

'That is just what Mrs. Bent, master's old housekeeper, used to say,' Alice cried eagerly. 'Whatever you have to eat, be it much or little, cook it nicely and make the best of it. Tom does enjoy a little bit of hot supper when he comes back in the evening, and I have always managed to get him something.'

'Quite right. A wife can't spend her time and strength better than by keeping a comfortable home for her husband. I can't let mine always have *meat* now there are so many mouths to fill; but something hot and nourishing he always finds; and you know there are many foods hardly less strengthening than meat, though ever so much cheaper. A good bowl of oatmeal porridge, for instance, is a capital supper for working people on a cold evening. The Scotch, who are much stronger than the English, almost live on oatmeal, and have it for breakfast, dinner, and supper. I give him a bit of butter, or a drop of milk with it if I can; the children like treacle in their porridge. Children are always fond of something sweet, and if they get it at home they don't want to be always running to the sweet shop.'

'There are a wonderful lot of that kind of shops about here,' Alice remarked.

'You are right there. Publics and sweet shops; publics for the parents, and sweet-stuff for the children. It keeps the stomach always a-craving. When they are little they must be always sucking sugar, and when they are big always running for a dram. One bad habit leads to another, and health and pocket suffer alike. I do believe some mothers give their children pennies to buy sweets just that they may want no dinner, and so there shan't be the trouble of cooking one.'

'Oh, but that is cruel,' said Alice. 'How can the little things grow up strong and healthy if they get no proper food?'

'Grow up strong and healthy! Small chance of that, I fear. Many don't grow up at all, and others are stunted and delicate, and suffer with weak hearts, and rickets, and sores, and all manner of evils.'

'They say London air is bad for growing children,' Alice remarked.

'London air ain't particularly good for 'aem, but I've seen fine healthy young persons grow up in it when they had mothers who had the sense to feed them with something they *could* grow upon. My eldest girl is fourteen, and she has got a good place as kitchen-maid, and is as strong and healthy a girl as you'd wish to see. I hope she'll stop where she is for some years yet. They are mighty pleased with her, for they could never get a girl strong enough for the work before. Poor feeble slips of things who would break down and have to go home ill, mostly before their month was out, though they were all older than Bessie by some years.'

'I am sure you are right, by the look of your children,' Alice said admiringly. 'But air—you can't get that good for them, I am afraid.'

'Well, of course they must do with the air that is to be had here; but I take care that they have as much of it as possible. For one thing, I have the windows to open *at top*, so that the bad air may always go out, not be shut up in the rooms night and day.'

'You mean the air you have all breathed?'

'Yes, and the air I have cooked in, and washed in, and dried my clothes in. I want to get rid of all that, and let fresh unused air come in, which it will always do if the bad is let to escape. But the window must open *at top*, because the bad air always mounts up to the ceiling, and also because one does not feel the draught as one does if it opens only at bottom.'

'How do you know the bad air goes to the ceiling?'

'I have always been told it did, and one day I got a step-ladder, when the windows were shut and a lot of us in the room, and went to the top of it. If you had smelt what the air up there was like you wouldn't want to be told twice that you must keep the upper part of the room ventilated somehow.'

'Well,' said Alice, 'I am not sure if our