

"She don't mean it, sir," interposed Mrs. Brown, "and I'm sure we're much obliged to you for coming. Mrs. Gusterson is werry bad with the roomatics—ain't ye, Emmer?"

"Speak for yourself, Mrs. Brown," was Emma's response.

The production of a little parcel—as affording some intelligible reason for my coming—partially mollified Mrs. Gusterson; and, whilst she was examining the contents, I got into conversation with Mrs. Brown.

"You have been living here for a year and more, I think."

"Two year, sir, and so has Emmer. We took the room betwixt us. We've both a little from the parish."

"But I should a-had to go into the House, if it hadn't been for her," angrily interjected Mrs. Gusterson. "I'd got no sticks."

"I suppose you have known each other a long time."

"No, we hain't. I never set my eyes on her, to my knowledge, till a day or two before we come here. But she would make me come, and a rare plague I've been to her. She don't look half so strong as me, but my roomatics pulls me down, and she've had to nuss me."

"It's a great comfort," went on Mrs. Brown, as if repeating an axiom, "to have a kind, well-conducted woman like Mrs. Gusterson livin' with me. We works together, and that helps to pay the rent; and then she's good company."

"What do you do?"

"We knit stockings, and muffetees, and things like that. Sometimes we get orders, and sometimes we take them out to sell."

"*You* take them, Hanner," growled Mrs. Gusterson.

"But surely, you can't make a living in that way?"

"We couldn't do, sir, if it wasn't for what we get from the parish——"

"And *that's* a fat lot," scornfully snorted the other old woman.

"But this and that together," went on Hannah, "we manage somehow to rub on. There's folks worse off than we are, poor souls. Some of our regular customers give 'andsome prices."

"Because the things wears better than what they could get from the shops," interjected Mrs. Gusterson; "and, Hanner, you can't deny that most on 'em is screws; an' sometimes you don't sell a thing when you've been traipsing about all day."

"Well, I try to do my best, Emmer. Anyhow, sir, we've managed to pay our rent, thank God."

"Does anybody ever call on you?"

"There was a lady come last winter, and give us a trac'," Mrs. Gusterson contemptuously answered.

"Emmer ain't herself to-night," Mrs. Brown anxiously explained. "She do suffer dreadful, poor dear. There was folks in the Row worse off than we was then, and I told the lady so. She 'adn't much to give, and Emmer wouldn't have taken the money, either, out of the mouths of them that wanted it worse than us. She was a kind, sweet young lady. It was as good as a fire to have her in the room, and she *did* send us half-a-hundred, you know, Emmer."