

displaced, and converted to her own use, that she felt glad she had not, according to her first intention, purposely left her money at home for that morning.

With the dearly-bought treasure, then, they proceeded in search of the street to which Maria had directed them, and which, but for their ignorance of London, they would scarcely have had the resolution to enter. The house too, was so little inviting, that they retreated from the door to look for some other No. 3, before they had the courage to knock. They did knock, however, at last, and it seemed to them, as the sound jarred upon their ears, that every inhabitant of that wretched street was looking upon them. A little dirty girl came to the door, and when they told her they wanted the dressmaker who lived on the third story, she tripped up stairs before them, evidently proud of pointing out the way to such illustrious guests.

The door of the third story was closed, and they knocked twice before a female voice answered from within, "Come in." They did so, and a scene presented itself which might have driven from a harder heart than Isabel's all satisfaction in having purchased an unnecessary dress. The miserable occupant of that dark chamber—the cheap dressmaker, whose daily and often nightly labour supplied her only means of subsistence, had been ill for three weeks; so ill, that bundles of work, untouched, lay heaped upon a table by the small window, which looked out upon an interminable range of black chimneys and tiles. She sat in a low chair, evidently too feeble to rise, beside a fire-place which contained only a few cinders. Her bed, if such it might be called, was in disorder for she had no strength to make it; and there were traces of recent tumult and confusion in the room, which her helpless situation was altogether insufficient to account for. On discovering who were her visitors, a deep crimson spread itself over her face; and, such was her weakness, confusion, and distress, that drops of perspiration were actually forced out upon her forehead.

With the kindness which, in a latent and inactive form, really belonged to her character, Isabel began to question the poor invalid as to the nature of her illness; when, as the tones of an unknown voice had roused some slumbering demon in the adjoining apartment, strange sounds, as horrible as they were strange to ears refined, again suffused the sufferer's face with crimson; and looking round, she saw the door forced open by a spectacle, which however familiar it might be to her, was worse than appalling to her guests.

It was the Mother of Maria—an aged woman, who for many years had been the victim of intemperance, and whose constant cravings drained away the produce of her daughter's industry. In health and strength, Maria had been able to conceal the wages of her labour from this woman's rapacity; but since her illness, every corner of the room had been searched, and even her own dress had that very morning been violently torn, to obtain the last shilling she possessed.

Attracted on the one hand by a strong sense of sympathy, repelled on the other by disgust and horror, Isabel remained as if rooted to the spot. She was unwilling to leave that helpless girl with her sufferings unrelieved; and yet there stood that frightful woman, grinning with distorted laughter, and beckoning to her as if to share the horrors of her den.

The mother of the young dressmaker had just sense enough to perceive the character of her daughter's guests, and consequently to make her accustomed demand for money, which, being promptly granted, partly through fear, and partly through disgust, she retreated into the inner apartment, leaving her daughter more at liberty to pursue her melancholy story. It was a short and simple one.

"Was your mother always addicted to these habits?" asked Isabel.

"Oh! no," replied Maria; "she was once the best of mothers; and as I grew up, we would have been able to do very well, but she married again, and her husband was a hard man, and stunted her of many things she had been used to. I believe he meant well, but they got to harsh words one against another, and so my mother took to drinking to drive away her grief, and then he left her. Indeed, no man could live with us, as we live now. My mother has had nothing for the last three days but gin; and I assure you ma'am, I have not a penny, nor a morsel of bread in the house. I had been thinking this morning, that if nobody came to help me, I should hardly live to see another day; and now I thank God for sending you, for I am sure there is goodness in your face."

In what way can I help you most?" said Isabel.

Why ma'am, if I might make so bold—you see those heaps

of work—it is a great thing to ask; but if I could hire a person for a week to do it for me, I should just keep my custom and all would be well."

Isabel again asked Betsy for her purse, but was interrupted by the young woman intreating that she would not leave the money with her. "I am not strong enough to keep it yet," said she, looking round with a suspicious glance at the door. "She would get it all from me; but if your maid would just step in at No. 5, there is a neighbour there who would take the work, and you could settle with her about the payment."

"But you have nothing to eat," said Isabel, "and you must be starving."

"I have no appetite," replied the poor girl; "yet if you would be so good as to leave a shilling with this woman and ask her to come and make me a cup of tea, it would be the greatest kindness."

Gladly did Isabel comply with this request. Not so her maid; for though Betsy considered her money well lent in the purchase of a handsome dress, she was far from being satisfied with her lady's having undertaken, at her expense, the relief of a case, as disgraceful in Betsy's opinion as it seemed likely to be interminable in its demands. It was on this occasion, therefore, that for the first time in her life, she began to evince openly a spirit of discontent towards her mistress, and of opposition to her wishes. A few words of impertinence which she let fall, at once awakened Isabel's surprise and indignation; but the sudden recollection that she could not, if she would, dismiss this woman from her service—that she was, in a manner, completely in her power—brought with it a violent revulsion of the proud feeling which had rushed to her heart, and sinking into a chair as soon as she regained her own apartment, she covered her face with both her hands, and gave way to a burst of agony and shame.

How many tears had Isabel lately shed unnoticed by any human being! How often had her maid—her once kind and attentive maid—passed in and out, and found her weeping, and spoken not one word of soothing! How often had her husband left her locked in her dressing-room, and gone forth on his own avocations, believing her to be one of the happiest of women! For Mr. Answorth reasoned thus: "All women wish to be married—consequently all are happy when they are married;" and for certain reasons, perhaps, best understood by himself, he thought his wife had a good right to be happier than most. Indeed, Mr. Answorth was altogether well satisfied with the matrimonial bargain he had made. His wife had money, she was of respectable parentage, looked well at the head of his table, and moreover was extremely quiet. He never had liked talking women. Women who had opinions, almost always had wishes—and then they got to reasoning about the expediency of laying out money. He eschewed such women they were great evils to society, and wasted men's money.

Poor Isabel! How little did her husband know, while pursuing these reflections on his daily walks to the city, of the hidden fire that burned within the heart he deemed so quiet—so contented with its lot.

Alarmed beyond measure at the first symptoms of rebellion in her maid, though in themselves extremely slight, and not soon repeated, Isabel stooped, as all most stoop who are determined to do wrong, to purchase the compliance she could not otherwise command; and this she easily accomplished by gifts from her own store of superfluous treasures. Still however, the impression on her mind was the same and that she had no longer a friend in her maid; and though appearances on the part of the quondam favourite became more favourable in proportion to the benefits she received, there was something different in her manner—something less respectful and submissive—which induced her mistress to contemplate the expediency of finding a confidant elsewhere. Her choice fell upon the young dressmaker, and for this purpose she ventured out in search of her obscure dwelling, unaccompanied by any witness.

Maria had now recovered her accustomed health. Her apartment, kept in order by her own industrious hand, no longer wore the aspect of wretchedness it had once presented; and her mother, recently recovered from a long fit of intoxication, was sitting, dejected and feeble, in a low chair beside the fire.

Isabel had no definite reason to allege for making this visit. It was therefore received as one of pure kindness, and the gratitude of the poor girl was proportioned to the rarity with which such visits were made to her.

Isabel was by no means at ease with her own conscience; she was therefore more susceptible of shame, at having so pure a mo-