

Elizabeth, who was nine years old when her father died, tenderly cherished his memory and felt the influence of his extraordinary faith and piety in all her religious life. The influence of her mother, Ann Louisa Shipman, of New Haven, was also very great in shaping her own character. Mrs. Payson was the impersonation of womanly energy, brightness, generosity and good sense. Some of the most striking traits of Katy's mother, in Stepping Heavenward, were drawn, no doubt, from Mrs. Prentiss' recollections of her own mother. Her intellectual training she owed largely to her sister Louisa, who,

later, married Professor Albert Hopkins of Williams College and was widely known as a religious writer, and also by her scholarly Review articles on Goethe, Lessing and Claudius. While yet a young girl Elizabeth may be said to have begun her literary career as a frequent contributor to *The Youth's Companion*, whose founder, Mr. Nathaniel Willis, was an intimate friend of the Payson family.

In April, 1845, Miss Payson was married to the Rev. George L. Prentiss, pastor of the South Trinitarian Church in New Bedford, Mass. Five years later he was called to the Second Presbyterian Church, in Newark, N. J.; then to the Mercer-street Presbyterian Church, and, later still, to the Church of the Covenant in New York. This city became thus Mrs. Prentiss' home during the rest of her days. Here some of her strongest and most delightful friendships were formed; here she passed through many of her deepest experiences of life—experiences full of grief and suffering, full also of sweetness, domestic bliss and joy unspeakable; and here chiefly she wrote the books which have made her name so dear to myriads of little children and to myriads of Christian women—especially to suffering, careworn wives and mothers—wherever the English tongue is spoken. Among the best known of these books, besides *Stepping Heavenward*, are *Little Susy's Six Birthdays* and its companions, *Henry and Bessie*, *The Flower of the Family*, *Little Lou's Sayings and Doings*, *The Little Preacher*, *Nidworth and His Three Magic Wands*, *The Percys*, *Gentleman Jim*, *The Story Lizzie Told*, *The Six Little Princesses*, *Fred and Maria and Me*, *Aunt Jane's Hero*, *The Home at Greylock*, *Pemaquid*, *Urbane and His Friends*, and *Golden Hours*.

Of her religious character the key-note is given in her hymn, *More Love to Thee, O Christ*. This hymn, which has passed into nearly all the later collections, expresses her ruling passion in life and in death. Writing to a young friend from Dorset, in 1873, she says:

To love Christ more, this is the deepest need, the constant cry of my soul. Down in the bowling-alley, and out in the woods,

More love to Thee, Oh Christ.

I

More love to Thee, Oh Christ,
More love to Thee!
Hear then the prayer I make
On bended knee;
This is my earnest plea,
More love, Oh Christ, to Thee.
More love to Thee!

II

Once earthly joy I craved,
Sought peace & rest,
Now Thee alone I seek,
Give what is best;
This all my prayer shall be,
More love, Oh Christ, to Thee.
More love to Thee!

III.

Let sorrow do its work,
Send grief & pain
Sweet are Thy messengers,
Sweet their refrain,
When they can sing with me,
More love, Oh Christ, to Thee,
More love to Thee!

and on my bed, and out driving, when I am happy and busy, and when I am sad and idle, the whisper keeps going up for more love, more love, more love!

In a letter to a friend, dated March 27, 1870, she says:

I am glad you liked that hymn. I write in verse whenever I am deeply stirred, because, though as full of tears as other people, I cannot shed them. But I never showed any of these verses to any one, not even to my husband, till this winter. I have felt about hymns just as you say you do; as if I loved them more than the Bible. But I have got over that. I prayed myself out of it—not loving hymns the less, but the Bible more. I wonder if you sing; if you do I will send you a hymn to sing for my sake, called More Love to Thee, O Christ. There is not much in it, but you can put everything in it if you make it your prayer.

The hymn was written in 1856, in a season of great anxiety and suffering. It was then thrown aside and forgotten. After fourteen years she showed it to me and was persuaded to let a few copies be printed for distribution among a few of our friends. It had been written so hastily that the closing stanza was left unfinished. This hymn was, so to say, the blossom which flowered into Stepping Heavenward. I am sure, therefore, that the lovers of that book will be glad to see a *fac simile* of the original. You can find it on the following page.

The handwriting of the line added in 1870 indicates how long a time had passed since the hymn was written. But though printed in 1870, it was not given to the public until several years later. After Mrs. Prentiss' death, through the kindness of American missionaries, I received copies of it translated into Arabic, Chinese and various other languages of the Orient. I will give one of them. One page xii you will find a *fac simile* of the Arabic version:

An important incident in Mrs. Prentiss' life was a residence of two and a half years abroad, chiefly in Switzerland, between 1858–61. Another, still more important, was the building of a country home in Dorset, Vt., where she spent her last ten summers. It would be

IV.

