

that so long as he was so docile, and worked so heartily, they would retain him.

One day, in the middle of the winter, a pedlar, long accustomed to trade at the cottage, made his appearance, and disposed of his goods readily, as if he had been waited for.

"You have a boy out there, splitting wood, I see," he said, pointing to the yard.

"Yes; do you know him?"

"I have seen him," replied the pedlar, evasively.

"And where? Who is he? What is he?"

"A jail-bird;" and the pedlar swung his pack over his shoulders. "That boy, young as he looks, I saw in court myself, and heard his sentence, 'Ten months.' He's a hard one. You'd do well to look carefully after him."

O! there was something so horrible in the word "jail," the poor woman trembled as she laid away her purchases; nor could she be easy till she called the boy in and assured him that she knew that dark part of his history.

Ashamed, distressed, the child hung down his head: his cheeks seemed bursting with the hot blood; his lips quivered and anguish was painted as vividly upon his forehead as if the words were branded into the flesh.

"Well," he muttered, his whole frame relaxing as if a burden of guilt or joy had suddenly rolled off, "I may as well go to ruin at onc't: there's no use in my trying to do better: every body hates and despises me; nobody cares about me; I may as well go to ruin at onc't."

"Tell me," said the woman, who stood off far enough for flight, if that should be necessary, "how came you to go so young to that dreadful peace? Where was your mother—where?"

"O!" exclaimed the boy, with a burst of grief that was terrible to behold, "O! I hain't no mother! O! I hain't had no mother ever since I was a baby. If I'd only had a mother," he continued, his anguish growing more vehement, and the tears gushing out from his strange-looking gray eyes, "I wouldn't ha' been bound out and kicked and cuffed and laid on to with whips. I wouldn't ha' been saucy, and got knocked down, and run away, and then stole because I was hungry. O! I hain't got no mother; I hain't got no mother; I haven't had no mother since I was a baby."

The strength was all gone from the poor boy, and he sank on his knees, sobbing great choking sobs, and rubbing the hot tears away with his poor knuckles. And did that woman stand there unmoved? Did she coldly bid him pack up and be off—the jail bird?

No, no: she had been a mother, and though all her children slept under the cold sod in the churchyard, she was a mother still.

She went up to that poor boy, not to hasten him away, but to lay her fingers kindly, softly, on his head; to tell him to look up and from henceforth, find in her a mother. Yes, she even put her arms about the neck of that forsaken, deserted child; she poured from her mother's heart sweet, womanly words, of counsel and tenderness.

O! how sweet was her sleep that night; how soft her pillow! She had linked a poor suffering heart to hers, by the most silken, the strongest bands of love; she had plucked some thorns from the path of a little, shinning, but striving mortal.

Did the boy leave her?

Never! He is with her still, a vigorous, manly, promising youth.