

as a substitute for Alison, she advanced to meet her with a pleasant smile.

"It's very good of you to meet me. What's the matter with Alison?"

"Don't know exactly, but probably hump," answered Madge laconically. "Got oceans of stuff, I suppose, as you've been abroad so long. You should see what we hoofed it with in Ireland. We mastered the whole art of going without."

"I don't doubt it, but as my only habitation happens to be a box at present," answered Tibbie with engaging dryness, "it has to be big enough, and occasionally to be duplicated."

"Oh, I don't mind, don't apologise; it's merely a matter of how much you can endure. Been hot abroad, I suppose? You look a trifle thinner, but jolly fit."

"I'm all right, thank you, and I've never seen you look better, Madge."

"Oh, I'm Ar, though Birtley always does take a bit of the gilt off my ginger-bread. Is this all? Come then."

They walked out to the waiting carriage, and got in.

"Isn't Alison well, then?" asked Tibbie apprehensively.

"Oh, she doesn't say she's ill. It's this beastly place," answered Madge, whose loyalty would have shamed many a man. She would not speak against her father, whatever she might think. "And then all the trouble about the works. My, what fools they be, everybody, not one, but every man jack of them from the boss downwards. Why people aren't born with a smattering of common sense economy in their compositions, I can't think. The omission was undoubtedly a mistake on the part of the Creator. Just a smattering might have saved them!"

"Then the strike is still going on?"

"The lock-out is. The foundry has been closed down for twenty weeks, and Birtley's like a place of the dead. It's horrible."