

Home, Sweet Home.

CHAPTER I.

GOOD-BYE, Alice, till evening,' cried a cheery young workman as he shouldered his basket of tools in the darkness of a winter's morning.

'Good-bye, Tom. I shall feel lonesome-like without you in a strange place, and with no one I know to speak to. But'—brightening up—'there is plenty to do, and I shouldn't have time to waste in talking, anyhow.'

Still Alice—a buxom country girl of twenty-five—found time to stand for a minute on the doorstep till Tom was out of sight before returning to begin the day's work she had planned for herself. Such an act was excusable, however, considering that this was the first time she and Tom had said good-bye as husband and wife; and the first time of doing anything is of importance, we know.

Tom and Alice had been married three days before at the church of the village where Tom had been born and had lived all his life, so far.

He had been apprenticed to his own father, a respectable working carpenter, and had continued to help in the business after his time was up. There were younger brothers coming on, however, and the village business was not enough to support more than two workmen; so when the second brother was out of his time, Tom accepted an offer to work for a London firm, where he was promised that his wages should not be less than 1*l.* a week. Tom was not what is called a skilled workman, having indeed had no opportunity of learning the higher branches of his trade under his steady-going old father, but he was a good trustworthy workman in the simpler branches, and could make a plain table or chair with any man going.

Alice was servant at the Vicarage. She

had gone first under an elderly cook house-keeper who had lived for many years in the Vicar's service, and who, being herself somewhat feeble, had made Alice do all the harder work under her superintendence. The place was a heavy one, and the old woman somewhat cross at times, and always very particular. Two or three girls, before Alice went to the Vicarage, had declared they could not stand her ways, and left for easier places. Alice had, however, been brought up by a good mother, and though, like other young girls, she felt put out sometimes by the housekeeper's strictness, she had the sense to know that the training was good, and by doing her best she actually succeeded in pleasing the old housekeeper and making a real friend of her.

And so it came about that when old Mrs. Bent felt that her own working days were really over, and that she might retire to live quietly on her savings for the rest of her days, she told her master and his sister, that if they were not very much set on having an elderly housekeeper, she, Mrs. Bent, was of opinion that they could not do better than engage Alice Smith, and let her have a young girl to help. 'For,' said Mrs. Bent, 'of all the wise-like girls I ever knew Alice is the queen. But, though I say it that shouldn't, I've never spared my trouble with her. If it was ten times over, she should sweep the room till there was no dust left in the corners. I've seen that girl scrubbing while the tears was mixing with the warm water in her pail, because I scolded her for not putting elbow-grease enough into the boards. But I never spared her—no, I can honestly say I never did—and now I've turned her out altogether to my mind, you won't often see the like of her in these days. She can cook and clean, and wash and sew, and iron with anybody, and all I can say is the man will be lucky that gets Alice Smith for his