



CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST ESSAY.

MABEL was already there when she arrived, and the two set to work in earnest, buttering great piles of tea-cakes and toasted muffins, which were all set forth in tempting array when the children began to appear at the door, looking in with some bashfulness at first, but plucking up courage after sundry peeps at the good things, they came trooping in, in goodly numbers—a motly throng, ranging in point of age, from about seven to fourteen, and in point of condition, from ragged and torn urchins, with dirty faces and uncombed hair, to mill-girls of various ages with shining faces, and ribbons of different degrees of dirtiness in their crimped and frizzled tresses.

They were led by Mabel into another apartment, where accommodation was provided for those who desired to improve their toilet with such additions as soap and water and a certain amount of vigorous brushing could afford. These arrangements completed, they were marshalled into the largest room the house contained, where it was found that, although an apartment of no mean dimensions, it was still