

THE SEAMSTRESS.

"Few, save the poor, feel for the poor;

The rich know not how hard

It is to be of needful food

And needful rest debarred.

Their paths are paths of plenteousness;

They sleep on silk and down;

They never think how wearily

The weary head lies down.

They never by the window sit,

And see the gay pass by,

Yet take their weary work again,

And with a mournful eye."

L. E. L.

However fine and elevated, in a sentimental point of view, may have been the poetry of this gifted writer, we think we have never seen any thing from this source that ought to give a better opinion of her than the little ballad from which the above verses are taken.

They show that the accomplished authoress possessed, not merely a

knowledge of the dreamy ideal wants of human beings, but the more pressing and homely ones, which the fastidious and poetical are often the last to appreciate. The sufferings of poverty are not confined to those of the common, squalid, every day inured to hardships, and ready, with open hand, to receive charity, let it come to them as it will.

There is another class on whom it presses with still heavier power--the generous, the decent, the self-respecting, who have struggled with their lot in silence, "bearing all things, hoping all things," and willing to endure all things, rather than breathe a word of complaint, or to acknowledge, even to themselves, that their own efforts will not be sufficient for their own necessities.

Pause with me a while at the door of yonder room, whose small window overlooks a little court below. It is inhabited by a widow and her daughter, dependent entirely on the labors of the needle, and those other slight and precarious resources, which are all that remain to woman when left to struggle her way through the world alone. It contains all their small earthly store, and there is scarce an article of its little stock of furniture that has not been thought of, and toiled for, and its price calculated over and over again, before every thing could be made right for its purchase. Every article is arranged with the utmost neatness and care; nor is the most costly furniture of a fashionable parlor more sedulously guarded from a scratch or a rub, than is that brightly-varnished bureau, and that neat cherry tea table and bedstead. The floor, too, boasted once a carpet; but old Time has been busy with it, picking a hole here, and making a thin place there; and

though the old fellow has been followed up by the most indefatigable zeal in darning, the marks of his mischievous fingers are too plain to be mistaken. It is true, a kindly neighbor has given a bit of faded baize, which has been neatly clipped and bound, and spread down over an entirely unmanageable hole in front of the fireplace; and other places have been repaired with pieces of different colors; and yet, after all, it is evident that the poor carpet is not long for this world.

But the best face is put upon every thing. The little cupboard in the corner, that contains a few china cups, and one or two antiquated silver spoons, relics of better days, is arranged with jealous neatness, and the white muslin window curtain, albeit the muslin be old, has been carefully whitened and starched, and smoothly ironed, and put up with exact precision; and on the bureau, covered by a snowy cloth, are arranged a few books and other memorials of former times, and a faded miniature, which, though it have little about it to interest a stranger, is more precious to the poor widow than every thing besides.

Mrs. Ames is seated in her rocking chair, supported by a pillow, and busy cutting out work, while her daughter, a slender, sickly-looking girl, is sitting by the window, intent on some fine stitching.

Mrs. Ames, in former days, was the wife of a respectable merchant, and the mother of an affectionate family. But evil fortune had followed her with a steadiness that seemed like the stern decree of some adverse fate rather than the ordinary dealings of a merciful Providence. First came a

heavy run of losses in business; then long and expensive sickness in the family, and the death of children. Then there was the selling of the large house and elegant furniture, to retire to a humbler style of living; and finally, the sale of all the property, with the view of quitting the shores of a native land, and commencing life again in a new one. But scarcely had the exiled family found themselves in the port of a foreign land, when the father was suddenly smitten down by the hand of death, and his lonely grave made in a land of strangers. The widow, broken-hearted and discouraged, had still a wearisome journey before her ere she could reach any whom she could consider as her friends. With her two daughters, entirely unattended, and with her finances impoverished by detention and sickness, she performed the tedious journey.

Arrived at the place of her destination, she found herself not only without immediate resources, but considerably in debt to one who had advanced money for her travelling expenses. With silent endurance she met the necessities of her situation. Her daughters, delicately reared, and hitherto carefully educated, were placed out to service, and Mrs. Ames sought for employment as a nurse. The younger child fell sick, and the hard earnings of the mother were all exhausted in the care of her; and though she recovered in part, she was declared by her physician to be the victim of a disease which would never leave her till it terminated her life.

