

THE BABY IN THE BROWN COTTAGE.

A small brown cottage stood on the road-side, opposite an old mill. From the door you could see the great wheel slowly turning. The miller's family lived in the brown cottage. Shall I tell you how many were in this family? Just three.

There was no mother in the miller's brown cottage; only two little girls and a baby. One month ago the mother's early life failed and flickered, as you have seen the light of a lamp when the oil was consumed. Then it went out, and there were tears and grief in the brown cottage.

As for the mother, sorrow and sickness had made both heart and body weak. For a long time before she died, a great shadow rested on her life—a shadow that grew darker day by day. But she was loving and holy, and in His own good time, the Lord closed her tearful eyes in this lower world that He might open them in heaven. And so she went to dwell with angels.

"Where was the baby's father?" I hear asked. "Did he not love and care for it, and for his two little girls also?"

I said that a shadow rested on the poor mother's heart—a shadow that grew darker every day. Such shadows rest on many hearts. The miller had once been the kindest of husbands and the tenderest of fathers. What had changed him? Drink! You know too well what that means.

Once he took a glass of beer only now and then: not that it made him feel any better, but really worse, for it produced a heaviness of head and limbs that was very unpleasant while it lasted. Sometimes a headache was the consequence. But others

drank beer, and he joined in the useless and unsafe custom. After a while, this unwholesome stuff so changed the healthy, natural state of his stomach, that it began to crave the bitter and stimulating draught. Then he drank oftener; which, of course, only made it worse—increasing the unhealthy condition, and likewise the craving thirst that could never be satisfied—no, not even with beer; and so at times whiskey, gin, and brandy were taken. These lead to ruin by a quicker way

than ale or beer; because they are more fiery, and burn with a fiercer flame.

You can understand now why a shadow had rested on the mother of these children; and why it had grown darker every day.

The baby was a year old. Hester, or Hetty, as she was called, had just passed her tenth birthday; and Mary was seven. So young, and motherless!

At first thought, it seems as if it would have been better for them to be fatherless also.

woman all at once, said, "No, no; I can't part from baby."

Then a lady who had no children took the half-drunken, wretched father aside, and talked to him until he consented to let her have the baby and bring him up as her own. She wanted to carry him right off; but the miller said, "No, not until to-morrow."

"Better let me take him now," urged the lady.

For Hetty's sake, the miller repeated his "No." He knew how great was her love for the

The funeral over, all the neighbors went home, except two, more tender-hearted and pitying than the rest. It seemed cruel to them to turn their backs upon these two little girls and the sweet baby left motherless.

One of them had been a very dear friend of the miller's wife, and she grieved for her loss as for that of a beloved sister.

Taking Hetty by the hand, and leading her into her mother's room, now so still and desolate, she shut the door, and putting her arms about the child, burst into tears, and wept over her for a long time before she could get calm enough to speak.

"I want to talk with you, Hetty," she said, at length, as she sat down and composed herself. The blinding tears dried out of Hetty's eyes, and she fixed them wistfully on the woman's face.

"What are you going to do?" Ah! that was the hardest of all questions to answer.

Hetty's eyes rested for a little while on the woman's face, and then dropped to the floor. Raising them quickly, after a moment, she replied:

"If they'll only let me keep baby, Mrs. Wilder!" The thought of his being taken away came back so vividly to the mind of Hetty that she could not bear it. Her lips quivered and she burst again into tears.

"I thought you were going to keep him," said the neighbor.

"Mrs. Florence wants him, and says she'll treat him just as if he was her own."

"I didn't know that," remarked the neighbor. "If Mrs. Florence will take him—"

"It is very kind in her," said Hetty, interrupting the sentence, "and I'm sure she

would be good to him. But indeed, Mrs. Wilder, I can't let him go. I feel just as if I should die if they were to take him away. You don't know how I do love him."

"But you are so young Hetty. Almost a child yourself. You can't take care of baby. And, then, who is to be house-keeper?"

I've thought it all over, Mrs. Wilder—over and over again—and Mary and I can do it all," said Hetty.



"HELP ME TO BE A FATHER INDEED TO THESE MOTHERLESS LITTLE ONES!"

But God knows what is best always. His tender care was over these little ones, and over their father too.

Now that baby was one of the loveliest things alive—so sweet and pure, so gentle, and yet so full of infantile joy; and so winning in all his ways: that none could help loving him.

This neighbor and that offered to take him when his mother died, but Hetty, who had seemed to grow into a

baby, and there was enough of tenderness left in his heart to keep him from adding this to her grief on the day of her mother's burial.

Now it happened that Hetty, unknown to her father and the woman, had heard what passed between them. At first she was almost beside herself with pain. It was as much as her heart could bear to lose her mother, and she felt that to take baby also would, as she said afterward, "just kill her."