

"What church do you go to?"

"Emmer can't go out, poor dear——"

"And Emmer wouldn't if she could," sneered Mrs. Gusterson. "What's the good o' goin' to church when you're poor? You only get shoved about and looked down on. A lot of fine folks with their smart clothes, and their smart prayer-books, settin' on cushions, and you a-settin' on them cold, hard benches."

"Well, Emmer," said Mrs. Brown, with a laugh, "I've got a seat right agin' the stove. But what do it matter," she added, seriously, "whether you're rich or poor when you're in church? Everybody has got the same God, and Christ didn't die for one more than another. Poor folks, I fancy, is best off at church. There's so much about them in the Bible. Pr'aps heaven don't seem so nice to them that have plenty of money, as it do to us. They've got so many things to leave behind them when they die. And yet I can't think that. What's the things rich folk has got to them you read about in Revelation? I like to hear that read out in church, sir—about the holy city and the voice of many waters. Seems as if the organ should be playing all the while. 'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.' That's the beautifullest book in the Bible, I think, sir."

As the old woman quavered the noble words which have comforted myriads of the down-stricken and down-trodden, with as near an approach to clerical tone as her piping voice could simulate, she hugged herself enjoyingly as if the scanty fire had suddenly burst out into yule-log blaze; and even Mrs. Gusterson looked up with a gleam of hopeful light glancing over her dreary eyes. But Mrs. Gusterson soon relapsed into grumpy gloom.

"Yes, that sounds werry nice," she said: "I wish I could say off Scriptur' like that. But we've got to live now, you know, Hanner."

"Well, ain't we livin' now, Emmer?" was Mrs. Brown's rejoinder, "and if dyin' means goin' to that, I don't see why you and me need fret ourselves."

From the disjointed autobiographical reminiscences which I afterwards managed to elicit from the two old women, I gathered that Mrs. Brown had had far more than Mrs. Gusterson to damp her spirits. The latter had never had the care which a poor woman's family brings upon her, and up to a very late period of her life had been in good practice as a charwoman. She spoke with regretful pride of the gin and beer she used to get, just as more aristocratical "reduced gentlewomen" speak of the mansions they have been obliged to give up, and the carriages they once rode in. Mrs. Brown, on the other hand, had had to fend for others as well as herself from the time she was eighteen. She had married then—a husband who had thrashed her before their married life was brought to a close by his tumbling drunk off a scaffold. She was left with a large family, some of whom