

JANE COURTNEY.

BY MRS. JENEVERAH M. WINTON.

About the time of Christmas
 (Not many years ago),
 When the sky was black
 With wrath and rack,
 And the earth was white with snow;
 When loudly rang the tumult
 Of winds and waves at strife,
 In her home by the sea
 With her babe on her knee,
 Sat Harry Courtney's wife.
 And he was on the water,
 Although she knew not where;
 For never a lip could tell of the ship,
 To lighten her heart's despair;
 And her babe was fading and dying;
 The pulse in the tiny wrist
 Was all but still,
 And the brow was chill
 And pale as the white sea mist.
 Jane Courtney's heart was hopeless;
 She could only weep and pray
 That the Shepherd mild
 Would take her child,
 Without a pain, away.
 The night grew dark and darker,
 And the storm grew stronger still,
 And, buried in deep
 And dreamless sleep,
 Lay the hamlet under the hill.
 The fire was dead on the hearth stone
 Within Jane Courtney's room,
 And still sat she,
 With her babe on her knee,
 At prayer amid the gloom;
 When, borne above the tempest,
 A sound fell on her ear,
 Thrilling her through,
 For well she knew
 'Twas the voice of mortal fear!
 And a light leapt in at the lattice,
 Sudden and swift and red,
 Crimsoning all
 The whitened wall
 And the floor and the roof o'erhead.
 It shone with a radiant glow
 On the face of the dying child,
 Like a fair first ray
 Of the shadowless day
 Of the land of the undetiled.
 And it lighted the mother's features
 With a glow so strange and new,
 That the white despair
 That had gathered there
 Seemed changed to hope's own hue.
 For one brief moment, heedless
 Of the babe upon her knee,
 With the frenzied start
 Of a frightened heart,
 Upon her feet rose she.
 And through the quaint old casement
 She looked upon the sea;
 Thank God that the sight
 She saw that night
 So rare a sight should be!
 Hemm'd in by many a billow
 With mad and foaming lip,
 A mile from shore,
 Or hardly more,
 She saw a gallant ship—
 Aflame from deck to topmast,
 Aflame from stem to stern,
 For there seemed no speck
 On all that wreck
 Where the fierce fire did not burn;
 Till the night was like a sunset,
 And the sea like a sea of blood,
 And the rocks and the shore
 Were bathed all o'er
 And drenched with the gory flood.
 She looked and looked till the terror
 Went creeping through every limb,
 And her breath came quick,
 And her heart turned sick,
 And her sight grew dizzy and dim;
 And her lips had lost their utterance,

For she tried, but could not speak;
 And her feelings found
 No channel of sound
 In prayer, or sob, or shriek.
 Silent she stood, and rigid,
 With her child to her bosom pressed,
 Like a woman of stone
 With stiff arms thrown
 'Round a sculptured babe at her breast.
 Once more that cry of anguish
 Thrilled through the tempest's strife;
 And it stirred again
 In her heart and brain
 The active thinking life.
 And the light of an inspiration
 Leap'd to her brightened eye,
 And on lip and brow
 Was written now
 A purpose pure and high.
 Swiftly she turned, and softly,
 She crossed the chamber floor,
 And faltering not,
 In his tiny cot
 Sh--id the babe she bore;
 And then, with a holy impulse,
 She sank to her knees, and made
 A lowly prayer
 In the silence there,
 And this is the prayer she prayed:
 "O Christ, who didst bear the scourging,
 But who now dost wear the crown,
 I, at thy feet,
 O true and sweet,
 Would lay my burden down.
 "Thou bade'st me love and cherish
 The babe Thou gavest me,
 And I have kept
 Thy word, nor slept
 Aside from following Thee.
 And lo! the boy is dying,
 And vain is all my care,
 And my burden's weight
 Is very great—
 Yea, greater than I can bear.
 "O Lord, Thou know'st what peril
 Doth threaten these poor men's lives,
 And I, a woman
 Most weak and human,
 Do plead for their waiting wives.
 Thou canst not let them perish:
 Up, Lord, in thy strength, and save
 From the scorching breath
 Of this terrible death
 On the cruel winter wave!
 "Take Thou my babe and watch it—
 No care is like to thine,
 And let thy power
 In this perilous hour
 Supply what lack is mine."
 And so her prayer she ended,
 And, rising to her feet,
 Gave one long look
 At the cradle nook
 Where the child's faint pulses beat;
 And then with softest footsteps
 Retrod the chamber floor,
 And noiselessly groped
 For the latch, and oped
 And passed from out the door.
 The snow lay deep and drifted
 As far as sight could reach,
 Save where alone
 The dank weed strown
 Did mark the sloping beach.
 But whether 'twas land, or ocean,
 Or rock, or sand, or snow,
 Or sky o'erhead—
 On all was shed
 The same fierce fatal glow.
 And through the tempest bravely
 Jane Courtney fought her way
 By snowy deep
 And slippery steep
 To where her duty lay.
 And she journeyed onward, breathless,
 And weary, and sore, and faint,
 Yet forward pressed

With the strength and the zest
 And the ardor of a saint.
 Silent and wild and lonely,
 Amid the countless graves,
 Stood the old gray church
 On its tall rock perch,
 Secure from the sea and its waves.
 And beneath its sacred shadow
 Lay the hamlet safe and still,
 For however the sea
 And the wind might be,
 There was quiet under the hill.
 Jane Courtney reached the church-yard,
 And stood by the old church-door,
 But the oak was tough,
 And had bolts enough,
 And her strength was frail and poor;
 So she crept through a narrow window,
 And climbed the belfry stair,
 And grasp'd the rope—
 Sole cord of hope
 For the mariners in despair:
 And the wild wind helped her bravely,
 And she wrought with an earnest will,
 And the clamorous bell
 Spoke out right well
 To the hamlet under the hill.
 And it roused the slumbering fishers,
 Not its warning task gave o'er
 Till a hundred fleet
 And eager feet
 Were hurrying to the shore;
 And then it ceased its ringing,
 For the woman's work was done,
 And many a boat
 That was now afloat
 Show'd man's work was begun.
 But the ringer in the belfry
 Lay motionless and cold,
 With the cord of hope,
 The church-bell rope,
 Still in her frozen hold.
 How long she lay it boots not,
 But she woke from her swoon at last
 In her own bright room,
 To find the gloom
 And the grief and the peril past;
 With a sense of joy within her,
 And the Christ's sweet presence near,
 And friends around
 And the cooing sound
 Of her sweet babe's voice in her ear.
 And they told her all the story—
 How a brave and gallant few
 Overcame each check,
 And reached the wreck,
 And saved the hopeless crew:
 And how the curious sexton
 Had climbed the belfry stair,
 And of his fright
 When, cold and white,
 He found her lying there;
 And how, when they had borne her
 Back to her home again,
 The child she had left
 With a heart bereft
 Of hope, and weary with pain,
 Was found within its cradle
 In a quiet slumber laid,
 With a peaceful smile
 On its lips the while,
 And the wasting sickness stay'd;
 And she said 'twas the Christ who watched it
 And brought it safely through;
 And she praised his truth
 And his tender ruth,
 Who had saved her darling, too.
 And first there came a letter
 Across the surging foam,
 And then the breeze
 Across the seas
 Bore Harry Courtney home;
 And they told him all the story
 That still their children tell—
 Of the fearful sight
 On that winter night,
 And the woman who rang the bell.