As soon, however, as her daughter was so far restored as not to need her immediate care, Mrs. Ames resumed her laborious employment. Scarcely had

she been able, in this way, to discharge the debts for her journey and to furnish the small room we have described, when the hand of disease was laid heavily on herself. Too resolute and persevering to give way to the first attacks of pain and weakness, she still continued her fatiguing employment till her system was entirely prostrated. Thus all possibility of pursuing her business was cut off, and nothing remained but what could be accomplished by her own and her daughter's dexterity at the needle. It is at this time we ask you to look in upon the mother and daughter.

Mrs. Ames is sitting up, the first time for a week, and even to-day she is scarcely fit to do so; but she remembers that the month is coming round, and her rent will soon be due; and in her feebleness she will stretch every nerve to meet her engagements with punctilious exactness.

Wearied at length with cutting out, and measuring, and drawing threads, she leans back in her chair, and her eye rests on the pale face of her daughter, who has been sitting for two hours intent on her stitching.

"Ellen, my child, your head aches; don't work so steadily."

"O, no, it don't ache much," said she, too conscious of looking very much tired. Poor girl! had she remained in the situation in which she was born, she would now have been skipping about, and enjoying life as other young girls of fifteen do; but now there is no choice of employments for her--no youthful companions--no visiting--no pleasant

walks in the fresh air. Evening and morning, it is all the same; headache or sideache, it is all one. She must hold on the same unvarying task--a wearisome thing for a girl of fifteen.

But see! the door opens, and Mrs. Ames's face brightens as her other daughter enters. Mary has become a domestic in a neighboring family, where her faithfulness and kindness of heart have caused her to be regarded more as a daughter and a sister than as a servant. "Here, mother, is your rent money," she exclaimed; "so do put up your work and rest a while. I can get enough to pay it next time before the month comes around again."

"Dear child, I do wish you would ever think to get any thing for yourself," said Mrs. Ames. "I cannot consent to use up all your earnings, as I have done lately, and all Ellen's too; you must have a new dress this spring, and that bonnet of yours is not decent any longer."

"O, no, mother! I have made over my blue calico, and you would be surprised to see how well it looks; and my best frock, when it is washed and darned, will answer some time longer. And then Mrs. Grant has given me a ribbon, and when my bonnet is whitened and trimmed it will look very well. And so," she added, "I brought you some wine this afternoon; you know the doctor says you need wine."

"Dear child, I want to see you take some comfort of your money

yourself."

"Well, I do take comfort of it, mother. It is more comfort to be able to help you than to wear all the finest dresses in the world."

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Two months from this dialogue found our little family still more straitened and perplexed. Mrs. Ames had been confined all the time with sickness, and the greater part of Ellen's time and strength was occupied with attending to her.

Very little sewing could the poor girl now do, in the broken intervals that remained to her; and the wages of Mary were not only used as fast as earned, but she anticipated two months in advance.

Mrs. Ames had been better for a day or two, and had been sitting up, exerting all her strength to finish a set of shirts which had been sent in to make. "The money for them will just pay our rent," sighed she; "and if we can do a little more this week----"

"Dear mother, you are so tired," said Ellen; "do lie down, and not worry any more till I come back."

Ellen went out, and passed on till she came to the door of an elegant house, whose damask and muslin window curtains indicated a fashionable

residence.

Mrs. Elmore was sitting in her splendidly-furnished parlor, and around her lay various fancy articles which two young girls were busily unrolling. "What a lovely pink scarf!" said one, throwing it over her shoulders and skipping before a mirror; while the other exclaimed, "Do look at these pocket handkerchiefs, mother! what elegant lace!"

"Well, girls," said Mrs. Elmore, "these handkerchiefs are a shameful piece of extravagance. I wonder you will insist on having such things."

"La, mamma, every body has such now; Laura Seymour has half a dozen that cost more than these, and her father is no richer than ours."

"Well," said Mrs. Elmore, "rich or not rich, it seems to make very little odds; we do not seem to have half as much money to spare as we did when we lived in the little house in Spring Street. What with new furnishing the house, and getting every thing you boys and girls say you must have, we are poorer, if any thing, than we were then."

"Ma'am, here is Mrs. Ames's girl come with some sewing," said the servant.