Then shall my latest breath
Whisper thy praise.

Thine ~~my~~ ^{the} passing cry
My heart shall raise.

How love to thee, O Church,
How love to thee!

This still my prayer shall be,

hard to imagine anything more real or more ideal than one of her Dorset summers. The place itself is exceedingly lovely, and when, early in June, she appeared with her children, the mountain valley seemed clothed with sudden brightness. Men, women and children told each other that they had seen her, accompanied by her youngest daughter, in the little phaëton, driving Coco or Shoofly again round Kent Square, past East Rupert to Hager's Brook, up the Hollow, through Lovers' Lane and West Road in quest of ferns, or on the way to Manchester Street. She had a sort of fascination for all sorts and conditions of people. A queer old fellow, known by everybody as 'Rastus, and helping her at times in her flower-beds, used to announce his presence, much to her amusement, by calling out under the window of her chamber, "Hollo! Hollo!" But her special delight was to meet and have a talk with "Uncle Isaac," the patriarch of the town, who loved to watch her passing to and fro on her mountain tramps. He was a typical Vermonter of Revolutionary stock. The celebration of his centennial in 1879 was the most strik-

MORE LOVE TO THEE O CHRIST.

١ زِدْ حُبِّي لَكَ يَا
وَأَسْمَعْ لَطْفِي
حَيَّ الْوُدُودِ
عِنْدَ السُّجُودِ
إِذْ كُلُّ بَغْيِي
فَرَطُ الْعَبَّةِ
لِلْمُفْتَدِي
لِلْمُفْتَدِي

٢ قَدْ رُمْتُ هَهْنَا
وَأَلَا زِي فِي رَيِّ
بَلِّ الْهَنَا
كُلُّ الْهَنَى
إِذْ كُلُّ مُنْيِي
فَرَطُ الْعَبَّةِ
لِلْمُفْتَدِي
لِلْمُفْتَدِي

٣ لَا أَبْخَشِي أَحْزَنَ
لَا بَلَّ تَفِضُ لِي
وَلَا الْعَيْنَ
مِنْهَا الْهِنَ
إِنْ زَارَ مُهْجَتِي
فَرَطُ الْعَبَّةِ
لِلْمُفْتَدِي
لِلْمُفْتَدِي

٤ وَحِينَهَا يَدْنُو
يَا نَفْسِي رَدِّدِي
مَنْبِي الْأَجَلِ
سُجَّ الْحَمَلِ
تَحْطِي بِطَلْعَةِ
رَبِّ الْعَبَّةِ
الْمُفْتَدِي
الْمُفْتَدِي

ing observance of the sort I ever witnessed. Near the grove where it took place were five hundred carriages from far and near. Shortly after Mrs. Prentiss' death, I drove past his house with her eldest brother, Edward Payson, Esq., of Portland. Uncle Isaac accosted us in his usual cheery way, and on learning that my companion was a brother of Mrs. Prentiss, turned to him and recalled various instances in which he had seen her climbing through the fences laden with wild flowers. He then expressed his tender sympathy with me in my sorrow, adding, "She was the most wonderful woman in this town, and you will never get another like her!"

On revisiting Dorset I have seemed always to breathe the very atmosphere of *Stepping Heavenward*. The mountains, the valley, the brooks and river, Lovers' Lane, the village lawn and church are all associated with the book. Here its closing chapters were written. Here I talked over with her some of its principal scenes and lessons; and here by a happy inspiration in the wakeful midnight hour, she named it *STEPPING HEAVENWARD*, linking it thus with her favorite poet, and revealing, as by a flash, her high aim in writing it. And here, on its publication, it became at once enshrined in the hearts of a goodly company of loving friends and neighbors. One of them, writing years later from the Pacific coast, thus depicted the Dorset life:

For seven successive summers I saw more or less of her in this "earthly paradise," as she used to call it. . . . She brought to that little hamlet among the hills a sweet and wholesome and powerful influence. While her time was too valuable to be wasted in a general sociability, she yet found leisure for an extensive acquaintance, for a kindly interest in all her neighbors, and for Christian work of many kinds. Probably the weekly meeting for Bible-reading and prayer, which she conducted, was her closest link with the women of Dorset: but these meetings were established after I had bidden good-bye to the dear old town, and I leave others to tell how their "hearts burned within them as she opened to them the Scriptures."

