

Literature, &c.

THE WIDOW AND HER CHILDREN.
A TALE OF REAL LIFE IN ENGLAND.

I happened to be wandering one evening through a dirty lane in the part of the town where the operatives are clustered. The factories were just opening their doors for weary thousands to go home; and I met crowds of ragged, pale men, women and children—There was an air of abjectness and exhaustion, of servile degradation and feebleness, about very many I saw; among whom were persons of all ages—from the old and haggard, to children of tender years. I may have been deceived about the ages of some of the children, but there were thousands of them who did not seem to me to be more than eight or ten years old.

I stood at the corner of the streets and looked at the crowds as they passed along. I observed a boy apparently about twelve or thirteen, holding up and dragging along a pale little girl considerably younger than himself. "Come along now, Meggy; can't you go for yourself a bit—I am about to give up, and I can't carry you again."

I took the little creature's left hand, and the boy took the other, and we led her on to their home. The eyes of every one in the street were turned upon me, as though it were a strange sight to see a well dressed person take a fainting child by the hand.

"What is the matter, my boy, with your sister?"

"She's tired out, sir; for she is not used to the mill work yet, and it comes hard to her."

"How long have you worked in the mills?"

"Five years."

"Why don't your sister stay at home?—She is too young yet to go to the mill."

"Mother did keep her out as long as she could; but after father died she was obliged to send Meggy to the mill too."

"How many brothers and sisters have you?"

"There's six of us in all. George is apprenticed in Preston; and Sarah and Kate and Billey work in Mr ———'s mill."

We turned a corner in a very narrow, filthy lane, and the boy, pointing the way down into the basement, said "here we live." The steps were steep and narrow, and I took the girl in my arms, and carried her into the cellar.

The mother was lying upon a low bed of rags in one corner of the apartment. She rose up after one or two unsuccessful efforts, and sat on the side of the bed. The room was nearly dark; and what light there was came through the door we entered, and fell upon her face. Her countenance looked sallow and consumptive; her cheek was feverish, and her eyes were sunk deep in her head. Her forehead was large and handsome; but there was an appearance of deep depression, and something like broken-heartedness in her looks.

I apologized for intruding. "Oh, sir," said she, in a low and hollow voice, "God bless you, don't apologize for entering my cellar; I am glad to see any one but my hungry children." Sobs shook her frame, and tears gushed from her eyes.

"I hope you have come to me for good; I am in great distress. No one has entered the cellar to day except the officer, and he took my last shilling for taxes."

"God bless you, woman," I exclaimed, "what can a tax gatherer have to do in your house? Come to rob a widowed mother, and hungry orphans of their last shilling!" When I contemplated the scene of misery before me, I could but sympathize with suffering humanity.

"I wish I had a chair for you, sir," said the widow, "but there's a bench."

The little girl climbed upon the bench and lay down, and the boy threw himself upon an old chest at the head of the bed, and in a few minutes both of them were in a deep sleep.

The widow rose up, and, supporting herself by the wall, went to the corner of the room, and brought a tin cup of gruel, [oatmeal and water] and seating herself again on the bed, roused up her children to eat their simple meal. She had to shake them several times before they got up; and then she fed them with an iron spoon, giving to each a spoonful at a time.

When the gruel was gone, the still hungry children asked for more. "No, dears," said the mother, "you must go to sleep now; you can't have any more to night."

"It's my turn to night, Tony, to have the cup," said the little girl; the boy gave it to her and crawled over the back side of the bed to his night's sleep. The girl licked the spoon, and then plunged her hand into the cup, to gather the last particle of the gruel left. When she handed the cup to her mother, she turned up her eyes with a mournful expression, asking for "one spoonful more;" which the mother refused.

"Have you no more in the house?" I enquired.

"Yes, sir," she answered, "but only enough for us till Saturday, when the children's wages become due; and I have laid the rest aside, for it is better to have a little every day, than to have enough once or twice, and then have nothing."