"Show her in," said Mrs. Elmore.

Ellen entered timidly, and handed her bundle of work to Mrs. Elmore, who

forthwith proceeded to a minute scrutiny of the articles; for she prided herself on being very particular as to her sewing. But, though the work had been executed by feeble hands and aching eyes, even Mrs. Elmore could detect no fault in it.

"Well, it is very prettily done," said she. "What does your mother charge?"

Ellen handed a neatly-folded bill which she had drawn for her mother. "I must say, I think your mother's prices are very high," said Mrs. Elmore, examining her nearly empty purse; "every thing is getting so dear that one hardly knows how to live." Ellen looked at the fancy articles, and glanced around the room with an air of innocent astonishment. "Ah," said Mrs. Elmore, "I dare say it seems to you as if persons in our situation had no need of economy; but, for my part, I feel the need of it more and more every day." As she spoke she handed Ellen the three dollars, which, though it was not a quarter the price of one of the handkerchiefs, was all that she and her sick mother could claim in the world.

"There," said she; "tell your mother I like her work very much, but I do not think I can afford to employ her, if I can find any one to work cheaper."

Now, Mrs. Elmore was not a hard-hearted woman, and if Ellen had come as a beggar to solicit help for her sick mother, Mrs. Elmore would have fitted out a basket of provisions, and sent a bottle of wine, and a

bundle of old clothes, and all the et cetera of such occasions; but the sight of a bill always aroused all the instinctive sharpness of her business-like education. She never had the dawning of an idea that it was her duty to pay any body any more than she could possibly help; nay, she had an indistinct notion that it was her duty as an economist to make every body take as little as possible. When she and her daughters lived in Spring Street, to which she had alluded, they used to spend the greater part of their time at home, and the family sewing was commonly done among themselves. But since they had moved into a large house, and set up a carriage, and addressed themselves to being genteel, the girls found that they had altogether too much to do to attend to their own sewing, much less to perform any for their father and brothers. And their mother found her hands abundantly full in overlooking her large house, in taking care of expensive furniture, and in superintending her increased train of servants. The sewing, therefore, was put out; and Mrs. Elmore felt it a duty to get it done the cheapest way she could. Nevertheless, Mrs. Elmore was too notable a lady, and her sons and daughters were altogether too fastidious as to the make and quality of their clothing, to admit the idea of its being done in any but the most complete and perfect manner.

Mrs. Elmore never accused herself of want of charity for the poor; but she had never considered that the best class of the poor are those who never ask charity. She did not consider that, by paying liberally those who were honestly and independently struggling for themselves, she was really doing a greater charity than by giving indiscriminately to a

dozen applicants.

"Don't you think, mother, she says we charge too high for this work!" said Ellen, when she returned. "I am sure she did not know how much work we put in those shirts. She says she cannot give us any more work; she must look out for somebody that will do it cheaper. I do not see how it is that people who live in such houses, and have so many beautiful things, can feel that they cannot afford to pay for what costs us so much."

"Well, child, they are more apt to feel so than people who live plainer."

"Well, I am sure," said Ellen, "we cannot afford to spend so much time as we have over these shirts for less money."

"Never mind, my dear," said the mother, soothingly; "here is a bundle of work that another lady has sent in, and if we get it done, we shall have enough for our rent, and something over to buy bread with."

It is needless to carry our readers over all the process of cutting, and fitting, and gathering, and stitching, necessary in making up six fine shirts. Suffice it to say that on Saturday evening all but one were finished, and Ellen proceeded to carry them home, promising to bring the remaining one on Tuesday morning. The lady examined the work, and gave Ellen the money; but on Tuesday, when the child came with the remaining

work, she found her in great ill humor. Upon reëxamining the shirts, she had discovered that in some important respects they differed from directions she meant to have given, and supposed she had given; and, accordingly, she vented her displeasure on Ellen.

"Why didn't you make these shirts as I told you?" said she, sharply.

"We did," said Ellen, mildly; "mother measured by the pattern every part, and cut them herself."

"Your mother must be a fool, then, to make such a piece of work. I wish you would just take them back and alter them over;" and the lady proceeded with the directions, of which neither Ellen nor her mother till then had had any intimation. Unused to such language, the frightened Ellen took up her work and slowly walked homeward.

