

that moment the keenness of the trial God was sending her, and the tears which she shed in those few minutes were the bitterest she had ever shed before.

Presently she heard Mrs. Robin's slow step on the stairs, and hastily wiping her eyes, she busied herself over the fire.

"How warm it is this evening," observed Mrs. Robin, seating herself, work in hand, at the open window. "You may let the fire out, Nellie; I can do no more ironing to-night."

"Yes, mother!" was the quiet reply, but Helen's eyes were swimming. Murmuring something about "mending," she made an excuse for leaving the room, and rushing away into the little garden at the back of the house, she fell on her knees on the soft grass, and told out her great grief to God.

## CHAPTER II.

WHEN Sunday came, Mrs. Robin seemed much stronger than she had been for a long time, and quite elated at the prospect of going to the parsonage, and of seeing new faces and forms. Dressed in her neat black bonnet and shawl, she set out at seven o'clock with Helen, whose fresh young face looked unusually sweet and gentle, though her heart was filled with many misgivings. She knew it was only excitement which rendered her mother so much stronger to-day than of late; and that when she returned home in the evening she would relapse again into her former weak state. But as Helen was not given to looking forward, nor of "taking thought for the morrow," she put away such sad surmises, and talked cheerfully to her mother, as she walked along the grassy lanes, till the parsonage was reached.

The house was all astir, and Helen and Mrs. Robin hurried to the nursery, where Anna, the housemaid, had kindly laid breakfast. How bright and cheery it all looked to be sure, with the pretty pictures on the walls, and the large low windows opening on to the grass. Mrs. Robin could almost have envied Helen being in such a room as this all day long, surrounded with comfort and love and merry faces.

But her attention was mostly attracted by the beautiful pictures, especially one of the infant Saviour, smiling, on His mother's knee. She was standing looking at it, lost in thought, when she felt a little hand laid on her own, and a silvery voice say, "Is it not beautiful? I love that picture better than any of the others," and found that little Amy had stolen away from the night-nursery, in search of Helen's mother.

"It is indeed lovely," was the earnest reply; but Mrs. Robin could not help thinking how beautiful was the face beside her, with its gentle blue eyes and golden hair, and stooping down to the fair child, she imprinted a warm kiss on the pink cheek. In a minute Amy's little arms were round her neck, and the kiss returned therewith, sealing a friendship which was never broken.

The day passed happily and slowly; the little twins were baptized, Helen carrying one, and Mrs. Beresford the other, and Mrs. Robin remained with the older children in the parsonage nursery. As Helen prophesied, her mother was very wearied when they returned to their humble home, and a restless night succeeded. However, next day she rose at her accustomed hour, and commenced her week of labour again with a cheerful spirit. She felt that "the time was short," and that very soon she must lay by everything of earth, and fix her mind on her future home; so, with a patient smile and fervent blessing, she dismissed her young daughter to her daily charge at the parsonage, and herself set the little kitchen straight, and put the cottage in order. The dying woman's heart felt strangely happy, and a kind of heavenly peace stole into her soul; she knew she was hourly advancing towards the dark, dark way of death; but a faint sweet light seemed to have broken softly over the darkness, and shone tenderly on the narrow path she was treading. That day there was a great change in the sickly woman, and Helen's searching eyes noticed it directly she caught sight of the pale, transparent face through the window. The white cheek was sunken, the trembling hands which tried hard to ply the needle failed entirely, and the dim eyes