"My good woman," I exclaimed, "I have money, and it is yours." We roused up the boy, once more, and sent him to the bake-shop to get something to eat; and while he was gone, the woman told me her pitiful story, which I will give you in her own language as nearly as possible:—

"For many years my husband worked in a machine shop; and until my children were ten or twelve years old, we did not send them to

the mill; we wished to keep them at home as long as we could, for we knew they would grow sickly and feeble as soon as they began the hard work of the factory. His wages supported us very comfortably; and I stayed at home and took in what sewing I could get, (for not one half of the factory people know anything about such work) and the oldest children went to the mills. Although they had to work hard and a great many hours, yet when we all came together at night, we were happy, and saw a great many good days. But about a year ago, my husband died; and that was a dark day for us all. He seemed to care only for us while he was sick, and when he came to die, after calling us all to him, and holding the children in his arms, and kissing them, he said, "the only thing that troubles me, Mary, is that I leave you and my poor children."

"I almost gave up in despair; for I could see nothing before me but the workhouse, where I pray God I may never go, if what they say of them be true. I saw nothing for my children but apprenticeship or starvation, and I could hardly choose between them. The little comforts we had in the house I was obliged to sell to get us board; and the expense of the funeral and the taxes soon swept away all my furniture and my husband's clothes, and at last I was obliged to sell my own."

"Six hungry children were staring me in the face, asking for bread; and I saw that in a little while I should have none to give them. It was as painful to me as to have laid them in the grave; but I was obliged to apprentice my four oldest children, and they see hard times. My health had been poor for a good many years, for my constitution was broken down while working at the mills when I was a girl. My husband found me when I was at work in the — mill, and we loved each other; and he provided me a home, where we were very happy; and if he had not died—"

Here the widow was overcome with exhaustion and grief, and fell back upon her bed. When she had partly recovered, she continued:

"But I thought I would not give up; I knew I must not. I took in what work I could get, and sent Tony to the mill. But I could get only a little work, and Tony got only two shillings a week, and we saw ourselves growing poorer and poorer every day. I knew I could not stand it long, but I went to the factory myself, and left Meggy with a neighbor. I did not last long there, the work was too hard for me. When I gave it up I was obliged to send Meggy; and it has been a sad work, sir, to see how pale and thin she grows; to break her sound sleep in the morning and send her off to the mill; and to have her come home at night so tired and hungry, and only half a meal to eat, and so worn out that she falls asleep before she eats that—it's pretty hard, sir, to see an officer come into our cellar and take the last penny we had on earth for taxes. Oh! sir, I wish we were all in our graves, and then we should be at rest."

Yes, blessed be God, there the wicked cease from troubling and there the weary are at rest!—To escape all the sorrows and struggles of earth, the stings of adversity, and the pains of hunger; to lie down peaceably in the thought—oh! there is a rich consolation in the thought!

The little boy returned from his errand with brightened features; but the smile that played over his pallid countenance, seemed like a faint light falling upon a grave; so little did the joy on his face conceal the deep seated gloom that had been traced there by want and sorrow.

One thing was still wanting—a light. The boy lit up a small tin lamp, which stood on a shelf over the fire place.

"We don't use a lamp," said the widow, "only when we are sick in the night; but I keep one against a time of need."

And now little Meggy was awakened again, and the family gathered around the deal stand to eat, for the first time in many weeks, food enough to satisfy hunger. It was affecting to me to see the joy of the children, and the gratitude of the mother. In my heart I praised the widow's God, for guiding my feet to her damp and cheerless home.

I talked for an hour with the widow about the religion of the Bible, the love of the Saviour, and the hope of heaven. Her ideas on this subject were extremely vague.

Said she, "I used to go to church when I had clothes to wear, but I heard what I could never believe. When I heard the priest speak of a merciful God, who loves all his creatures so well that he does not let a sparrow fall to the ground without his notice, I could not forget that I, for no crime had to toil on in poverty and wretchedness, and see the bread taken from the mouths of my hungry children to support the rich minister who never came near my cellar. If this is religion, I do not want it; and if God approves of this, I cannot love him."

"But, my good woman," I replied, "your Bible tells you of the abounding mercy of God."

"That may be, sir," she answered; "but I have no Bible to read, although I believe I could read some if I had it."

