

girl, who sat beside him, endeavouring to supply her mother's place, a sort of sacredness, which he was not yet so hardened as to violate.

"Mary," said he, "do you always eat that brown bread for your breakfast, which I saw you eating this morning?"

"Yes, always."

"And have you always those wooden bowls for your milk?"

"Oh, yes; we like them better, because they never break."

"And does your mother always eat the brown bread and milk with you?"

"Yes, when she eats any thing; but she sometimes goes almost without a breakfast at all."

"Do you think she likes the bread and milk?"

"I don't think she does like it much; no more did Henry and Isabel at first, but we are all getting to like it now, and mamma is always trying to persuade us to eat the simplest and cheapest food, because she says we shall have to do so some time, and it is better to do it now while we are young, and healthy, and happy, than to wait until we are forced, and may neither be strong, nor so well able to eat coarse bread.

Frederick now recollected that his children never dined with him, and the idea struck him, that perhaps they lived through the day on the same hard and homely fare. He recollected that his wife generally made excuses when she sat down with him, that she had previously dined with the children, thinking it best to keep order amongst them by her presence; and he recollected, too, that his own little board was always spread with dainties—with the game that was in season, or with some choice vivands cooked so as to tempt his falling appetite, and always served up in such a manner, as to avoid reminding him that he was not a gentleman still.

"And these poor creatures," said he to himself, "have all the while been living like the paupers of the parish!" He could scarcely swallow the morsel he had put into his mouth; and if ever man loathed himself, he did so at that moment. By way of diverting his thoughts, however, he made an effort to change the subject of consideration.

"Who are you working for, Mary?" he inquired.

The child blushed deeply, while she answered, "I am making a shirt."

Her father had asked the question with the most perfect indifference as to any answer she might make; but her embarrassment awakened his curiosity, and he went on.

"Is it for me, or your brother?"

"Oh, it is too large for George," said Mary, endeavouring to smile away her blushes.

"It is for me then, I suppose. Why don't you answer me, Mary?"

The child burst into tears. "It is a secret," said she; "my mother charged me not to bring this work into the room where you were; but I felt sure you would never notice it, and so I disobeyed her commands, and now she has hardly been gone an hour, and my judgment has come upon me."

"But what secret can you have, Mary, about a shirt?"

"Oh, don't ask me father. I dare not tell a falsehood, and yet I must not betray my mother's secret; she has kept it so long."

"Poor child!" said Frederick, in a voice so kind, and so unusual, that Mary's little heart was melted; and looking up through her tears, she said; "I am sure you would like my mother better if you knew, and yet I hardly dare tell you."

"Well, Mary, I will leave it to you. If your mother has ever charged you not to tell me—if you have promised

her you would not—I cannot urge upon you to break your trust."

"No, she has never charged me at all; she has never mentioned the subject directly, but she has been so studious to keep it from you, that we all know her wishes; and ought to regard them as much as her word."

"Certainly you ought; but in this instance I do beg you will tell me the whole truth; it may be of the utmost consequence, both to your mother and to me."

Mary looked anxiously at her father, and began her story.

"Well, then, we take in a good deal of plain sewing; my mother, and Eleanor, and Isabel, and I. We all get up at five every morning, and a shirt is sometimes made before you breakfast."

"And do you this for pay?"

"Oh, yes; and mamma tells us all about the house-keeping, and how much it saves to eat such and such things, and to wear our common frocks; until sometimes she smiles, and says, she is afraid we shall become lovers of money."

"And what do you do with all that you make and all that you save?"

"Why, first, there is George's schooling, about which mamma thinks a great deal, and all the house-keeping; and Isabel's doctor's bill, and the wages of the servant—all these take a great deal of money to pay, and there is also another thing which mamma keeps a great secret."

Frederick was afraid to pursue the subject any farther; but the child having once plunged into her mother's secrets, thought it just as well to tell the whole as part. She therefore went on:—

"I am sure you love mamma, as we all do, when I tell you, that for years she has been trying to afford to keep a pony for you, she persists in it, that you are not in good health, though we all think you are a great deal better than she is herself. Yet she says it would do you as much good to ride out every day; that it is a hard thing for a man who has been accustomed to riding to do without a horse; that it would give you more respectability in the neighbourhood, and many other things that we don't quite understand. However, we all work for this great object, and last winter we had nearly accomplished it, when there came in at Christmas; that long, long bill from the cruel wine merchant, for things which we never knew of, but which she said must be paid for before we thought of the pony. I shall never forget how she cried that day. Indeed, we all cried to see her so distressed, and the worst was, poor George would not go to school for a whole quarter, because there was not money to pay his master and the wine merchant too; so he grew idle and mischievous, and lost more than he had gained for three months before."

And thus the child went on in her simplicity, disclosing more and more of the details of her mother's economy, till her dreaming that every word she uttered went like a dagger to her father's heart. He had dropped his knife upon his plate, his coffee remained untasted, and he sat with his elbow resting on the table, and his forehead shaded by his hand, apparently occupied with the pattern of a napkin which he was folding and unfolding, wholly unconscious of what he did.

"You may take away those things, Mary," he said, when he felt that he could bear no more. And as soon as the child had disappeared, he rushed into his own room, and bolted the door.

"Have I then been such a wretch!" he exclaimed. "Yes, I have eaten my children's bread, and reduced my wife to the grade of a common beggar! a village sempstress! a taker in of plain work! She who once was so elegant in