

Maria was again at a loss what to think of the actual situation of a lady whom the world considered so enviable and so happy. She, like others, had heard whisperings that all was not so pleasant in Mr. Ainsworth's establishment as it looked on the surface; she, like others, had heard that the lady was not exactly what had been expected of her, in her private habits; but these reports had not lessened the gratitude of the poor dress-maker, for the kindness received at her hands; and her own circumstances requiring that she should make some change in her mode of living, she had chosen to offer her services to Mrs. Ainsworth in preference to any other person.

"My poor mother," said she, after entering upon her own story, "is, I fear, beyond all hope. I have tried my utmost to maintain her by my work, but her habits have driven away all my best friends. I am now determined to adopt a different plan—to leave her to herself. It seems a hard thing for a child to do, yet I am supported by the advice of an excellent gentleman who has taken great pains in that part of the town where we live, and been the means, under Providence, of saving many a poor family from ruin. The person my mother married for her second husband, I have already said, is a hard man; but I must do him the justice to add, that he has come forward on this occasion, and agreed to join with me in her support, each of us supplying a weekly sum out of our earnings, so that she will have no need to suffer, unless she brings distress upon herself. And now, ma'am, if you should want a person in the capacity I have mentioned, you will find no one more anxious to serve you faithfully than myself."

The offer was a tempting one to Isabel, for she had keenly felt the privation of having no longer an attendant upon her person, no one whose undivided attentions she could command as a right. Her authority, as the mistress of the house, was, however, so entirely nominal, that she could only refer Maria to Mr. Ainsworth, and she did this without the slightest hope that her wishes would be complied with.

Merely considered as her wishes, it is more than probable they would not; but it so happened that he had already been looking out for a trustworthy and economical person, to fill the station for which Maria had offered herself. Arrangements were therefore soon entered into, by which the poor dress-maker became a member of Mr. Ainsworth's family, and her mistress had then the advantage of proving how superior is a faithful, to a flattering servant. Dutiful, and devoted, as Maria was, to the interests of her mistress, in one point she proved unflinching; and it is probable that the unassailable integrity of this simple girl, had more effect upon the unfatuated being over whom she watched, than all the reproaches and severity of her equals in rank and station.

It was, however, not the resolution of a moment with Isabel, which saved her from ruin. It was the yearning of a wounded spirit after better things, which often proved too weak for the conflict of the day. It was a recurrence again and again to those aspirations of the soul, which all, except the utterly depraved, at times experience. It was a determination so often violated, so often shaken, that no forbearance, but that of the Giver of all holy desires, could have received again to the bosom of mercy, the weak and erring wanderer who strayed so perversely from the path of peace.

In addition to the watchful eye of her faithful attendant, Isabel had the reproachful looks of her adopted child to meet, whenever she transgressed the rule this child had laid down for her; and fertile as Matilda was in finding excuses for herself, she found none for deviations which to her appeared as gross, as they were wholly unaccountable. Thus the force and simplicity of her expressions, whenever she spoke the language of condemnation on this subject, were such as to make her mother shrink before her; while her best, and strongest resolutions were often formed by the bed-side of the suffering child.

Sad would it be, however, and fatal to our best interests, if our good resolutions were left entirely to our own strength. There is a mighty power which may often be seen at work around us, removing obstacles, making duties easier, and raising up barriers to protect us from temptation and danger.

Isabel discovered, in her growing intimacy with the neglected being, whose situation claimed her utmost tenderness, that she had to do with a more than ordinarily gifted mind, whose latent powers, existing without the means of exercise, afforded a sufficient cause for much of that irritability and discontent for which Matilda had hitherto been more blamed than pitied. One talent, which she possessed in a more than common degree, was a genius for music. It not only soothed her ruffled temper, but exercised so great a power over her whole frame, that the violence of her

bodily sufferings became subdued under its influence, while her whole being was so changed, that a new existence seemed to dawn upon her.

Isabel had never regretted so much as on making this discovery, that indolence had prevented her cultivating to a greater extent her own taste for music. Still she knew enough to please Matilda; and when she first conceived the idea, and proposed to the listless and unoccupied girl to become her teacher on the piano, it would have been difficult to say which of the two, the mother or the daughter, was the most happy. It seemed as if, to the poor child, there was an actual expansion of being in the mere thought—so vacant had been the long hours of her lonely life, so destitute of melody the chamber in which her young spirit had pined and fretted like a captive bird. The dry routine of learning in its least attractive form, had been sometimes tried upon Matilda by her sisters, and on every occasion had been pronounced entirely through her own perverseness, to be a total failure. She was in fact, considered as incompetent, though her countenance, and her occasional remarks, were strongly contradictory of this assertion. She now began to show, however, of how much her character was capable, how trifling was her estimate of difficulties when a sufficient end was to be attained, and how much her spirit could rise above the sufferings under which it had been accustomed to sink, when occupation was afforded to the faculties of her mind.

In the anticipated pleasure of teaching the impatient child the only thing she had yet evinced an inclination to learn, Mrs. Ainsworth was, however, disappointed; for how to teach music without an instrument, and how to procure one were questions of paramount difficulty to solve; nor was it until repeated applications for the necessary sum had been denied, that she clearly saw, and bitterly regretted, the folly of having spent her own money as she had done—in personal—nay, worse—in bodily gratification. A little less of this indulgence, for the last few years of her life, would now have enabled her to rouse into cheerful and healthy exercise, the powers of a mind, which nothing but adverse circumstances could have depressed; and yet in consequence of her lavish and fruitless expenditure upon the body, she must see this young mind cast down, repining, hopeless, and unoccupied.

Isabel felt daily more and more the distress in which her long established habits of selfish indulgence had involved her; but she felt at the same time, what was in some measure a new sensation with her, that her present object was a good one; and she determined, if it were possible, to overcome every obstacle which stood in the way of its accomplishment, and for this purpose she ventured to renew her application to her husband.

Mr. Ainsworth could understand the difference between vice and virtue, so far as vice was allowed to be wasteful and extravagant, virtue decent and saving; but how to understand the claims of his wife when she had no object in view beyond that of imparting happiness to an obscure and profitless individual, or of elevating an humble fellow-being in the scale of moral agency, was more than could be expected of a man like him; and the refusal he so often repeated, was prompted more by a conviction of the extreme unreasonableness of the demand, than by any decided feeling of unkindness.

What then was left for Isabel to do? She applied to Miss Ainsworth. She even condescended to bargain with her for the price of many household luxuries, which she proposed for the future to deny herself. Miss Ainsworth, however, had as little understanding of the case as her father, and she replied with blank astonishment—"if you have no need for these things, and don't intend to take them, why should I pay you for them? It is a principle with us never to take what is unnecessary."

Poor Isabel! she was on the point of yielding to her natural feelings of despondency, when suddenly recollecting her jewels, she exclaimed—"Never more shall this person, so unattractive, so degraded, be decked with costly ornaments as it has been. It is for me to shrink from observation, not to court the gaze of others."

The alternative which thus presented itself was soon acted upon. In the absence of Mr. Ainsworth, a piano was purchased, and placed in Matilda's room; and though the disapprobation with which this daring act of extravagance was regarded by the master of the house, was by no means trifling, Isabel was more than rewarded for the reproaches she had to endure, by the uncontrollable joy of the delighted girl.

Lessons on the piano were now regularly commenced, and though the process of learning music is a very different one from that of practising it when learned, it afforded to the mother and