I took from my pocket a small Bible, and read the story of the Saviour's love; his life, his works of mercy, his kindness to the poor, his ministry, his death and resurrection. I tried to have her distinguish between the corrupt abuses of the Man's Religion, and the Christianity of the Bible; between the unjust and cruel legislation of man, and the just and kind laws of God. I tried to point her to the lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. I told her of the love of the Universal Father; that she was his child; that He loved her better than she loves these dear children who were resting from their toil by her side; that if she

suffered, it was all ordered in mercy, for God did not willingly afflict his creatures; that he was as kind in what he withheld, as in what he bestowed; that it was the desire of the Saviour to take her and her children, with all the weary, the oppressed, and sorrowful, home to Heaven, when they had done with this world, its cares and its sufferings. She had but to love her Father; trust his goodness; be sorry for all she had done that was wrong give herself in an everlasting covenant to him in covenant to him in confidence, and she should meet the compassionate embrace of her kind Saviour.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I think I could love such a being;" and as she spoke, a smile that seemed almost unwilling to stay, spread its gentle glow over her once handsome features. "But," said she, after a moments hesitation, "if there was such a Being as the Bible describes; such a being as you have told me of; so powerful that He can do all things; and so good that He is pained to see any of his creatures suffer it seems to me that He would help my children. He certainly would if He loved them as well as I do."

I endeavored to explain these things to her mind, in as simple a way as possible.—She replied, "I wish I could see all these things as you do; but I am so ignorant, I am afraid I never shall." And then after a few words had been said about death, she added, "Oh, yes, sir, there is much pleasure in thinking about death; and if I and my children could all lie down and die to-night I should be very happy. For if there is such a Being as you have read and spoken of, and we shall live after we are dead, He will provide us a home where the rich and the proud will trouble us no more."

"Only believe it, and trust in the mercy which has promised it, and the Being who made you, and it shall be all yours; and there is one promise in the Bible specially adapted to your circumstances. God has declared that He is the widow's God and the orphan's Father's and will hear their cry. He has given you a gracious invitation to come to Him in these tender words: 'Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"

"Oh! sir," she answered, "I think I would go to Him; but I am very ignorant, and I have been very wicked; what shall I do?"

"He will instruct your ignorance, and enliven your soul; and all your sins he will forgive and forget—only trust in his mercy, He has declared He loves all who trust in His mercy. Be willing to obey Him, to submit to your lot, though it be hard, without repining; kiss the hand that afflicts you; go to Him; give yourselves and your children away to Him in confidence, and He will never forsake you or them. And if you are called to die soon, and leave these orphan children on the wide world, remember that in Heaven is the orphan's Father; that He loves your children better than you do, and will protect them more tenderly. He will watch them more tenderly. He will watch over them with fidelity, and be a kind parent to them when you are dead; and at last gather them all up into that bright world where there shall be no more sorrow, or sighing, or pain, where God shall wipe the tears of earth from every eye; and where the orphan shall never be heard to say I have no father."

"Oh!" exclaimed the widow, as she clasped her hands together, and tears and smiles covered her face, "I will go to God; I will trust Him and love him forever; I think I see it. I can bear these things better now. It is hard to see my children suffer. I should not care much for myself, if I could see these dear little things have bread to eat. But if it is God's will, I think I can bear all now. I thank God, sir, that you ever came here. I shall never forget it. I wish you would pray before you go, sir, if it will not be asking too much."

We knelt by her bed, and tried to pray.—I felt that we need not pray to God as though He were in a distant heaven—He was with us. It was a holy scene, and we were forgetful that we were in that cold, damp cellar, for the atmosphere seemed like that we are told fills Heaven.

When we rose from prayer, the widow took my hands and pressed them with great earnestness, saying, "I have nothing to give you sir; but I will remember you, and try to pray for you as long as I live." I felt in my inmost soul that the widow's prayer was answered. I was blessed.

One pleasure was still in store for me; I gave her what money I thought it would be right in my circumstances to spare, and left for home. It seemed unlike the room I had entered.

Oh! thought I, as I pursued my way through the dark narrow streets to my lodgings, what have sin and oppression done in this world! How have they marred the fair works of God! It is a world of tears and broken hearts; but it was not always so—this bright record stands upon the page of inspiration, "God has made everything beautiful in his time." It shall not always be so.

AN EXAMPLE FOR WIVES.

A TALE OF REAL LIFE.

In the year 18—, and the month of August, the following marriage might be found in a column of our daily papers. "On the 18th inst., by the Rev. Philip M——, D. D., William Gordon to Maria Sheldon." Maria had made what the world would call a good match. Her husband was an honest, industrious tradesman, was engaged in a lucrative business, and had means enough to support her respectably. A neat house was furnished for their reception and they took possession with feelings, understood alone by those who marry from pure disinterested affection.