She had in a remarkable degree the lovely feminine gift of

home-making. She was a true decorative artist. Her room when she was boarding and her home after it was completed were bowers of beauty. Every walk over hill and dale, every ramble by brookside or through wildwood, gave to her some fresh home-adornment. Some shy wild-flower or fern, or brilliant tinted leaf, a bit of moss, a curious lichen, a deserted bird's nest, a strange fragment of rock, a shining pebble, would catch her passing glance and reveal to her quick artistic sense possibilities of use which were quaint, original, characteristic. One saw from afar that hers was a poet's home; and if permitted to enter its gracious portals, the first impression deepened into certainty. There was as strong an individuality about her home, and especially about her own little study, as there was about herself and her writings. A cheerful, sunny, hospitable Christian home! Far and wide its potent influences reached, and it was a beautiful thing to see how many another home, humble or stately, grew emulous and blossomed into a new loveliness. Mrs. Prentiss was naturally a shy and reserved woman, and necessarily a pre-occupied one. Therefore she was sometimes misunderstood. But those who knew her best, and were blest with her rare intimacy, knew her as "a perfect woman, nobly planned." Her conversation was charming. Her close study of nature taught her a thousand happy symbols and illustrations, which made both what she said and wrote a mosaic of exquisite comparisons. Her studies of character were equally constant and penetrating. Nothing escaped her; no peculiarity of mind or manner failed of her quick observation, but it was always a kindly interest. She did not ridicule that which was simply ignorance or weakness, and she saw with keen pleasure all that was quaint, original or strong, even when it was hidden beneath the homeliest garb. She had the true artist's liking for that which was simple and genre. The common things of common life appealed to her sympathies and called out all her attention. It was a real, hearty interest, too—not feigned, even in a sense generally thought praiseworthy. Indeed, no one ever had a more intense scorn of every sort of feigning. She was honest, truthful, *genuine* to the highest degree.¹

In Dorset, on the thirteenth of August, 1878, after a brief illness, she entered into the joy of her Lord. I never knew any one who looked

death in the face with an assurance more perfect or with greater joy than she did. There is a passage in *The Home at Greylock*, which was evidently inspired by her own experience. It is where old Mary, when her first burst of grief was over, said:

Sure, she's got her wish and died sudden. She was always ready to go, and now she's gone. Often's the time I've heard her talk about dying, and I mind a time when she thought she was going, and there was a light in her eye—"what d'ye think of that?" says she. I declare it was just as she looked when she says to me, "Mary, I'm going to be married, and what d'ye think of that?" says she.

We like to be told how those who have endeared themselves to us by their writings, looked while still in the flesh. Here is a pen-picture of Mrs. Prentiss, drawn by one of her most gifted and beloved friends:

Her face defied both the photographer's and the painter's art. She was of medium height, yet stood and walked so erect as to appear taller than she really was. She was perfectly natural, and, though shy and reserved among strangers, had a quiet, easy grace of manner that showed at once deference for them and utter unconsciousness of self. Her head was very fine and admirably poised. She had a symmetrical figure, and her step to the last was as light and elastic as a girl's. When I first knew her, in the flush and bloom of young maternity, her face scarcely differed in its curving outline from what it was more than a quarter of a century later, when the joys and sorrows of full-orbed womanhood had stamped upon it indelible marks of the perfection they had wrought. Her hair was then a dark brown; her forehead smooth and fair, her general complexion rich without much depth of color except upon the lips. In silvering her clustering locks time only added to her aspect a graver charm, and harmonized the still more delicate tints of cheek and brow. Her eyes were black, and at times wonderfully bright and full of spiritual power, but they were shaded by deep, smooth lids which gave them when at rest a most dove-like serenity. Her other features were equally striking; the lips and chin exquisitely moulded and marked by

great strength as well as beauty. Her face, in repose, wore the habitual expression of deep thought and a soft earnestness, like a thin veil of sadness which I never saw in the same degree in any other. Yet when animated by interchange of thought and feeling with congenial minds, it lighted up with a perfect radiance of love and intelligence, and a most beaming smile that no pen or pencil can describe, least of all in my hand, which trembles when I try to sketch the faintest outline.²

Before closing this part of my sketch I will say a word about Mrs. Prentiss' writings from the literary point of view. Her books were warmly praised for their high aim and their usefulness, but little else was said about them. This always struck me with some surprise. A few months before her death she received a letter from her old friend Mr. J. Cleveland Cady, the distinguished architect, thanking her for *The Home at Greylock*. In the course of this letter occurred the following passage:

