## CHAPTER XV.

### AMONG THE WIGAN OPERATIVES.

"There'll be some on us missin', aw deawt,
Iv there isn't some help for us soon."
—SAMUEL LAYCOCK.

THE next scene of my observations is the town of Wigan. The temporary troubles now affecting the working people of Lancashire wear a different aspect there on account of such a large proportion of the population being employed in the coal mines. The "way of life" and the characteristics of the people are marked by strong peculiarities. But, apart from these things, Wigan is an interesting place. The towns of Lancashire have undergone so much change during the last fifty years that their old features are mostly either swept away entirely, or are drowned in a great overgrowth of modern buildings. Yet coaly Wigan retains visible relics of its ancient character

still; and there is something striking in its situation. It is associated with some of the most stirring events of our history, and it is the scene of many an interesting old story, such as the legend of Mabel of Haigh Hall, the crusader's dame. The remnant of "Mab's Cross" still stands in Wigan Lane. Some of the finest old halls of Lancashire are now, and have been, in its neighbourhood, such as Ince Hall and Crooke Hall. It must have been a picturesque town in the time of the Commonwealth, when Cavaliers and Roundheads met there in deadly contention. Wigan saw a great deal of the troubles of that time. The ancient monument, erected to the memory of Colonel Tyldesley, upon the ground where he fell at the battle of Wigan Lane, only tells a little of the story of Longfellow's puritan hero, Miles Standish, who belonged to the Chorley branch of the family of Standish of Standish, near this town. The ingenious John Roby, author of the "Traditions of Lancashire," was born here. Round about the old market-place, and the fine parish church of St Wilfred, there are many quaint nooks still left to tell the tale of centuries gone by. These remarks, however, by the way. It is almost impossible to sunder any place entirely from the interest which such things lend to it.

Our present business is with the share which Wigan feels of the troubles of our own time, and in this respect it is affected by some conditions

peculiar to the place. I am told that Wigan was one of the first—if not the very first—of the towns of Lancashire to feel the nip of our present distress. I am told, also, that it was the first town in which a Relief Committee was organised. The cotton consumed here is almost entirely of the kind from ordinary to middling American, which is now the scarcest and dearest of any. Preston is almost wholly a spinning town. In Wigan there is a considerable amount of weaving as well as spinning. The counts spun in Wigan are lower than those in Preston; they range from 10's up to 20's. There is also, as I have said before, another peculiar element of labour, which tends to give a strong flavour to the conditions of life in Wigan, that is, the great number of people employed in the coal mines. This, however, does not much lighten the distress which has fallen upon the spinners and weavers, for the colliers are also working short time—an average of four days a week. I am told, also, that the coal miners have been subject to so many disasters of various kinds during past years, that there is now hardly a collier's family which has not lost one or more of its most active members by accidents in the pits. About six years ago, the river Douglas broke into one of the Ince mines, and nearly two hundred people were drowned thereby. These were almost all buried on one day, and it was

a very distressing scene. Everywhere in Wigan one may meet with the widows and orphans of men who have been killed in the mines; and there are no few men more or less disabled by colliery accidents, and, therefore, dependent either upon the kindness of their employers, or upon the labour of their families in the cotton factories. This last failing them, the result may be easily guessed. The widows and orphans of coal miners almost always fall back upon factory labour for a living; and, in the present state of things, this class of people forms a very helpless element of the general distress. These things I learnt during my brief visit to the town a few days ago. Hereafter, I shall try to acquaint myself more deeply and widely with the relations of life amongst the working people there.

I had not seen Wigan during many years before that fine August afternoon. In the Main Street and Market Place there is no striking outward sign of distress, and yet here, as in other Lancashire towns, any careful eye may see that there is a visible increase of mendicant stragglers, whose awkward plaintiveness, whose helpless restraint and hesitancy of manner, and whose general appearance, tell at once that they belong to the operative classes now suffering in Lancashire. Beyond this, the sights I first noticed upon the streets, as peculiar to the place, were, here, two "Sisters of Mercy," wending

