

The house place had a second wide window at the end looking on to the road; but passers-by were few and far between, and nearly all owned familiar faces at the date of this story, thirty-five years back.

In the early morning there were none to attract Susan's eyes from her work; and she was a little surprised when she heard the click of the gate, followed by the sound of footsteps on the causeway which led to the door.

## CHAPTER II.

## AN EARLY VISITOR



COUNTRY neighbours are not given to ceremony, but run in and out of each other's houses without a warning knock, so Susan Fowler was not surprised to see a visitor directly after hearing the sound of a footfall. A slatternly woman planted herself in the doorway, and leaned against the post as if preparing for a gossip.

"Eh, Susan," she exclaimed, "but you are *throng*. You never let grass grow under your feet. I hardly thought you'd have started yet, though I knew it was your wash morning. I got up as soon as you did, meaning to start myself, but I hardly know what to do for the best, it's so like rain. What do you think about it?"

"You may judge what I think by what I am doing," replied Susan, with a good-humoured smile. "It may rain or let it alone, but I mean to get my washing done."

"But I don't like having my clothes ready and then not be able to hang them out, so I'm whether or no to wash to-morrow instead."

Susan understood this remark perfectly. Ann Jackson was her next-door neighbour, and by no means a pleasant one in some respects. She put off every kind of household work to the last possible minute. She allowed pots, pans, and crockery to rust into holes, or get cracked and spoiled, for want of cleanliness and care, then borrowed her neighbours' belongings to make up for those she lacked.

"I shall be glad to lend you anything I have," she would say, when a doubtful look came on a tidy housewife's face, and she seemed unwilling to let some cherished chattel pass into Ann's keeping for a time.

Nobody doubted the woman's willingness, only as a quick-spoken neighbour at last told her—

"Your things are in such a muddle, Ann, that you have none worth borrowing, and turn about is fair, so I'll keep mine to myself till you have."

Washing day was Ann's evil day above all others; and though it was supposed to be the same as Susan's it was sure to be put off on the smallest excuse. If no real one presented itself Ann was sure to invent one, so her cottage was in a muddle with work that was *going to be done* from Monday morning to Saturday night.

"If the clothes are washed to-day," said Susan in answer to Ann's last remark, "they will be ready for hanging out the first thing to-morrow morning, if it should rain before then. They'll take no harm by waiting, if you rinse them well and leave them in clean water."

While Susan was speaking she went on working, soaping, rubbing, and wringing with wonderful quickness, for she had no machine to help, except the old-fashioned dolly tub, and cared for none. What a contrast there was between her appearance and that of her visitor, who stood idly wasting the precious time which should have been used for the comfort of her family.

Susan, though at work, was a picture of cleanliness. Ann, from the crown of her tousled head to her slipshod feet, was a dingy slattern, and her cottage, only a stone's throw distant, matched its mistress.