Though you cared less about the manner than the matter, I was impressed by its literary qualities. The scene at the death of Mrs. Grey, and parting of herself and Margaret, is as highly artistic and beautiful as anything I can think of. The contrast of good and bad, or good and indifferent, is common enough; but the contrast of what is noble and what is "saintly," is something infinitely higher and subtler. I cannot imagine anything more exquisitely tender and beautiful than Mrs. Grey's departure, but it is the more realized by the previous action of Margaret. The few lines in which this is told bring their whole character—in each case—vividly before you. But I see that if the book previously to this point had been differently written it would have been impossible to have rendered the scene so remarkably impressive. The story of "Eric" is extremely quaint and charming; it is a vein I am not familiar with in your writings. It is a little classic. The quaint child's story and the death of Mrs. Grey affect me as a fine work of art affects one, whenever I recall them. The trite saying is still true, "a thing of beauty is a joy forever."

² Mrs. Horace B. Washburn, herself one of the best, as well as brightest and loveliest, of women.

Here is a part of Mrs. Prentiss' reply:

Your letter afforded me more satisfaction than I know how to explain. It is true that I made up my mind, as a very young girl, to keep out of the way of literary people, so as to avoid literary ambition. Nor have I regretted that decision. Yet the human nature is not dead in me, and my instincts still crave the kind of recognition you have given me. I have had heaps of letters from all parts of this country, England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany and Switzerland, about my books, but in most cases there was no discrimination. People liked their religious character, and of course I wanted them to do so. But you understand and appreciate everything in Greylock, and have, therefore, gratified my husband and myself. Nobody has ever alluded to Margaret save yourself. * * * * I am not sorry that I chose the path in life I did choose. A woman should not live for, or even desire, fame. This is yet more true of a Christian woman. If I had not steadily suppressed all such ambition I might have become a sour, disappointed woman, seeing my best work unrecognized. But it has been my wish to

“Dare to be little and unknown,
Seen and loved by God alone.”

I have asked Him a thousand times to make me smaller and smaller, and crowd the self out of me by taking up all the room Himself.

In a memorial address, delivered by Dr. Vincent, her old pastor, soon after Mrs. Prentiss' death, will be found a very lucid and discriminating estimate of her writings from the literary, as well as the religious, point of view. So far as I know this estimate was the only attempt ever made to point out and analyze the sources of her power as an author. But the task was performed with so much judgment, skill and delicacy of touch, as well as loving sympathy, that it left little to be added by any other pen. The memorial address, referred to, may be found in *The Life and Letters of ELIZABETH PRENTISS*, pp. 559-568.

The Story of the Book.

II.

Stepping Heavenward appeared thirty years ago. Mrs. Prentiss had become known already by her "Little Susy's Six Birthdays" and other books for children, as also by "The Flower of the Family," and a succession of volumes for youth of both sexes; but in Stepping Heavenward she struck a higher and stronger note. In this work she aimed to help and to cheer all her readers, whether old or young, in the hard struggle of life. She composed the larger part of it in the winter and spring of 1867-8, while absorbed in caring for a little motherless nephew who died shortly after. Referring especially to this part, she once said to a friend, "Every word of that book was a prayer, and seemed to come of itself. I never knew how it was written, for my heart and hands were full of something else." On going to Dorset for the summer she carried the manuscript with her, but in no mood to finish it. In a letter dated August 3, she said: "I feel now as if I should never write any more. Book-making looks formidable." I begged her to take the story up again, and two gifted Christian ladies, then sojourning in Dorset, joined their persuasion to mine. Several years later one of them, Miss E. A. Warner, wrote to me:

Do you remember coming into the parlor one morning where Miss Hannah Lyman and I were sitting by ourselves, and telling us that your wife was writing a story, but had become so discouraged she threatened to throw it aside as not worth finishing? "I like it myself," you added, "it really seems to me one of the best things she has ever written, and I am trying to get her to read it to you and see what you think of it." Of course both of us were

eager to hear it, and promised to tell her frankly how we liked it. The next morning she came to our room with a little green box in her hand, saying, with her merry laugh, "Now you've got to do penance for your sins, you wicked women!" and, sitting down by the window, while we took our sewing, she began to read to us in manuscript the work which was destined to touch and strengthen so many hearts—"which," to use the words of another, "has become a part of the soul-history of many thousands of Christian women, young and old, at home and abroad." It was a rare treat to listen to it, with comments from her interspersed, some of them droll and witty, others full of profound religious feeling. Now and then, as we queried if something was not improbable or unnatural, she would give us bits of history from her own experience or that of her friends, going to show that stranger things had occurred in real life. I need not say we insisted on its being finished, feeling sure it would do great good; though I must confess that I do not think either of us, much as we enjoyed it, was fully aware of its great merits.

