

at least, who was young and strong, should not put her shoulder to the wheel, and assist in the awakening process?

"Now, I assure you," said that strenuous spinster, "that there is an immense field to labour in. Eliza's district, where I've been this morning, is full of interesting cases. There is a woman, an electro-plater's wife, in New Bridge-street, who has had some of the most remarkable experiences."

Mabel started at the words, and Miss Fluke, taking her eager look of interest as a tribute to her own eloquence, proceeded with redoubled vigour: "Experiences, Mabel, of a thoroughly evangelical and spiritual character. That woman's mind was in outer darkness—literally outer darkness. She was willing—to use her own words—weltering, in worldliness and self-seeking. I have strong reason to believe she drank. And I know," added Miss Fluke, nodding her head and speaking in a loud triumphant tone, "that she habitually used the most awfully bad language! Well now, what is the result of three months—only three months—diligent district visiting, tract distributing, and attendance at Sabbath evening lecture? why, that woman—Pugley her name is, is so awakened to the truth, has got such a real sense of sin, that she looks upon the spiritual state of all her friends and relations with absolute loathing."

"Lo-o-o-athing!" repeated Miss Jane unctuously.

"And she said, I particularly remember, that she considered her husband's mother to be clothed in filthy rags, as with a garment—spiritually speaking, of course; for the old woman is a very decent, clean old creature, in a worldly sense, and looks after her grandchildren when Mrs. Pugley is at lecture or Bible class."

Miss Fluke stopping the torrent of her discourse here to take breath, and apply a very large pocket-handkerchief to her nose, with a strong wrenching action, Mabel took occasion to ask whether Eliza had any other houses, besides the admirable Mrs. Pugley's that she visited in New Bridge-street?

"Let me see," said Miss Jane, availing herself of her sister's temporary retirement behind the pocket-handkerchief to assert her knowledge of the subject, and advertise her share of the family energy. "Well, I'm not sure, but there's a great deal to be done in the neighbourhood, I know. Will you join, Mabel? Do say yes. It would be a real help, now that Eliza is ill. You could take the lighter duties to begin with. Just a little Scripture reading, and so on, unless—unless—you'd prefer to have Eliza's catechism class, or to make a subscription-book for the Infant Bosjesman Mission."

"May I accompany Jane and Miss Fluke in their district visits?" asked Mabel, addressing Mr. Saxelby.

Her step-father was much surprised by the demand. Mabel had never before shown any desire to associate herself with her friends' parochial labours. But he answered at once: "Certainly, Mabel. I am rejoiced to think that you care about these things. Under Miss Fluke's guidance, I can have no objection to your going."

"I must tell you, sir," said Mabel, flushing deeply, "and tell you, too, Miss Fluke, that I have asked to join you because I particularly wish to have an opportunity of seeing a poor sick little girl in whom I am interested, and who lives in the part of the town you have been speaking of. If you don't think it right to admit me with that motive, I shall be sorry. But that is the true one. I have no other."

"Join, Mabel!" said Miss Fluke, who had risen to go, and was tying her bonnet-strings with superfluous application of muscular power. "It may be a useful and a blessed experience for you. If the little girl you speak of is in a state of grace, so much the better. If not, we will endeavour to bring her into the way of—Are you ready, Jane? And have you given Mrs. Saxelby the penny subscription card for the rebuilding of Duckrell Chapel and school-house? And the last report of the Infant Bosjesman Mission Ladies' Committee? And lent her the number of the Christian Reminder, with those

verses about justification by faith, adapted to a popular melody? Very well, then, come along. And Mabel, be your motive what it may, I say again to you, join! Remember the beautiful hymn we had last Sunday, beginning—

Come dirty, come filthy,
Come just as you are.

That's my advice to you. Come just as you are; only join!"

Miss Fluke took leave briefly with her sister, and was heard to march with a quick firm tread down the front garden path, and to shut the gate behind her with a loud jarring clang.

"An excellent woman, Miss Fluke," said Mr. Saxelby. "One of those who may be truly said to be unwearied in well-doing."

"I wish," said Mrs. Saxelby, "that she wouldn't shut the garden gate in that dreadfully violent way. It jars every nerve in my body."

To this, Mr. Saxelby made no reply, but took his hat and set forth to return to the office: having first kissed his wife's forehead with more gentleness than his ordinary manner would have led one to suppose him capable of.

"Mabel," said her mother, when Mr. Saxelby had gone, "I'm afraid this won't do."

"Won't do, mamma?"

"No, you'll hate the whole thing, and then you'll say so. And that will make a quarrel, and be worse than not joining at all. Besides, I—I—don't think Mr. Saxelby will like your going to these Trescotts. And his wishes should be respected."

"But, mamma, I told him. I made no false pretences."

"Dear me, Mabel!" cried Mrs. Saxelby, pettishly—her temper, usually gentle, had been ruffled by Miss Fluke; Miss Fluke was trying to do the nervous system; "I wish to Heaven you wouldn't be so entêtée. The child is cared for. Why not be quiet, and let her alone?"

"Mamma," answered Mabel, softly, bending her head down, and shading her eyes with her hand, "suppose every one had been quiet, and let us alone, when we were desolate!"

CHAPTER VI. A DISTRICT VISIT.

