

"There," said one of the party, as they went down the avenue, "there is one of them this moment, Mrs. Hathaway. Your theories are at your threshold. If they don't keep away from *you*, what hope is there for the age? Of what use is it for us to lavish our souls and bodies on those problems when we can't keep beggars off from our own doors? Why should we—"

"I'm no beggar," said a sturdy voice from the uncertain shadow that the dusk was building by the servants' doors.

The little group stopped and stared at the peddler—all but the very young gentleman with the conscientious mustache, who ran to catch the plaid horse-car, and lost it; whereupon, I regret to say that he devoutly expressed the wish that he had never made the acquaintance of Mrs. O'Flaherty.

"What are you?" asked Mr. Wax, trying to speak sternly (he had a vague impression that the man had been impertinent), but not succeeding in the least.

"I'm a peddler," stoutly. "I've never taken charity from no man—yet."

"Very good. That is excellent. I hope you never will," said Mrs. Hathaway hastily. "You talk like a man."

"Anything would be better than to pauperize yourself," suggested the lady who did not smile. "Cold and hunger are not the worst things in the world."

"Marm," said the peddler, "did you ever try it?"

The four refined, benevolent, perplexed and comfortable faces glanced hard for the moment at the peddler's sickly, shrinking one. He had a hunted look, glaring across the dark at them, where he stood apart.

"My horses are getting restless," said the lady who thought cold and hunger were not the worst things in the world, "and I must really go."

But Mr. Wax said he should stay and see a little more of this.

"Go round into the side porch," sug-

gested Mrs. Hathaway to the peddler. "We will look at your things there."

The peddler did as he was bidden, walking slowly. He stood on the uppermost step but one, and looked up at the lady and gentleman, who waited in the open doorway against a background of bright, indefinite interior, as delicate and mysterious to the man as the heart of a rose. His arrested attitude was not without significance; it was that of one who could not go up, and would not go down.

"What is your name?" began Mrs. Hathaway promptly. The question came kindly, yet with a certain mechanism, from the delicate, philanthropic lips which had asked it so many times of so many "cases."

"Tape and needles, pins and ruffling, lace and hairpins—oh! John True, marm."

"I will look at the needles. Do you make a comfortable living?"

"Sometimes," said the peddler, evasively.

"Have you a permit?" asked Mr. Wax, with the determination of a man resolved to say the proper thing.

"Sir?—Yes. Those are American pins, marm. I've got no English to-day."

"Have you sold much to-day, John True?"

"Not much to-day, nor yet yesterday," said John True, hesitatingly. "I got a breakfast for a couple of box-plaits and some pink tape."

"You look hungry," said Mr. Wax, with blunt compassion.

The peddler looked at the Committee of the Association for the Prevention of Pauperism. He did not speak. The stout gentleman had come out and joined them; he called Mrs. Hathaway "My dear." The pug had followed also, and stood airing his crimson ribbons with high personal reserve on the door-sill; he had the aspect of a sub-committee not expected to give advice, but admitted to unfathomable confidence.

"We will have some supper," said the