

A woman's life may truly be said to have its commencement in betrothal. Before then she is a child, and the days of her childhood are usually spent without any form of restraint whatever. Most of her time, even if she be the daughter of quite well-to-do people, is often spent playing in the streets, where she learns much that is evil and little that is good. The one great reason which many parents give who wish to put their children to school is, "to keep her out of the street, where she plays in the dirt and learns bad language." But whether she goes to school or not the life of a little girl except in school hours is a perfectly free, untrained life in which she learns no morality, not even obedience to her parents. If she does obey them it is from abject fear of punishment, when disobedience would inevitably mean a severe beating. Between the ages of ten to fifteen, usually about twelve and often earlier, the little girl is betrothed and then confinement to the house begins. In one hour her life is changed, no more playing about in the street and acting upon the impulse of her own sweet will, no more for her the child's delight of spending her millième or two at the costermonger's cart and then sitting in the gutter to eat her purchase with face and hands begrimed with dirt; no more for her the joy of paddling in the mud by the street pump, and climbing and clambering about wherever she can with difficulty get. No, she is betrothed now, and her childhood and girlhood are over. Instead of