



*The head of the family, a robust and sturdy man, lay weak and feeble.*

Tears filled Mrs. Bennett's eyes. She had not expected this offer, but thought that her eldest son, having a wife and child dependent upon him, would be quite unable to help her. Indeed, since his marriage she fancied, as mothers often do, that Ben had grown cold and indifferent to her, and that his wife secretly despised her. But she felt ashamed of these fancies when she saw Fanny's approving smile and heard her say, "Yes, you'll be able to settle there comfortably, granny."

"That will be lovely!" cried Nelly, the youngest girl. "I can nurse the baby, and perhaps Mr. Brown will take Tom for an office boy, and we shall all be happy again."

Tom's face did not look very bright at this suggestion. His desire was to become a good mechanic in the large yard where his father had worked, and if he left school just now he perhaps would never be more than a labourer. He was working hard, and longed to keep on until he knew enough to enter the yard.

"I think I must stay with Mrs. Sims," said Mary, the eldest girl. "I was going to give notice, you know, mother, because cook is so bad-tempered; but I learn a good deal from her, and missis is so kind, and perhaps I shall get to be a cook myself before long." Already many of the dreaded questions were being

answered by the children themselves, and the widow's heart was lighter and her sleep more peaceful that night, for she felt sure that the Lord, who had already begun to show her the way she should take, would lead her safely on to her journey's end.

In the days and weeks that followed Mrs. Bennett often had cause to rejoice and give thanks for the many mercies and joyful surprises that came to her. Not only did she find a comfortable home for herself and her family in her son's house, but Mary did so well, and proved herself so useful to her mistress, that her wages were raised, and she was able now and then to help her mother with a small present.

Tom's schoolmaster was quite annoyed at the idea of the lad's leaving school when he was getting on so well, and finally offered to teach him gratuitously until he was able to enter the yard, rather than let him leave at once and spoil his prospects for life. Many other kind friends came forward and helped in various ways, and although nothing could ever make up for the loss of the husband with whom she had spent five-and-twenty years, the children were thoughtful and good, and Mrs. Bennett was greatly cheered and comforted by the kindness shown her, and saw in every fresh instance of it the loving care of her heavenly Father.