Affairs glided on smoothly; he was attentive

to his business and she did all in her power to make his house a cheerful one. After some time, one night at ten o'clock found her waiting his return; this was unusual. For the first time since their marriage, was he out at that hour. She tried to while away the tedious moments in numerous ways, hoping that every one would be the last spent in solitude. At length he came—a political meeting, he said, detained him longer that he expected, as a number of addresses had been delivered by eminent men, and he had become interested and had forgotten how slowly the hours passed to her, with whom he had been in the habit of passing all his leisure moments. Excusing him with a smile, she answered, "I should not have complained of feeling weary on this your first absence, but you have been so much with me, that I have become selfish. Dear William, you must blame your previous attentions for my fault."

"Do you call it a fault, Maria; it does not need even as much as you have said; you have uttered no complaint; it is from those tell tale eyes that I have learned how lonely you have been, as he spoke he fondly gazed upon the beautiful features of his wife, that upon his entrance had lost their heaviness, and sparkled with double brilliancy. He loved her with as much truth and fervour as ever warmed the heart of the fondest husband, and he resolved that excepting those hours devoted to business, none should be passed from her side. But alas for man's resolution! the first step had been taken; the second was not difficult.

At that time there was a great political excitement, and the meetings, as is generally the case, were held in taverns. William, though not a warm politician, was young, and like even older persons, believing his candidate the one above all capable of filling the office sought with credit to the State. He imbibed the views of his associates, and if not as conspicuous, was as anxiously watched as those who had been foremost in the ranks. Ten o'clock now found him at home as seldom as formerly away from it. Maria attributed it all to the meetings, that she knew he was constantly attending, and therefore uttered no murmur.

It grieved her to see him return sometimes with a flushed cheek, and unsteady step; she did not give vent to her uneasiness, and only trusted when the election was over, he would forsake all that had grieved her so much, and return again to his former conduct. She was willing, as ever woman is, to look forward to a bright and beautiful future. She knew that all who live have clouds as well as sunshine to encounter, and thought the present one would soon pass away, and leave her a horizon as serene and calm as the day she looked back upon as her morning light. At the meeting where William might always be found, there was a party of young men near his own age, possessing pleasing address and manners, they made it a business to attach themselves to all new comers by inviting them to drink to their better acquaintance, and thus gently lead them into the worst of vices. They knew that William was in a good business; and to him they professed the warmest friendship. They made up various kinds of excursions and pleasure parties, to all of which he was invited; and of course, had to bear a part if not the whole of the expense. For a man in his moderate circumstances, this could not long continue; his business was neglected, his customers finding him inattentive, sought more punctual men. When his friends found his means exhausted, they saw in him many faults that had not presented themselves before. The foremost and most to be despised, an empty purse; that was a bugbear from which his associates shrunk with terror. He was now father of two children, no money, no business, a ruined reputation—what was to become of him? The thought almost made him mad, and he had recourse to the bottle; with this he banished all thoughts of his condition, his home, his wife, and his children. How he succeeded we shall see.

Four years had elapsed since the conclusion of the first part of my narrative. In a room in one of the small houses that are situated in the northern part of the city, sat an interesting woman. The room was small but very clean, and had an air of comfort that cleanliness always gives. The furniture was all for use,—not a piece for ornament. In one corner stood a cradle, in which a babe was sleeping; beside it sat an elderly woman with her foot upon a rocker, she was trying to keep herself awake and the child asleep by the motion of the cradle.

It was Maria and her mother. Four years had not wrought any change in Maria's face, but resignation sat sweetly on her handsome features; her eyes, though not so bright and sparkling, were not the less beautiful, though the light that shone from them was less dazzling than when at first presented to the reader. Her neat figure was clothed in a dress of the plainest materials.

Her glossy hair was hidden from view by a snow white cap, and checked apron, that had not yet lost its folds, completed her attire. It was very late, yet she was still sewing industriously. When she saw the fatal change that had come over her husband, she uttered no complaint. She did not greet him with harsh words on his entrance, but received as calmly as her misery would permit. She had given up the pretty home she had entered with such joyous prospects, and seated the one that we now find her in. All that she deemed unnecessary was sold, and paid the debts that were rashly incurred by her unthinking husband.

She called upon all who had been friends in her prosperity, and requested their patronage, as she intended by sewing, to earn a livelihood for her family. Her mother went to live with her, that she might devote more of her time