

"BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD."

CHAPTER I.



HE day had been very sultry, and more than once Mrs. Robin had been obliged to lay down her iron, and rest her weary limbs before going on with her work.

The poor woman was slowly dying, she knew that, and each day labour became too much for her; the iron felt so heavy, and her frame so feeble, that sometimes she gave up almost in despair. I say "almost," for Mrs. Robin, though a helpless, dying woman, was very *strong in faith*, and rested all her hopes and fears on that rock which is Christ. She knew there was One above, who, in "perfect wisdom, perfect love is working for the best;" and so, humbly and trustingly, she laid her aching heart before Him, content, though "storms should beat, and tempests swell," to let Him do "as seemeth Him best."

The sun was going down in solitary splendour behind the "distant hills," and the faint sweet smell of honeysuckle and roses came in at the open window, as, wearied and heart-sick, Mrs. Robin sat down, and watched for her daughter's return. The latter was a gentle, pale-faced girl of seventeen, who was daily nurse at the parsonage, where there were eight young children, and twin babies. She appeared presently, coming quickly up the lane, with a large bunch of hothouse grapes in her hand. New life and energy seemed to come into the quiet little cottage with Helen. Her smiling, though rather careworn face, was gladly welcomed by the sick woman, who rose and lifted the singing kettle off the fire, made the tea, and prepared a dainty little tea-cake for the new comer.

"Have the children been good to-day?" asked Mrs. Robin, as they sat down to their comfortable meal in the fading sunlight. The soft warm rays fell aslant the little room, lighting up the mother's white face, and shewing Helen, more distinctly

than she had ever dreamed of, the cruel ravages which disease had made there.

With a slight tremor in her sweet voice, she answered; "Yes, dear mother, very good." Dear little things! they hardly give me any trouble, and little Miss Amy is such a handy child, she helps to amuse the lesser ones, when I am attending one of the babies. Mrs. Beresford is in the nursery almost the whole day, now she is well enough, and the children are so quiet and good, I quite love to be amongst them."

"Are the babies' names settled on yet?" asked Mrs. Robin, who was always interested in little children.

"Yes, Ethel and Mabel: they are to be baptized next Sunday morning; I shan't be able to go, I am afraid, as there'll be no one to mind the children."

"Look here, Nellie," exclaimed Mrs. Robin, eagerly, "if you like to go to the baptism and help your mistress with the babies, instead of one of the other maids, I'll gladly undertake the care of the nursery while you're gone."

"Oh will you, mother, thank you; I never thought of that, and I know mistress will be only too glad to have you. I'll tell her to-morrow;" and so saying the young nurse rose, and began washing up the tea-things, humming softly the words of a hymn she had been teaching the clergyman's little children. She knew it would be a real pleasure to her mother to take her place in the parsonage nursery; and besides, it would be a change to the poor sickly woman, after her lonely existence in the tiny cottage, to have youthful faces and childish voices around her. It would be quite an event in her life. But (and the aching thought would come) was she strong enough for it? Her health seemed in a very frail condition, and she could bear but a very little exertion. Helen's tears sprang forth, and fell thick on to her wet hands. She was glad her mother was gone upstairs, for then she could weep in peace; she felt at