


There is nothing to complain of inside the room, wretched as the place looks from without. It is simply furnished, very clean and tidy, though littered just now by a few spotless folded garments hanging over the chair backs and the fender, showing that Mrs. Lake has been putting the finishing touches to the week's washing. There is not much of a fire, cold though it is—for one must be careful of coals nowadays—but the room is bright with the western glow which shines through the muslin-curtained bow-window, in spite of all that the hideous buildings opposite can do to shut it out.

The little hostess herself is more sunshiny still. She has a gentle, attractive face, and a look of youthfulness one would hardly have expected in the mother of seven children fast growing towards manhood—an intent, watchful expression too, by which, as well as by the lowness of her voice, one can tell that she is deaf.



To-day she has a handkerchief tied round her head. It is very becoming, but evidently not put on for that reason, and one naturally makes inquiries. "I think it's a cold I caught, Miss. You see, it's draughty having to do your washing on the roof, and it made my head ache. It's not so bad now as it was this morning; but then, the boys were rather noisy getting off to school, and you know what boys are—they don't seem like as if they could be quiet. Yes, indeed, it does seem a lot of boys to have to manage, and they're not handy in their ways like girls; but mine are wonderful good—so they are. There wasn't one of them—not even the littlest—that didn't come and want to do something to help me, or put their hands to my head to cool it; but the clatter just comes natural to them, and—there," with a laugh, "I don't know as I'd like them to be different."

The Irish brogue is not very noticeable in her ordinary speech, but it gets stronger as she becomes more animated.

"Yes, Miss, it's good to know that your children are fond of their home and fond of their mother. I do try to make it happy for them; for I know that if their father and mother haven't done right by them it's hard for them to know how to do right themselves. My parents were good to me entirely—good to me, not always good to themselves. But my father turned a new leaf when I was still quite a little girl; and for four-

teen years before he died he never touched a drop of liquor—never a drop.

"Oh, there was a time when he used to be a terrible drunkard. It was when we lived in the barracks, and he used to come home (it was always when he had been down to draw his pension) driven in a cart because he couldn't stand. I remember I used to run away screaming (I was such a little girl), for he'd come back with his face all cut and bleeding, where he'd fallen down in the road. Such a fine strong man he was, Miss—and that seemed to make it all the worse. Not that he was ever quarrelsome, and he never said a word unkind to my mother, or to us children; he was just helpless and stupid—so stupid that he'd come home and eat his dinner, and then forget that he'd had it. He never had a farthing of his pension to bring back, and none of us ever knew where the money went. I suppose people knew how it would be with him, and waited to rob him."

The bright eyes are growing rather tearful.

"And how was it that the change came?"

"Well, you see, Miss, it was this way. We came down from the barracks to live in the town, and it made a good deal of difference. I don't know as the town-people was better than the soldiers, but they was quieter; and we didn't seem to be like the rest. I used to look at the other children going on Sundays to school and to church in their fine clothes. We never had anything nice to wear, and so of course we couldn't go. There was one Sunday morning my father was sitting by the window, and I said to him—I remember just how it was, me standing by with my hand on his shoulder, for we was always very fond of each other, me and father—I said, 'Father, I wish *we* could be like them, and be able to go to church too.' But I never thought we could. He didn't answer, and I didn't think as he'd noticed. But one day—it can't have been long after—a friend came in to see him, and talked for a bit, and then asked him to go out and have a drink. Father said, 'No.' And when the man laughed he said, 'Ay, you may laugh, and go on laughing, but I'm never going to drink another drop o' beer as long as I live.' And no more he did, though that was fourteen years before he died."

"And your mother?"

"Ah, Miss, there was the trouble. I