along, in their black cloaks and hoods, with their foreheads and cheeks swathed in ghastly white bands, and with strong rough shoes upon their feet; and, there, passed by a knot of the women employed in the coal mines. The singular appearance of these women has puzzled many a southern stranger. All grimed with coaldust, they swing along the street with their dinner baskets and cans in their hands, chattering merrily. To the waist they are dressed like men, in strong trousers and wooden clogs. Their gowns, tucked clean up, before, to the middle, hang down behind them in a peaked tail. A limp bonnet, tied under the chin, makes up the head-dress. Their curious garb, though soiled, is almost always sound; and one can see that the wash-tub will reveal many a comely face amongst them. The dusky damsels are "to the manner born," and as they walk about the streets, thoughtless of singularity, the Wigan people let them go unheeded by. Before I had been two hours in the town, I was put into communication with one of the active members of the Relief Committee, who offered to devote a few hours of the following day to visitation with me, amongst the poor of a district called "Scholes," on the eastern edge of the town. Scholes is the "Little Ireland" of Wigan,—the poorest quarter of the town. The colliers and factory operatives chiefly live there. There is a saying in Wigan that no

man's education is finished until he has been through Scholes. Having made my arrangements for the next day, I went to stay for the night with a friend who lives in the green country near Orrell, three miles west of Wigan. Early next morning, we rode over to see the quaint town of Upholland, and its fine old church, with the little ivied monastic ruin close by. We returned thence, by way of "Orrell Pow," to Wigan, to meet my engagement at ten in the forenoon. On our way, we could not help noticing the unusual number of foot-sore, travel-soiled people, many of them evidently factory operatives, limping away from the town upon their melancholy wanderings. We could see, also, by the number of decrepid old women, creeping towards Wigan, and now and then stopping to rest by the wayside, that it was relief day at the Board of Guardians. At ten, I met the gentleman who had kindly offered to guide me for the day; and we set off together. There are three excellent rooms engaged by the good people of Wigan for the employment and teaching of the young women thrown out of work at the cotton mills. The most central of the three is the lecture theatre of the Mechanics' Institution. This room was the first place we visited. Ten o'clock is the time appointed for the young women to assemble. It was a few minutes past ten when we got to the place; and there were some

twenty of the girls waiting about the door. They were barred out, on account of being behind time. The lasses seemed very anxious to get in; but they were kept there a few minutes till the kind old superintendent, Mr Fisher, made his appearance. After giving the foolish virgins a gentle lecture upon the value of punctuality, he admitted them to the room. Inside, there were about three hundred and fifty girls mustered that morning. They are required to attend four hours a day on four days of the week, and they are paid 9d. a day for their attendance. They are divided into classes, each class being watched over by some lady of the committee. Part of the time each day is set apart for reading and writing; the rest of the day is devoted to knitting and plain sewing. The business of each day begins with the reading of the rules, after which, the names are called over. A girl in a white pinafore, upon the platform, was calling over the names when we entered. I never saw a more comely, clean, and orderly assembly anywhere. I never saw more modest demeanour, nor a greater proportion of healthy, intelligent faces in any company of equal numbers.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Hopdance cries in Tom's belly for two white herrings. Croak not, black angel; I have no food for thee."

—*King Lear.*

I LINGERED a little while in the work-room, at the Mechanics' Institution, interested in the scene. A stout young woman came in at a side door, and hurried up to the centre of the room with a great roll of coarse gray cloth, and lin check, to be cut up for the stitchers. One or two of the classes were busy with books and slates; the remainder of the girls were sewing and knitting; and the ladies of the committee were moving about, each in quiet superintendence of her own class. The room was comfortably full, even on the platform; but there was very little noise, and no disorder at all. I say again that I never saw a more comely, clean, and well conducted assembly than this of three hundred and fifty factory lasses. I was told, however, that even these girls show a kind of pride of caste amongst one another. The human

heart is much the same in all conditions of life. I did not stay long enough to be able to say more about this place; but one of the most active and intelligent ladies connected with the management said to me afterwards, "Your wealthy manufacturers and merchants must leave a great deal of common stuff lying in their warehouses, and perhaps not very saleable just now, which would be much more valuable to us here than ever it will be to them. Do you think they would like to give us a little of it if we were to ask them nicely?" I said I thought there were many of them who would do so; and I think I said right. After a little talk with the benevolent old superintendent, whose heart, I am sure, is devoted to the business for the sake of the good it will do, and the evil it will prevent, I set off with my friend to see some of the poor folk who live in the quarter called "Scholes." It is not more than five hundred yards from the Mechanics' Institution to Scholes Bridge, which crosses the little river Douglas, down in a valley in the eastern part of the town. As soon as we were at the other end of the bridge, we turned off at the right hand corner into a street of the poorest sort—a narrow old street, called "Amy Lane." A few yards on the street we came to a few steps, which led up, on the right hand side, to a little terrace of poor cottages, overlooking the river Douglas. We called at one of these cottages. Though

