

fore me became indistinct in twilight, till the last slanting sunbeams had withdrawn from the highest panes of the church window, till the blackbird's song was hushed, and the baby's voice was still, and the mother and her nursing had retreated into their quiet dwelling, and the evening taper gleamed through the fallen white curtain and still open window.

But yet before the curtain fell, another act of the beautiful pantomime had passed in view before me. The mother with her infant in her arms had seated herself in a low chair, within the little parlour. She untied the frock strings, drew off that, and the second upper garments, dexterously and at intervals, as the restless frolics of the still unwearied babe afforded opportunity; and then it was in its little under coat, the plump white shoulders shrugged up in antic merriment, far above the slackened shoulder straps. Then the mother's hand slipped off one shoe, and having done so, her lips were pressed, almost as it seemed involuntarily, to the little naked foot she still held. The other, as if in proud love of liberty, had spurned off to a distance the fellow shoe; and now the darling, disarrayed for its innocent slumbers, was hushed and quieted, but not yet to rest: the night dress was still to be put on, and the little crib was not there; not yet to rest, but to the nightly duty already required of young christians. And in a moment it was hushed, and in a moment the small hands were pressed together between the mother's hands, and the sweet serious eye was raised and fixed on the mother's eye (there beamed, as yet the infant's heaven;) and one saw that it was lisping out its unconscious prayers; unconscious, surely not unaccepted. A kiss from maternal lips was the token of God's approval; and then she rose, and gathered up the scattered garments in the same clasp with the half naked babe, she held it smiling to its father; and one saw in the expression of his face, as he upraised it after having imprinted a kiss on that of his child, one saw in it all the holy fervour of a father's blessing.

Then the mother withdrew her little one, and then the curtain fell, and I still lingered, for after the interval of a few minutes, sweet sounds arrested my departing footsteps; a few notes of the harp, a low prelude stole sweetly out, a voice still sweeter, mingling its tones, with a soft quiet accompaniment, swollen out gradually into a strain of sacred harmony, and the words of the evening hymn came wafted towards the house of prayer. Then all was still in the cottage and around it; and the perfect silence, and the deepening shadows, brought to my mind more forcibly the lateness of the hour, and warned me to turn my face homewards. So I moved a few steps, and yet again I lingered, lingered still, for the moon was rising, and the stars were shining out in the clear cloudless heaven; and the bright reflection of one danced and glittered like a liquid fire-fly on the ripple of the stream, just where it glided into a dark deeper pool beneath a little rustic footbridge which led from where I stood into a shady green lane, communicating with the neighbouring hamlet.