

CHAPTER II.

A NEW SCHOLAR.

I HAVE only one thing to tell you about my little school; the only one strange thing that happened to me all the years I kept it.

It had been a sharp frost in the night—so sharp that the panes in the window, little diamond panes, were frosted over with so many pretty shapes that I almost wished they could stay there always. I quite wished that the children were there to see them. When I opened the door all the great, broad sweep of country stretching before me was lightly powdered over with snow, and long icicles hung like a ragged fringe to the eaves. If the dingle had been there, how sparkling and beautiful every tree and shrub would have shone in the early light! But the last bit of the dingle was gone, and a new, red brick house stood at the end of our garden. Still the low bushes about our place were silvered over, and glittered in the frosty sunshine, which they caught before it reached the houses below.

I had overslept myself that morning, for the night before I'd been poring over a book that had been lent me, till my candle burned down in the socket, and left me in the dark. I could not put that book down; it stirred my heart so. But now I began to feel as if I'd been wasteful, for candles were not plentiful with us, nor money to buy them, though I was loath to blame myself. At any rate I was behind time, and I could not tarry at the door, but must hurry more than usual in getting breakfast over, and redding up the kitchen in time for school. Inside the house the place seemed dark and dreary, and everything was cold to the touch of my fingers. I began to think of how ailing Transome was, and how the frost would bite him. He had not been to work for a fortnight, and the rent was running on all the while. The rent was my heaviest care. As long as that was paid it did not matter much to me what I had to eat and drink, so that we made both ends meet, and kept out of every man's debt. But Transome's pains had been very bad all night; and I knew well he could not go out in such a bitter frost, if the rent was never paid.

Well, I was down-hearted that morning; and I felt as if I could not afford to put more than a spoonful and a half of tea in our little black teapot, which stood simmering on the hob. I'd been in such a glow over that book the night before, it seemed as if it made me all the lower that morning. I had wanted to be doing some good in the world; trading for the Lord, so as to offer Him something more than my mere day's work, which seemed to be all for myself and Transome. But now the glow was gone I felt what a poor old creature I was, and that I could do nothing at all extra for Him.

"Ally!" I heard Transome calling from the room upstairs, "are yo' asleep again? Aw'm fair parched wi' drought."