rather disorderly just then, it was not an uncomfortable place. It was evidently looked after by some homely dame. A clean old cat dosed upon a chair by the fireside. The bits of cottage furniture, though cheap, and well worn, were all there; and the simple household gods, in the shape of pictures and ornaments, were in their places still. A hardy-looking, brown-faced man, with close-cropped black hair, and a mild countenance, sat on a table by the window, making artificial flies, for fishing. In the corner over his head a cheap, dingy picture of the trial of Queen Catherine, hung against the wall. I could just make out the tall figure of the indignant queen, in the well-known theatrical attitude, with her right arm uplifted, and her sad, proud face turned away from the judgment-seat, where Henry sits, evidently uncomfortable in mind, as she gushes forth that bold address to her priestly foes and accusers. The man sitting beneath the picture, told us that he was a throstle-overlooker by trade; and that he had been nine months out of work. He said, "There 's five on us here when we 're i'th heawse. When th' wark fell off I had a bit o' brass save't up, so we were forced to start o' usin' that. But month after month went by, an' th' brass kept gettin' less, do what we would; an' th' times geet wur, till at last we fund ersels fair stagged up. At after that, my mother helped us as weel as hoo

could,—why, hoo does neaw, for th' matter o' that, an' then aw 've three brothers, colliers; they 've done their best to poo us through. But they 're nobbut wortchin' four days a week, neaw; besides they 'n enough to do for their own. Aw make no acceawnt o' slotchin' up an' deawn o' this shap, like a foo. It would sicken a dog, it would for sure. Aw go a fishin' a bit neaw an' then; an' aw cotter abeawt wi' first one thing an' then another; but it comes to no sense. Its noan like gradely wark. It makes me maunder up an' deawn, like a gonnor wi' a nail in it's yed. Aw wish to God yon chaps in Amerikey would play th' upstroke, an' get done wi' their bother, so as folk could start o' their wark again." This was evidently a provident man, who had striven hard to get through his troubles decently. His position as overlooker, too, made him dislike the thoughts of receiving relief amongst the operatives whom he might some day be called upon to superintend again. A little higher up in Amy Lane we came to a kind of square. On the side where the lane continues there is a dead brick wall; on the other side, bounding a little space of unpaved ground, rather higher than the lane, there are a few old brick cottages, of very mean and dirty appearance. At the doors of some of the cottages squalid, untidy women were lounging; some of them sitting upon the doorstep, with their elbows on their knees, smoking, and look-

ing stolidly miserable. We were now getting near where the cholera made such havoc during its last visit,—a pestilent jungle, where disease is always prowling about, "seeking whom it can devour." A few sallow, dirty children were playing listlessly about the space, in a melancholy way, looking as if their young minds were already "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," and unconsciously oppressed with wonder why they should be born to such a miserable share of human life as this. A tall, gaunt woman, with pale face, and thinly clad in a worn and much-patched calico gown, and with a pair of "trashes" upon her stockingless feet, sat on the step of the cottage nearest the lane. The woman rose when she saw my friend. "Come in," said she; and we followed her into the house. It was a wretched place; and the smell inside was sickly. I should think a broker would not give half-a-crown for all the furniture we saw. The woman seemed simple-minded and very illiterate; and as she stood in the middle of the floor, looking vaguely round she said, "Aw can hardly ax yo to sit deawn, for we 'n sowd o' th' things eawt o'th heawse for a bit o' meight; but there is a cheer theer, sich as it is; see yo; tak' that." When she found that I wished to know something of her condition—although this was already well known to the gentleman who accompanied me—she began to tell her story in a simple,

off-hand way. "Aw 've had nine childer," said she; "we 'n buried six, an' we 'n three alive, an' aw expect another every day." In one corner there was a rickety little low bedstead. There was no bedding upon it but a ragged kind of quilt, which covered the ticking. Upon this quilt something lay, like a bundle of rags, covered with a dirty cloth. "There's one o' th' childer, lies here, ill," said she. "It 's gettin' th' worm fayver." When she uncovered that little emaciated face, the sick child gazed at me with wild, burning eyes, and began to whine pitifully. "Husht, my love," said the poor woman; "he 'll not hurt tho'! Husht, now; he 's noan beawn to touch tho'! He 's noan o'th doctor, love. Come, neaw, husht; that 's a good lass!" I gave the little thing a penny, and one way and another we soothed her fears, and she became silent; but the child still gazed at me with wild eyes, and the forecast of death on its thin face. The mother began again, "Eh, that little thing has suffered summat," said she, wiping her eyes; "an', as aw towd yo before, aw expect another every day. They 're born nake't, an' th' next 'll ha' to remain so, for aught that aw con see. But, aw dar not begin o' thinkin' abeawt it. It would drive me crazy. We han a little lad o' mi sister's livin' wi' us. Aw had to tak' him when his mother dee'd. Th' little thing 's noather feyther nor mother, neaw. It 's gwon eawt a beggin' this morning wi' my two

