

THE A

TWO DOLLARS PER ANNUM.]

BY DAVIS & CREWS.

THE SNOW SHROUD.

BY MARY RIVERS.

"Oh, dear, there's so many to wash," said little Nelly Barton, as she surveyed with a rueful glance at the long table full of dishes.

About two years ago, her mother died. Mrs. Barton was a tender, gentle woman, living only in the happiness of her beloved ones, and she had made the first eight years of her daughter's life very bright.—When she died, the bitterest pang was the thought of leaving her only child, to the tender mercies of a world which is not always disposed to be merciful. When the hand of death was upon her, she called the little one to her bedside and kissed her long and fervently, brushing back her thick curls with her pale hand, and looking into her eyes with a steadfast gaze of hopeless love and sorrow.

"Oh," she faltered; "I can give up every thing else, but I wish I could take you with me. I cannot bear to leave you in this cold world, motherless, my child.—Better for you if you could sleep here in my bosom and never wake up again. I wish we could be buried together."

Mr. Barton was a kind hearted man.—His sympathies were quick rather than deep. Perhaps this was why he never understood the woman, who, for ten years had been his wife. Her nature was very different. Her feelings deep buried in her woman's heart. Sometimes, like diamonds in the windings of a gloomy mine, they would flash out for a moment, giving the beholder a sudden startling glimpse of the richness hidden within. Her love was like the course of a subterranean stream, which you could only trace by the sweet fragrance of the flowers, the rich verdure of the grass above it. Her husband saw those things from a different point, therefore her words seemed incomprehensible. He had been sitting at his dying wife's bedside, his face bowed upon his hands, and the tears trickling down his fingers, but he raised his head, now, and said, "I don't like to hear you say that, Sarah. If you must die; it isn't right to wish the child dead too. I want something left for me. After you are gone, I shall love her better than anything else in the world."

A faint sad smile crossed the dying woman's face. She knew her husband better than he knew himself. "You will be comforted," she murmured in her low tones, but she did not remove her steady questioning, sorrowful gaze from her child's face. She died with her hands twined in her girl's thick curls.

Mr. Barton was loud in his lamentings over the dead, but Nelly was very quiet.—No one ever saw her weep; and some people even remarked it was strange the child didn't seem to care more for her mother. But there were others, shrewd observers, who noticed that for months after a smile never crossed her face—that she scarcely tasted food—and grew so thin and pale, one might almost have thought that her dead mother's kisses had drawn half the life from her childish veins.

For a while Mr. Barton did seem absorbed in his child and his grief; but as time passed on his wife's words came true—he was comforted.

He needed a housekeeper sadly. The sister, who had come to him when his wife first died, could remain no longer. He must procure some one to take her place. It was with this view he first called upon the widow Bennett; but she was not willing, she told him, to leave her own home to become his housekeeper; and it all ended in his asking her to become his wife, and bring her own three children with her.

She was a dominant, artful, and some said, a hard woman—very different from the first Mrs. Barton. Little Nelly's life under this new rule seemed more weary and desolate than ever, though so long as her father lived she was secure from positive ill treatment; There was not wanting those who whispered that Adam Bennett's buxum widow did not make Mr. Barton's life a very happy one. He certainly did seem to grow old very fast. Be that as it might, he was under his wife's full control; and they had not been long married before he made his will bequeathing to her all his property. She had managed well in securing this hold in good season, for she had not been Mrs. Barton quite a year, when Mr. Barton fell a victim to fever, and was laid in peace by his gentle first wife's side.

Mrs. Barton had kept Nelly with her of course. She had too high a regard for public opinion to do otherwise, but she made the orphan pay, many times over, in hard toil, for her morsel of food and her bed in the attic. Was an errand to be done, Nelly was summoned. Nelly made the beds, Nelly cleaned the knives, Nelly washed the dishes, and then, at night, Nelly sobbed herself to sleep in her comfortless attic; with a prayer that she might die before morning and go to her mother.—But this part of this story no one but One above.

She had passed a weary Christmas, for it was the third Christmas, day died. The first one, the snow pressed heavily on a new made grave, and covered up the inscription on a white tomb stone, "Sarah Barton, wife of Stephen Barton, aged 34."

The second Christmas was—but a few weeks after her father brought his second wife home; and on this, the third, he too was gone, and his child was alone on the desolate earth.

Nelly had worked hard all day—she was very tired but now she must clear off the long table which had groaned under the weight of good cheer round which Mr. Barton had gathered her relations. Nelly must not go to bed till the last dish was washed—she knew that. She got a high chair and set it before the closed door leaping into the parlor. Then climbing up on it, she looked through the glass over the door, into the cheerful room. Oh, how warm and bright it was! Her step-mother sat, with her friends, before the fire. Her gaily dressed children were gathered round her. There was warmth and light and mirth for the living, but there was no one to speak a loving word to her. Could the dead see her from under the grave mounds? She came back and looked again at the table. She sighed and said once more, in her low sad voice, "Oh, dear, there are so many!" That was all. Then she began her task, and did not pause until it was done—the last dish was washed and put away, and the table placed against the wall. It was only nine o'clock but she did not go into the parlor. They had nothing for her—she had nothing for them.—She took her candle and climbed wearily up stairs to bed.

Soon sleep closed her eyelids, and brought with it dreams. At first they were pleasant ones. Her mother seemed with her again, and life was bright and hopeful. But even in her sleep, trouble followed after the joys. She lived over again her wrongs, her oppression, her long sorrow. Then a voice seemed to speak to her. It roused her from her slumber.—She thought it was her mother's tones.—They seemed calling her to the churchyard. They told her that the earth underneath the grave sod was troubled. If she went there, she thought her mother could hear her moan—her mother, who seemed calling her again to her bosom.

