

CORRODING GOLD

CHAPTER I

ESTELLE

ESTELLE RODNEY had had a most discouraging day at her post in the Romsey Road Board School, Camberwell. The infants had seldom been denser, less malleable, or more tiresome. Some of them had cried, and some of them had slept for the greater part of the afternoon.

Estelle attributed this state of matters entirely to the lack of fresh air. She was excessively fond of it herself; but over-indulgence of her craze for ventilating the room in season and out of season had resulted in a crusade of Camberwell mothers against it, and these had driven their protests home so effectually that explicit instructions had been issued to Miss Rodney regarding the opening of the windows.

The personal hygiene of that section of Camberwell infants left much to be desired, and the mingled odours of the class-room were such that the moment it was emptied of its human swarm at half-past three on this particular afternoon Estelle threw all the windows open to their utmost extent. At the last one she paused, leaned her elbows for a moment on the wide sill, and looked out across the huddling roofs and spires, as if seeking some remote, almost impossible horizon.

There are parts of old Camberwell which are still beautiful, and which are relieved from dinginess by