She went on with her work, occasionally reading to us what she had added. In those days she always spoke of it as her "Katy book," no other title having been given to it. But one morning she came to the breakfast table with her face all lighted up. "I've got a name for my book," she exclaimed, "it came to me while I was lying awake last night. You know Wordsworth's *Stepping Westward*? I am going to call it *Stepping Heavenward*; don't you like it? I do." We all felt it was exactly the right name, and she added, "I think I will put in Wordsworth's poem as a preface."

The work was first printed as a serial in *The Advance* of Chicago. As it drew to a close Mr. J. B. T. Marsh, one of the editors, wrote to her:

You will notice that the story is completed this week. I wish it could have continued six months longer. I have several times been on the point of writing you to express my own personal satisfaction and to acquaint you with the great unanimity and volume of praise of it, which has reached us from our readers. I do not think anything since the *National Era* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* times has been more heartily received. We have had hundreds of letters of which the expression has been: "We quarrel to see who shall have the first reading of the story." I think if you should ever come West my wife would overturn almost any stone

for the sake of welcoming you to the hospitality of our cottage on the Lake Michigan shore.

When issued in book form its reception surpassed all expectation. Notwithstanding the favor it met with in *The Advance*, Mrs. Prentiss had still great misgiving about its success—a misgiving that constantly haunted her while engaged in writing it. But all doubt on the subject was soon dispelled.

Stepping Heavenward seemed to meet so many real, deep, inarticulate cravings in such a multitude of hearts, that the response to it was instant and general. Others of Mrs. Prentiss' books were enjoyed, praised, laughed over; but this one was taken by timid hands into secret places, pored over by eyes dim with tears, and its lessons prayed out at many a Jabbok. It was one of those books which sorrowing women read to each other, and which lured many a bustling Martha from the fretting of her care-cumbered life to ponder the new lesson of rest in toil. It was one of those books of which people kept a lending copy, that they might enjoy the uninterrupted companionship of their own.³

The circulation of *Stepping Heavenward* was very large. In this country not less, probably, than a hundred and fifty thousand copies have been sold; while abroad, where it was not copyrighted, the sale is estimated to have reached a much larger number of copies—perhaps half a million. Four leading houses in Great Britain republished the work. It was translated into German, French, Norwegian, Swedish, Italian, and I know not what other languages. The German version long ago passed into the sixth edition. Baron Tauchnitz, the celebrated Leipsic publisher, inserted it also in his noted *Collection of British Authors*. In a letter asking my permission to do so, he praised the work in very high terms. Indeed, the testimonials to its power and beauty from beyond the sea were even more striking than those at home. Men and women known the world over as scholars and authors or for their high culture, social position and leadership in the service of God and humanity, expressed their admiration

without stint. One of them, said to have been an eminent German theologian, used this language respecting it: "Already many a good, noble gift, rich in blessing, is come to us from North America; but we do not hesitate to designate *Stepping Heavenward* as the best among all from there which we have ever seen."⁴

An interesting chapter might be written about the different translations of *Stepping Heavenward*. I will refer to one of them, the German version. It was made by an invalid lady of Göttingen, and led to a correspondence, which has not yet ceased. Her letters, overflowing with grateful affection and giving details respecting the successive editions of the work, the welcome it received into thousands of German homes and its great usefulness, have been running on now for nearly thirty years.⁵

THE SECRET OF ITS INFLUENCE

Stepping Heavenward, while deeply religious, is wholly free from either sectarian bias or theological formulas. Every page bears the stamp of earnest conviction. The tone throughout is honest, sympathetic and full of good cheer. No false or jarring notes are struck. All is natural and true to life. The "one human heart" beating in the bosom of the race and, more or less feebly, in its humblest members, is depicted with a skill, fidelity, gentleness and soothing touch, which could come only of deep personal experience and the keenest observation. If the lessons taught by the story are at times painful, they are yet sweet, inspiring and fresh as a spring breeze. No discouraging, still less gloomy or pessimistic sentence can be found in the entire volume. *Stepping Heavenward* was its dominant, animating, ever-recurring thought as well as its aim

4 "Schon manche gute, edle, segensreiche Gabe ist uns aus Nord-America gekommen, aber wir stehen nicht an Himmeln als die beste zu bezeichnen unter allen, die uns von dort zu Gesichte gekommen."

5 Here is the dedication of the sixth edition, published in 1894:

DER GELIEBTEN ENKELIN
der verewigten Verfasserin von "*Stepping Heavenward*"
ELIZABETH PRENTISS-HENRY
widmet diese sechste Auflage von "Himmeln" die Uebersetzerin.