

DEAN'S
Illustrated Farthing Books.

THE
BEREAVED MOTHERS.



LONDON: DEAN & SON,
11, Ludgate Hill.

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“CHARLEY, your wife is the best woman in the world!”

“Now, if my friend Barnes, under ordinary circumstances, had uttered in my presence such an exclamation, I might have replied: “My dear friend, why don't you tell me something I don't know already?”

But the circumstances were extraordinary, as I will tell you. The day before, Barnes had buried his eldest boy—a fine looking fellow, five years old. Being neighbours, and a close intimacy existing between our families, I ran over early next morning to speak a word of sympathy. His countenance wore a look of deep distress.

“It's very hard, I know,” said I.

“Oh! I could bear it, for myself—but Mary—my wife—she wound her heart-strings so tightly around the object she loved, that the shock of separation is terrible. She has not slept, she has not shed a tear, but passes from one paroxysm to another. Nothing tends to soothe her. The baby she takes no notice of—seems to have forgotten that she has a child

left; I fear for her life, and, if that is spared, that her reason will give way."

I could not detain him longer from the care of his wife, but sadly returned home. My wife listened to the story of her friend's desperate condition, and scarcely appeared to know when I had finished telling it, but still sat as if listening. Five minutes later, however, when I passed through the hall, I saw her in her dressing-room, putting on her cloak and bonnet.

It was night when I returned home, after a busy day at my office; and, just as I was passing Barnes' door, he came out, and surprised me with the exclamation I have already repeated. Remembering the interview of the morning, it was not in my thought to reply lightly, when he said: "Your wife is the best woman in the world—the most considerate, the most thoughtful."

"She came down to see Mary?" I said.

"No, she didn't; she did what was still better—she sent another. You know Mrs. Pardoe."

“Yes; she buried her husband last week.”

“And her three children within a twelvemonth Well, about noon, to-day, just after Mary had experienced one of her wildest paroxysms, and had sunk at



last upon the sofa, overcome by exhaustion, the bell rang, and when I opened the door, there was Mrs. Pardoe. She was accompanied by your wife, who was in the act of taking leave of her.”

“ ‘ You will go in ? ’ said Mrs. Pardoe.

“ ‘ No, I’d better not ; you go alone. I’ve not lost a husband ; and *my girls*—they are at home, rosy with health.’

“ ‘ *I understand.*’

“ She entered without another word, but paused on seeing Mary apparently asleep. Then, catching sight of the cradle, she went to it, and, sinking upon the floor, bent her face over the baby, and burst into tears.

“ That was a moment not to be lost ; *I also understood.*

“ ‘ Mary ! ’ I cried, in a voice intended, if possible, to rouse her. ‘ Mary, look up ! look ! ’

“ Both women raised their eyes at the same instant, and looked the one upon the other. That scene will live in my memory—the picture of those two women looking into each other’s eyes—the expression of one full of agony—the other calm though sad. For a full minute neither spoke. Gradually, the full conception of the circumstances seemed to form itself in Mary’s mind. The garments of deep mourning,

the child in the cradle, the husband near her—she saw them all, though her eyes were still looking down into the bereaved heart before her. Then, with a cry, she sprang from the sofa, and threw herself upon the neck of her friend. The fountain of tears was unsealed, and long, long they wept together over the sleeping infant. At last Mary slowly spoke :

“ ‘ You believe—there is—a God,—and—that—He is good? How can you think so, when He has taken all—your dear ones?’ ”

“ The light of a divine trust beamed in the woman’s face, as she answered, in deep, firm tones: ‘ When my children were taken from me, I thought the Lord wanted part of my love. But when He took my husband also, *then I knew the Lord was determined to have my whole heart.*’ ”

“ Like lightning the words went to Mary’s soul.

“ She clasped her babe to her breast, and then, clinging her arms around both

husband and child, she said: 'I will not dare complain again.'

"From that moment she was calm, resigned—and, yielding to our persuasion to partake of some refreshment, in half an hour I had the happiness of seeing her sink into a gentle sleep, with a smile on her lips.

"Then Mrs. Pardoe explained how your wife had come to her, and begged, in the name of sweet mercy, that she would visit Mary. She was loth to comply at first, being a comparative stranger; but her visitor insisting that she alone could hope to rouse Mary from her despair, and perhaps save her life, she consented.

"'And I am very thankful,' she added, 'that my visit appears to have produced such favourable results.'

"And so am I," Barnes added, pressing my hand; I hardly hoped to see her smile again."

I wrung his hand and left him, without saying a word. But in my mind I repeated, as I went home: "She is the best woman in the world."