

difficulties of spelling and pronunciation, or dabbled both fingers and copybook with ink in her endeavour to shape her letters properly. It was with difficulty that Ruth could persuade her to leave her studies and take exercise; and so great was the change from the free, open life which she had hitherto led, that it began to tell upon her, the bright colour in her face paled, and the bright eyes became heavy.

A letter announcing her father's intended return, with an order for Abraham to meet him at Skirley, broke the spell, and all that day she wandered restlessly about the house, unable to settle to her books, and speculating uneasily as to what "Dad" would say to her new studies.

"Perhaps he won't like it, Ruth," she would say. "I don't think he cares for learned people; but then, I'm not learned yet. You do think I am getting on though, don't you, Ruth, dear?"

"Indeed I do, Miss Stella; I think it is quite wonderful what you have done in the last two weeks. I believe you will turn out very clever if you will only keep to your books, and have somebody who understands teaching to help you."

"Nobody could help me like you do; but oh! I do so wonder what Dad will say. Will he be pleased, or will he be angry? Do you know, Ruth, I am half afraid to tell him."

Ruth pondered a minute, and then said, "I think you ought to tell him yourself, Miss Stella, or I would offer to do it for you, only your father will like to hear it from yourself first. I will speak afterwards if there is need."

Mr. Atherfield missed the boisterous welcome which Stella had always accorded to him, but he was conscious as she clung to him, that there was more of depth in the quieter greeting which she gave him.

"Why, what has my girl been doing to make her look so pale?" he exclaimed, as she lifted her head from

his shoulder, and gazed wistfully into his face, trying to read his mood, and to guess whether it was a happy moment to make her confession.

"I daresay you will say I have been very silly, Dad," she answered, as she rubbed her cheek against his arm. "Ruth has scolded me ever so many times; but I was so busy I could not go out; I have been learning to read. You won't mind, will you? I want so badly to be like other girls, and to know what they know."

Mr. Atherfield lifted her head and looked curiously and intently into her face; then he laid it back again on his shoulder with a heavy sigh.

"You're not angry, are you, father?"

"No, I'm not angry, only I don't think you will be any happier in being like other girls, or in knowing what they know, my dear; but I suppose these things must be. You're not a child now; and as you grow to be a woman you'll forget your Dad, and you are all he has got to love."

"Never, never, father! I shall love you to the end!" cried the child, flinging her arms about his neck, and kissing him passionately. "I've got nobody else to love but you—you and Ruth. She loves me too, but mother doesn't care. I shall love you always."

"Yes, child, love Ruth too; she is a good girl," said Mr. Atherfield.

"And Ruth says I must love mother; she won't allow me to say anything against her," continued Stella.

"Ruth is a good girl, different to others we have had here before, isn't she?"

"Oh, quite different! I feel as though I'd got a sister in Ruth," answered Stella with enthusiasm.

"Yes, she is a good girl. Do what Ruth tells you, only don't let any one drive your father out of your heart; never forget, Stella, you are all I've got to love."

A little later, when Ruth entered the room with the lamp, Mr. Atherfield spoke to her—