

## LITTLE ANGEL'S MINISTRY.

It was not the name given her at her birth, and I cannot tell how the child came to be always called "little Angel." She was not so fair as many children, nor had she the graceful form, the rich waving hair, that we always associate with angels. But sometimes, when she lifted her eyes suddenly, there was a deep, far-off light shining through them; a light that made us almost start to look into their depths, it was so clear, so pure; a light that had in it so little of earth, that involuntarily we murmured, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

It must have been because of this, and because the child's mind seemed drawn to holy things, untaught, unless indeed angels spoke to her at these times when her eyes looked intently away at something we could not see, and came back softer, deeper than before. It may be.

She was a happy, very quietly happy child, save when the one shadow of her life darkened and drew its thick gloomy folds about her. Ah me, it often did that! Little Angel's father was a drunkard. But she never spoke of this. Nor was there need that any should mention it to her. No one could doubt, that saw the light of her dark eyes grow so painfully intense, and the slender frame quiver with agony, that she felt and comprehended all. Yet she never wept, never shrank from him.

Mr. West was not a bad man, and very tenderly he loved his wife and child. But he was weak, irresolute, vacillating. There were those who said this was not his natural disposition, and that some time he might recover from his infatuation. He had tried to free himself from the grasp of intemperance, but so feebly, that it only held him more closely; as sometimes, when we make but a weak effort to shake off the worm that clings to our garments, it only tightens its hold upon us.

He came home one night, without having taken his usual stimulus of liquor. Possibly the influence of his little daughter's parting kiss had been with him all day, perhaps her spirit had in a measure gone with it. It is said that angels are often about us unseen. He entered the house, and called for little Angel, waiting her approach with a mixture of sadness and pleasure.

"Angel, my child," he said, as he lifted her to his knee, "you look happy to-night."

She leaned her head on his shoulder, stroking his hand tenderly as it lay in her lap. Then looked up at him with shining eyes. He looked into them a moment, and sighed. Only the night before—oh, that he could blot out the memory of many such nights!

"Angel, darling," he said, with sudden pain, "will you ever go away from me?"

"Not yet, father," she answered quietly.

Had she understood the meaning he hardly dared give his words himself? He could not doubt it, and her reply fell like a dark prophecy, sinking with a strange nameless fear into his heart, so vividly came up before him a foreshadowing of what might be.

What was it made him turn and listen so suddenly? Was it only a delusion of his brain, or was it really a sweet voice that came from afar, singing, "Suffer the little ones to come unto me?" He could not tell. He sat a minute in thought, then lifted the child as tenderly as if she had been an infant, and sought his wife.

"Mary, my wife," he said, "I am trying to be a man once more. I have taken a new step to-day." She looked up with eager, half doubtful countenance. "I have signed the pledge."

"Oh, God be praised!" murmured the happy wife, and she threw her arms around his neck. "We may be happy once more."

"And as God liveth, I will keep this pledge," and as Mr. West uttered the solemn words, he bent over his child, and looked at the tearful radiance of her soft eyes. There was a look there he did not like to see; a look that haunted him for hours after.

But it was a very happy household that night. Would that the shadow had never fallen again!

"Angel, dear, listen at the window for father." It was a week later; the day had been very dull, and night was setting in dark and stormy. The heavy autumnal rain sobbed mournfully at the windows, and the chill wind kept time to it in a low, far-off muttering. It was one of those nights in the late autumn, when the earth seems to gather up afresh her grief for the beautiful dead summer,

and break forth into passionate tears for the glory that was, and is not.

But Mrs. West thought not of this. A heavier darkness was settling within than without, and her frame shook visibly as the child came back slowly from the window, silent, for she had no words to speak her disappointment, and stood by her mother's side.

Ten o'clock passed, half-past ten, and the hand of the little clock on the mantel was fast travelling to eleven. Mrs. West buried her face in her hands and wept. Little Angel went softly from the room, and hastily wrapping herself in cloak and hood, left the house.

The storm struck a cold chill over her, but there was a purpose at her heart which the fiercest raging of the elements could hardly have caused her to abandon. Very still and swiftly the little figure passed down the street. But at the corner she was met by a policeman.

"Wait, little girl," he said, as she was gliding by him. "Can it be possible!" he continued, drawing her into the light of the street lamp, "little Angel! on such a night as this!"

"Let me go, please, Mr. Howard," and she looked up sadly in his face. "I am going for my father." The man's eyes filled in spite of himself.

"Do you know where your father is?" he asked, presently.

"I think I do. Only in the next street."

He let her go, following her slowly till she entered a well-known club-house.

And the child! With trembling limbs she mounted the stairway. For one moment only her resolution almost forsook her as she placed her hand on the door, then, inspired with sudden courage, pushed it bravely open, and entered.

The door had been inadvertently left unlocked, and her unexpected entrance was hailed with coarse expressions of surprise, not unmingled with bursts of inebriate laughter.

"Who are you?" at last cried one.

The child was silent for a moment, her eyes glancing round the room in search of her father. Then she brought them back gravely to the speaker's face—

"I am little Angel. I want my father."

"Angel, ha! ha! then you're in the wrong pew. This isn't heaven not by a long chalk!"