

ing out of the door of the farther-end house, excited my special interest, and I resolved at last to learn something about her. I ascertained her name from one of the Row's nursemaids, who was airing her charge at the mouth of the archway, and was told also that the old woman, who had stopped to chuck the baby under the chin as she went by, lived with another old woman at the top of No. 17.

A few evenings afterwards, I found my way to No. 17, and mounted its broad, dirty, broken, balustraded staircase—curiously stared at by those I passed upon it, and by other tenants looking out through their open doorways. When I reached what I thought was the top landing, I knocked at random at one of the doors which gave on it, but found I had to mount another flight—a short, quite dark, crooked little flight, which led to the garrets. There had originally been four garrets, two in front and two behind, with a passage between; but each one had been halved, and, therefore, I had eight doors to choose from. A candle that had been left burning outside one of them threw its dim light along the passage. At last I found my two old women. It was a cold night, and they had a fire—but such a little one; a sleepy inch or two of red between three small stony bits of coal. They were trying to fancy that they were warming their poor old knees over it as they sat knitting in the dusk. When I went in, my old woman, Hannah Brown, lighted the bit of candle in the tin candlestick that stood upon the mantel-shelf, and offered me her chair—there was no spare one: but I found a seat upon a box. That mangy old hair trunk, a mouldy brown leather port-manteau, the two chairs, a bed upon the floor, quilted with a mouse-coloured “charity-blanket,” a little kettle, and a little crockery, etc., on a shelf in an angle of the garret, formed almost the whole of the furniture.

Both of the old women were very thin, and had a lizard look about their shrivelled necks, but Hannah Brown was a cheerful, uncomplaining old body, whilst her companion, introduced as Mrs. Gusterson, had a half-sour, half-savage expression. For one thing, rheumatic twinges were racking her poor old quarter-clad shoulders.

“I hope you won't think that I am intruding,” I said to her. “I heard about you and Mrs. Brown, and I wanted to hear something more about you.”

“We hain't so many visitors that we need 'be pertic'lar,” was Mrs. Gusterson's somewhat ungracious reply. “I suppose ye're a parson, or do you belong to the parish?”

“At any rate, I have not called as a parson—you are just outside my parish. I am a neighbour, and have come to pay a neighbourly visit.”

“You've been a long time coming, then, and I don't suppose you'll be in a hurry to come again.”

“That depends on whether you will let me.”

“Oh, you're free to come or stay away, for what I care.”