On the following Saturday, Mabel, accompanied by Miss Fluke and her youngest sister, a girl of about Mabel's own age, set forth on her first experience as a district visitor. Not without many misgivings, and much upward trembling, did she commence her round. But she put a brave front on the matter, and resolved to be as little intrusive as possible, and to embrace every opportunity, should any be afforded her, of being helpful, and showing sympathy as far as might be.

It is not necessary to follow her and her companion through all the scenes of the morning. Mabel soon discovered that, except in cases where physical aid was rendered, in the shape of food, medicine, or clothing, Miss Fluke's appearance was generally the signal for a sturdy tacit sullen resistance on the part of the poor people whom she visited. Sometimes it flamed out into open warfare. Sometimes it only smouldered with a dull latent heat. But almost always it seemed to be an accepted fact, that Miss Fluke came like an invader into an enemy's country, and that she meant fighting, and had braced herself for the combat. There were exceptions to this, of course. There were whining canting hypocrites of the Pugley school, who related their "experiences," and abused their neighbours in true Mawworm fashion. There were also several instances—and these amongst the most sorely afflicted—of real unaffected piety, which all Miss Fluke's coarse handling was powerless to dim. Mabel was particularly touched by the cheerful serenity of one old blind bedridden man, who listened eagerly to a chapter of the Bible, read aloud in Miss Fluke's hardest and most controversial tone, and who thanked her with unmistakable heartiness when she had finished. Mabel, to whom the chapter selected had appeared singularly ill chosen for purposes of soothing or consolation, could not resist asking the old man privately if he had really liked that, and why?

"Liked it? Ah, sure, miss," said he, in a tone of surprise. "Why, don't ye see that if my

fellow-crecturs thinks of me, and cares for me enough for to come and spend their time a-reading and a-talking to a poor ignorant old man such as me, how sure and satisfied it makes me feel as our Father in Heaven—Him as is all love and mercy—won't forget me neither? Now, I desay, I seems very lonely to you, lyin' dark here all day; but I ain't; not a bit lonely. I've allus lots to think about and blessed thoughts too."

There were few such pleasant gleams of light on the dreary disheartening round of visits; but Miss Fluke seemed to accept the sullen looks and scant courtesy with which she was mostly received as part of the day's routine, and indeed enjoyed any opportunity of displaying her pugnacity and tenacity in the good cause.

When they came, in the course of their duty to New Bridge-street, Mabel left her friends at the door of Mrs. Pugley's dwelling, that interesting subject being laid up with sore-throat, and Miss Fluke having brought in her pocket a large tract and a small pot of black-currant jam, so as to administer at once to her spiritual and bodily requirements. Mabel had stipulated that she should be allowed to visit Corda Trescott on this very first day of her new employment, and had obtained the Misses Fluke's promise that when they had finished their visit at Mrs. Pugley's they would call for her at Number Twenty-three. They were, in fact, very willing, and even eager to do so. Their young friend had not thought it necessary to give them what slight particulars she knew as to the Trescotts' position and circumstances, but they had learned from her the story of the accident, and of Clement Charlewood's kindness to the child, and were excessively curious to see little Corda. Mabel Earnshaw saw her companions enter the abode of Mrs. Pugley, and then ran swiftly up the dirty street to Number Twenty-three. She paused as if irresolute, and then knocked lightly at the door, feeling that her heart was beating a trifle more quickly than usual.

Mrs. Hutchins opened the door—which led directly into the front kitchen, without any intermediate passage—and stood staring at Mabel, with a mop in one hand and a pail of very dirty hot water on the ground behind her. Mrs. Hutchins was washing the brick floor of the kitchen. It was Saturday, the day usually devoted to a general "cleaning up" by the ladies of New Bridge-street and its vicinity; and Mabel had already experienced that morning the wrathful indignation of several housewives at being interrupted in that avocation. Consequently, when she saw Mrs. Hutchins throw the door wide open and stand before her arrayed in full "cleaning up" costume—canvas apron and bib, iron clogs, sleeves tucked up, and a general tone of black-lead over her dress and complexion—she was prepared to be not very civilly received.

Mrs. Hutchins stood and looked at Mabel; Mabel stood and looked at Mrs. Hutchins. At length that lady said, slowly;

"Who might you be inquiring for, miss?"

"Does a gentleman name Trescott live here, if you please?" said Mabel.

"Trescotts oockypies my first floor," returned Mrs. Hutchins, majestically.

"Is his little girl in, can you tell me?"

"Yes, and ever likely to be so."

Mabel was sufficiently well acquainted with the phraseology of the lower orders in Hammerham to understand that Mrs. Hutchins did not by any means intend to imply that Corda was a prisoner to the house thenceforth for evermore, but simply that, under the present circumstances, it was natural that she should be in.

"Can I see her," asked Mabel.

"I suppose so. I don't know as you can't."

"Be good enough to allow me to pass, then, if you please," said Mabel, resolutely; for Mrs. Hutchins stood full in the doorway, and made no attempt to remove the great pail which helped to block the passage. The woman drew aside at once. Mabel's tone of command was the best she could have adopted for attaining her purpose. Mrs. Hutchins being one of those persons whom it is necessary to treat firmly, as one grasps a nettle. She had a secret contempt for people who showed her much gentleness or