

"Because you may poison the decanter, dear father," returned his son.

"Ha ha!" chuckled the old man. "Tizzy," calling the servant, "bring a bottle of sherry from the cellar. We'll drink," he added, when the woman had executed the order, "to the health of Mrs. Harding, Eh? Shall we?"

His son tossed off four glasses of wine without replying, and with a rough farewell, left the house. He took a cab at the first stand, and having called to treat with the doctor on the way, rejoined his wife after three hours' absence. She had not been left alone all this while. Harding found a woman, the wife of the fellow-lodger, in the room, who was employed in airing some baby-linen before the fire, while the contents of a small saucepan were simmering away upon the hob.

"I've made bold," she said when he entered, "to look in upon your good lady."

She seemed half afraid of him, as if her samaritan deed had merited reproach. Bending first over the bed to kiss the little enduring creature, whose heart had been so full for many and many a long day, and whisper his adventures in her ear, he advanced and took the friendly neighbor by the hand.


"It's so good of you, Mrs. Merrythought," he said; "but you women are always so considerate. I don't know what we men should do without you."

She had something to say to him, of which she did not know how to acquit herself in his wife's hearing; so, feigning to believe that she heard her husband's voice in the passage, she opened the door and went out upon the landing-place, where she stood coughing and beckoning to attract his notice; he had stepped across to the bed-side, however, to kiss his little wife once more, and she was obliged to call him by his name.

"There's a nice doctor," she said, when he had joined her without the apartment, "as did for me when my last was born. If you don't mind going to him, and using my husband's name, sir, I'm sure he would come, and wait for his money till its quite convenient. And then," she added, checking his disposition to speak, "as for a nurse I've sent my eldest son over to Poplar for Mrs. Boss—maybe you've heard of Mrs. Boss, sir? I once was housemaid to a lady she attended, and then she said—I wasn't married then, sir, or even keeping company—Cheekey," she said—Cheekey was my maiden name, sir—when it comes to your turn, my girl, my name is Boss, and I lives when I'm at home, which ain't often to be sure, in Tozer street Poplar." And every one of my eight, sir, she has been the nurse to; and a good nurse she is, which I can put my oath to if you wish."

"My good Mrs. Merrythought," said Harding, touched by her kindness, "I have already provided a doctor, but I am greatly your debtor for Mrs. Boss."

#### CHAPTER IV.

E are the slaves of stone and wood and iron. I wish we could import somewhat of the Hindoo philosophy into our religion. This apparently solid earth—these clouds that go tearing along in a strong wind, a hundred miles an hour they say—that sun and moon, those stars; how we are cheated into a belief of their real existence! When the fact is that the landscape I saw last night, in that foolish dream I had, was just as real as they. I awoke, and the landscape was nought. But I passed from that delusion to another, and fancied the bed and the chair and the window to be real, when, like the landscape in my dream they were only apparitions. We are the slaves of matter—of substance (forgetting the meaning of that word SUBSTANCE, which implies that which stands, or exists, under appearances.) But in all ages, there have been seers among men, whose names endure as household memories, who have discovered the truth and have roundly asserted it. Others, venturing half-way, admit Time to be a delusion; but if Time, then also must Space be a delusion for I can only traverse from one point of space to another in Time, and it would require many years for a cannon ball to reach the sun. And then Time is a delusion, let every one know who can remember how short the hour seemed that was passed with the pleasant friends, and how long it was when he spent it upon the rack of anxiety.

Sixty minutes being real and independent of the mind, must be always of the same length in all circumstances. But we

perceive that an hour may be as a day, a week, when we spend it in terrible expectancy, and the messenger delays. And for space—yesterday the journey appeared to me so short, and today it was so long, yet I did not lengthen it by ten paces. Yet if the distance were real, and independent of my mental condition, it must have been on both occasions of the same extent.

We are the slaves of matter; but this matter is an arrant cheat, and we are the constant dupes of its imposition.

Is it not so with us, when God sends a new ray of his Divinity upon earth, and we say a child is born? We are the slaves of matter again in those little human limbs which are only the form that our thought has taken, and are as unreal as Time and Space. The miniature man or woman is two spans long. I can measure the length by extending my hand twice, but the act of extension implies Space, and is done in Time. I say we are the dupes of matter.

Quiting the region of metaphysics, however—which is no dim haze, as divers persons would have us believe—let us see whether the baby-clothes which had swathed the limbs of Mrs. Merrythought's last required any mending before they were ready for their new office. No; in no one instance; so good had baby Merrythought been. Very soon the doctor arrived in a cab and Mrs. Boss was dropped at the end of the street by an omnibus. Very fat was Mrs. Boss and very good-natured and obliging. Her warm heart, moreover, like her body, seemed ever on the increase, and daily became greater, in two senses.

"It will be the death of me," she said, as she followed Mrs. Merrythought up the stairs, which were by mishap, very narrow. "I never can do it, I never can—that's for certain."

"Eh?" said Mrs. Merrythought, "What's amiss?"

"Can it be expected of me?" proceeded Mrs. Boss halting to pant more at her ease. "Is any one so ridiculous as to suppose I could do it? If the door-way is as narrow as the stairs, when I once get into the room, I shall be like a cork in a bottle, and as difficult to get out again."

"Ah!" remarked Mrs. Merrythought, "I see."

"See, child! Yes, and so do I see it. It can't be done. Positively, I'm stuck fast already," said Mrs. Boss, "and tighter lacing would be of no use, bless you."

"I suppose it wouldn't," returned Mrs. Merrythought.

"Not a bit of it," said the nurse. "You may as well ask me to creep through a key-hole, as to get up and down those stairs half-a-dozen times a day."

"Well, I must wait upon you—you shan't have to leave the room," said Mrs. Merrythought, who always did her best to diminish difficulties.

"Is the room a large one?" gasped Mrs. Boss.

"Not a very large one," replied Mrs. Merrythought, faltering.

"It's small,—isn't it? don't deceive me," said the nurse, anxiously.

"Well, it is smallish," answered her friend.

"I never can,—It's of no use," said Mrs. Boss. "I want air. I must have air, or perish,—its my nature."

"But you must come up," said Mrs. Merrythought, "now you have got so far. You can't turn upon the stairs, and you can't go down backward. You must come up, if it's only to turn in the room and go down again."

The, good unwieldy woman seemed struck with this suggestion and applied herself anew to the task of mounting. Once in the room, and recovered in some measure, she turned her eyes upon the little wife she had come to tend.

"Pretty lamb," she said, compassionately, to Mrs. Merrythought, "and is it her first? Deary me, what a many ladies I have nursed, whose first it was, and hoped to be the last and I said—no please God; for scripture says they shall be like olive-branches round about your table."

"You won't go home again—promise you won't," said Mrs. Merrythought, who saw that with the increased facility of breathing, she was waxing into the best of humors.

Mrs. Boss did not reply, but set herself to survey the room, the wall of which she swept with her eyes, and rested her gaze upon the window.

It was a very small window. If wishing could have made it larger, Mrs. Merrythought would have had it as large as a shop-front.

"You can try how you feel for one night, at least nurse," she said.