

MARY BELL; OR, THE WIFE AT HOME.

BY J. W. M., IN CHRISTIAN TREASURY.

'I'm off then out of this dark dismal hole of a place,' exclaimed Charles Bell, as he made for the door of his dingy dwelling. 'No—no—Mary, you needna be cryin' and sobbing there, for I'll not spend my last night o' the year in a fireless, supperless, cheerless garret—So a happy New Year to you a', and when the clock strikes twelve, I mean to shake hands wi' it in a cheery fashion, an' I know where to go for that.'

So saying he flung off the arm of his wife, which had grasped his tattered coat to hold him back, and uttering a hoarse angry, 'be quiet there, will you,' banged the door after him, and was gone.

Mary Bell knew too well whither her husband was gone; and sick at heart as well as jaded in body and mind, she sank into a chair, and covering her face with her apron, sobbed aloud. Little Alice, a golden haired child of five summers, was in a moment at her mother's side, and clambering upon her knee, drew aside the apron, and while hersweet blue eyes glistened at the sight of her mother's fast-falling tears, she strove, in her childish way, to cheer and comfort her. But it seemed as if the poor heart was too pained to be soothed even by such sweet caresses; for Mary heeded not the little tinkling voice, warbling forth its music of love; and even the soft touch of the little arms thrown tenderly round her neck, served only to increase her grief. In broken sobs she cried aloud, 'Oh, Alie! Alie! what is to become of you, an' us a'?—your father will break my heart.'

At this moment a gentle tap was heard at the door.

Mary started—the stirring of a leaf would have raised the beating of her

heart—and hastening to the door, she opened it with a trembling hand. 'Oh, it's you, Miss Gray—come in, come away in, you're the very one I would best like to see. Charlie's off again; I told you he would never mind. Wae's me, but it's an awful thing that drink. It breaks bones, an' breaks hearts, and digs a hantel graves. I'm sure mine 'ill be near ready by this time. Oh dear! oh dear!' and Mary again sank into her chair.

Miss Gray was the Bible woman of the district, and a tried and welcome friend of the families she visited. It was a common remark with them, that 'she aye left things better than she found them'; and truly she had carried sunshine into homes, where nothing but gloom had reigned.

One great obstacle to her work she found, in the too general custom of the wives and mothers to leave their own dwellings and go out during the day to work or wash, thinking by this means to increase their income. She had labored to prove to such their mistake, and the sorrowful train of evils which such a practice inevitably brought. The case of Mary Bell was one in point, and she was prayerfully striving by unwearied but judicious effort and advice, to induce her once for all to relinquish her habit of going out to wash.

Many talks they had had on the subject, and often had Miss Gray pointed out to Mary the ruin she was bringing on her family, and indeed had already brought.

It was truly a cheerless scene from which Charles Bell had angrily fled; and as Miss Gray glanced round the room, she scarcely felt surprised that