

A GLIMPSE OF LONDON LABOUR AND LONDON POOR.

LIFE IN A GARRET.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EPISODES OF AN OBSCURE LIFE."

"THE poor make no new friends," and often experience a still drearier loneliness as they grow old, so far as human fellowship is concerned. They are almost forgotten in the holes into which they have crept to die; and when, now and then, they creep out again into the busy world, they have a very ghost-like look. They don't belong to the bustling throng they feebly thread; they have made no mark in the world—utterly failed to win fame or fortune, and have no chance of doing so now. Preoccupied eyes accordingly, pass over them with as little notice as if they were mere shadows, or glance at them for a moment with a look of semi-contemptuous and semi-puzzled dislike. "How do people come to be so poor in such a money-making world as this? And when they are poor, why don't they die out of the world, instead of crossing respectable people's paths, and making them feel uncomfortable?" That is what the cold, shrinking look seems to say. It is no wonder, I think, that so many of the aged poor sour in their solitude: the wonder to me is, that so many of them should keep their milk of human kindness sweet, and bear their want so patiently. It is hard work loving kindred who take no notice of one; and being heroic, when there is no nobody to praise you if you succeed, or to care a penny if you fail. It is of two poor old women, of very different dispositions, chance-drifted into the same *magna-civitas magna-solitudo* loneliness, a London garret—that I am about to write.

From the back of my house I can see a row of dim red-brick old houses, crowded up and blinking behind a block of more modern drab brick. Where the newer houses stand there were once, I suppose, white rails and grass and trees, pleasantly screening the old from the road; but now their only look-out in front is on the dreary back-yards, and drying linen, and bulging bath-rooms, and untidy back-windows of the usurpers of the roadside grass-plats. The only access to the old houses is through an archway in the new block, and the path that passes them, and ends in a dead wall, is overshadowed by the back-yards' boundary. There is an almost constant rumble of traffic in the great thoroughfare outside, but, built in behind as well as in front, the old houses, which must have been a cosy row of private residences once, seem quite shouldered out of the world.

As are the tenements, so are the tenants. All the adults have a *worsted* look. The little trades they carry on in their own houses are of the most uncertain and shadowy description: if they have work elsewhere they seem, from the numbers that idle