"Come, come, come!" called the far off voice. The child started up wildly.—She rose from bed—she hurried noiselessly down stairs. She opened the outside door just as the clock struck the hour of midnight. The house was still. No one heard the light footsteps. She closed the door behind her and hurried on. The winds swept through and through her nightdress—the hard earth cut and goaded her bare, tender feet. But she was insensible to the cold or pain. She hurried on. Only one thought was in her heart—her mother had called—she was going to her.

Across the fields she sped—into the churchyard gate—on, these two graves beneath the willows—on, until she pressed her fevered brow upon the bare sod above her mother's heart. And then the merciful snow began to fall. It covered up the letters on the headstone, which the poor child had been tracing with her fingers.—It folded over the two graves its white mantle of peace. It lay like a snowy veil over that young victim's brow. It clothed like a garment her shining limbs. It was more merciful to her than the world, ut she heeded not its ministry.

All her senses were locked save one.—She listened—eagerly—breathlessly—wildly. She listened for her mother's voice.—Oh, was it fancy? Out of that grave sweet low tones seemed to rise. She thought—it may have been only the snow flakes—but she thought a soft hand rested upon her hair; she felt a spirit kiss upon her forehead. She lay on the cold bare earth no longer—her head was lifted to a soft loving bosom. She had found rest at last, and she murmured, as she had so many times done at her mother's knee, "God keep little Nelly, and take her to heaven when she dies. And gentle gentle fall the snow—over the two graves—over the sleeping child.

They called in vain to little Nelly in the morning. She was not in the kitchen; she was not in the yard; she was not in her little bed in the attic. The clothes she had worn the day before hung across the foot of her bed. Her shawl and bonnet hung in the passage, but where was Nelly?

Ah, hurrying feet of Mrs. Barton!—What strange terror, what late awakening instinct leads you across the fields into the churchyard gate? Your face is white, my lady?—but you shall see something there, whiter still. Aye, kneel now—let those tardy tears have free course. They will not melt the shroud of snow from off that dead child's face. Your voice cannot awaken her, be its tones ever so tender now. The sun may rise, care and sorrow and toil go on, waving a web of life as before, she shall toil no more. They can be idle awhile now. The aching feet shall have a long rest.

On earth she had but few friends, but the Almighty pitied her. He called her home; the angels waited for her—they will not teach her their new song to day; the snow was merciful—it has woven her a whiter shroud than mortal hands could fashion. Father, mother, child, stand together before the eternal throne—they walk together where no voice shall ever say, "I am weary." Nellie is gone home.

promise to pay attention to it."

"Of course I will uncle, for I always like to hear of the printers."

The judge seemed wrapped in study for some moments, and then began:

"I once knew a man," said he, "who lived in a little town in a western part of Virginia. He was of respectable family, but not very wealthy, and the youth, for a youth he was at the time our narrative commences, expressed a desire to learn the printing business. His parents having no objections to it, he entered an office in the town of W—— which was carried on by a young man by the name of M——. He continued in the office some two years, at the expiration of which the office was sold out to another firm. The former proprietors of the establishment immediately purchased another office in the interior of the State and the young man wishing to finish his trade with those he had commenced with immediately left, and joined his old employers. Time rolled on, and his apprenticeship was finished, when he returned home. There he meets his old friends and former associates and particularly a young lady to whom he was very much attached. His visits were very often and in less than a year they were engaged to get married.

He in the meantime had purchased a printing office, and was publishing a weekly paper, and by applying himself closely to the office, and many friends, and as is the case in publishing a paper, some enemies. Those who were his enemies had sought every means within their power to injure him, but in spite of all they could do, he still prospered in business.

But although he was engaged, some of the ladies of the place, who had set themselves up as aristocracy, sought an interview with the young lady's mother, and by falsehoods and misrepresentations, succeeded in winning the unsuspected parent over to their side, and by her interference with her daughter, the marriage was broken off.

This was more than the young man could stand and at the end of the volume, he discontinued the publication of the paper, and left for parts unknown.

Years rolled on, we find the young printer a successful lawyer, residing in the city of New Orleans. He had there gained a name that will ever stand, not only being an influential member of the bar, but a respectable and honored citizen of the "Crescent City."

As this young lawyer was sitting in his office one afternoon, reading, he was interrupted by a gentle rap on the door. The lawyer answered the knock with his pleasant "come in." The door opened, and the figure of a female entered. She seemed about thirty years of age; she had been one of the most handsome of her sex, although time has cast its shadow over the freshness of her features.

"Are you not a lawyer?" she enquired in sweet musical voice.

"I have the honor to belong to that profession," replied he.

"I have a case I would be happy to have you attend to if you will do so," she added blushing.

"What is the tenor of it?"

"It is a divorce case. My husband, shortly after our marriage, took to drinking very hard and having squandered all our means, has now abandoned me altogether, and I am forced to take in sewing to support myself and child."

"I will do what I can for you madam, and I think there will be difficulty in obtaining one."

"The lady gave him her name as Mrs. Young, and said she was boarding with a friend at number — Chesnut street, and then left the office.

After she had gone, the thought occurred to him that he had seen the face before and the more he thought of it the more he was convinced that such was the case, and to satisfy his curiosity he resolved to visit her the following day. The next afternoon he called at — Chesnut street; and found the person he was in search of sitting in a very nicely finished apartment with a sweet, rosy checked boy by her side.

After talking on the different topics of the day he ventured to ask her if she was a native of the State.

"No, sir, I was in Virginia, and resided there till shortly after my marriage" she answered.

"Did you not at one time reside in the village of M——?"

"I resided there several years, said the lady, as she scrutinized the features of the lawyer.