"O, dear, how my head does ache!" thought she to herself; "and poor mother! she said this morning she was afraid another of her sick turns was coming on, and we have all this work to pull out and do over."

"See here, mother," said she, with a disconsolate air, as she entered the room; "Mrs. Rudd says, take out all the bosoms, and rip off all the collars, and fix them quite another way. She says they are not like the pattern she sent; but she must have forgotten, for here it is. Look, mother; it is exactly as we made them."

"Well, my child, carry back the pattern, and show her that it is so."

"Indeed, mother, she spoke so cross to me, and looked at me so, that I do not feel as if I could go back."

"I will go for you, then," said the kind Maria Stephens, who had been sitting with Mrs. Ames while Ellen was out. "I will take the pattern and shirts, and tell her the exact truth about it. I am not afraid of her."

Maria Stephens was a tailoress, who rented a room on the same floor with Mrs. Ames, a cheerful, resolute, go-forward little body, and ready always to give a helping hand to a neighbor in trouble. So she took the pattern and shirts, and set out on her mission.

But poor Mrs. Ames, though she professed to take a right view of the matter, and was very earnest in showing Ellen why she ought not to distress herself about it, still felt a shivering sense of the hardness and unkindness of the world coming over her. The bitter tears would spring to her eyes, in spite of every effort to suppress them, as she sat mournfully gazing on the little faded miniature before mentioned.

"When he was alive, I never knew what poverty or trouble was," was the thought that often passed through her mind. And how many a poor forlorn one has thought the same!

Poor Mrs. Ames was confined to her bed for most of that week. The doctor gave absolute directions that she should do nothing, and keep entirely quiet--a direction very sensible indeed in the chamber of ease and

competence, but hard to be observed in poverty and want.

What pains the kind and dutiful Ellen took that week to make her mother feel easy! How often she replied to her anxious questions, "that she was quite well," or "that her head did not ache much!" and by various other evasive expedients the child tried to persuade herself that she was speaking the truth. And during the times her mother slept, in the day or evening, she accomplished one or two pieces of plain work, with the price of which she expected to surprise her mother.

It was towards evening when Ellen took her finished work to the elegant dwelling of Mrs. Page. "I shall get a dollar for this," said she; "enough to pay for mother's wine and medicine."

"This work is done very neatly," said Mrs. Page, "and here is some more I should like to have finished in the same way."

Ellen looked up wistfully, hoping Mrs. Page was going to pay her for the last work. But Mrs. Page was only searching a drawer for a pattern, which she put into Ellen's hands, and after explaining how she wanted her work done, dismissed her without saying a word about the expected dollar.

Poor Ellen tried two or three times, as she was going out, to turn round and ask for it; but before she could decide what to say, she found herself in the street.

Mrs. Page was an amiable, kind-hearted woman, but one who was so used to large sums of money that she did not realize how great an affair a single dollar might seem to other persons. For this reason, when Ellen had worked incessantly at the new work put into her hands, that she might get the money for all together, she again disappointed her in the payment.

"I'll send the money round to-morrow," said she, when Ellen at last found courage to ask for it. But to-morrow came, and Ellen was forgotten; and it was not till after one or two applications more that the small sum was paid.

But these sketches are already long enough, and let us hasten to close them. Mrs. Ames found liberal friends, who could appreciate and honor her integrity of principle and loveliness of character, and by their assistance she was raised to see more prosperous days; and she, and the delicate Ellen, and warm-hearted Mary were enabled to have a home and fireside of their own, and to enjoy something like the return of their former prosperity.

We have given these sketches, drawn from real life, because we think there is in general too little consideration on the part of those who give employment to those in situations like the widow here described. The giving of employment is a very important branch of charity, inasmuch as it assists that class of the poor who are the most deserving. It

should be looked on in this light, and the arrangements of a family be so made that a suitable compensation can be given, and prompt and cheerful payment be made, without the dread of transgressing the rules of economy.

It is better to teach our daughters to do without expensive ornaments or fashionable elegances; better even to deny ourselves the pleasure of large donations or direct subscriptions to public charities, rather than to curtail the small stipend of her whose "candle goeth not out by night," and who labors with her needle for herself and the helpless dear ones dependent on her exertions.