childer. My mother lives with us, too," continued she; "hoo's gooin' i' eighty-four, an' hoo's eighteenpence a week off th' teawn. There's seven on us, o'together, an' we'n had eawr share o' trouble, one way an' another, or else aw'm chetted. Well, aw'll tell yo' what happened to my husban' o' i' two years' time. My husban's a collier. Well, first he wur brought whoam wi' three ribs broken—aw wur lyin' in when they brought him whoam. An' then, at after that, he geet his arm broken; an' soon after he'd getten o'er that, he wur nearly brunt to deeath i' one o'th pits at Ratcliffe; an' aw haven't quite done yet, for, after that, he lee ill o'th rheumatic fayver sixteen week. That o' happen't i' two years' time. It's God's truth, maister. Mr Lea knows summat abeawt it—an' he stons theer. Yo may have a like aim what we'n had to go through. An' that wur when times were'n good; but then, everything o' that sort helps to poo folk deawn, yo known. We'n had very hard deed, maister—aw consider we'n had as hard deed as anybody livin', takkin' o' together." This case was an instance of the peculiar troubles to which colliers and their families are liable; a little representative bit of life among the poor of Wigan. From this place we went further up into Scholes, to a dirty square, called the "Coal Yard." Here we called at the house of Peter Y——, a man of fifty-one, and a weaver of a kind of stuff

called, "broad cross-over," at which work he earned about six shillings a week, when in full employ. His wife was a cripple, unable to help herself; and, therefore, necessarily a burden. Their children were two girls, and one boy. The old woman said, "Aw'm always forced to keep one o'th lasses a-whoam, for aw connot do a hond's turn." The children had been brought up to factory labour; but both they and their father had been out of work nearly twelve months. During that time the family had received relief tickets, amounting to the value of four shillings a week. Speaking of the old man, the mother said, "Peter has just getten a bit o' wark again, thank God. He 's hardly fit for it; but he 'll do it as lung as he can keep ov his feet."

## CHAPTER XVII.

"Lord! how the people suffer day by day
A lingering death, through lack of honest bread;
And yet are gentle on their starving way,
By faith in future good and justice led."
—BLACKBURN BARD.

IT is a curious thing to note the various combinations of circumstance which exist among the families of the poor. On the surface they seem much the same; and they are reckoned up according to number, income, and the like. But there are great differences of feeling and cultivation amongst them; and then, every household has a story of its own, which no statistics can tell. There is hardly a family which has not had some sickness, some stroke of disaster, some peculiar sorrow, or crippling hindrance, arising within itself, which makes its condition unlike the rest. In this respect each family is one string in the great harp of humanity—a string which, touched by the finger of Heaven, contributes a special utterance

to that universal harmony which is too fine for mortal ears.

From the old weaver's house in "Coal Yard" we went to a place close by, called "Castle Yard," one of the most unwholesome nooks I have seen in Wigan; yet, though there are many such in that part of the town. It was a close, pestilent, little *cul de sac*, shut in by a dead brick wall at the far end. Here we called upon an Irish family, seven in number. The mother and two of her daughters were in. The mother had sore eyes. The place was dirty, and the air inside was close and foul. The miserable bits of furniture left were fit for nothing but a bonfire. "Good morning, Mrs K——," said my friend, as we entered the stifling house; "how are you geting on?" The mother stood in the middle of the floor, wiping her sore eyes, and then folding her hands in a tattered apron; whilst her daughters gazed upon us vacantly from the background. "Oh, then," replied the woman, "things is worse wid us entirely, sir, than whenever ye wor here before. I dunno what will we do whin the winter comes." In reply to me, she said, "We are seven altogether, wid my husband an' myself. I have one lad was ill o' the yallow jaundice this many months, an' there is somethin' quare hangin' over that boy this day; I dunno whatever shall we do wid him. I was thinkin' this long time could I get a ricommind to see

would the doctor give him anythin' to rise an appetite in him at all. By the same token, I know it is not a convanient time for makin' appetites in poor folk just now. But perhaps the doctor might be able to do him some good, by the way he would be ready when times mind. Faith, my hands is full wid one thing an' another. Ah, thin; but God is good, after all. We dunno what is He goin' to do through the dark stroke is an' us this day." Here my friend interrupted her, saying, "Don't you think, Mrs K——, that you would be more comfortable if you were to keep your house cleaner? It costs nothing, you know, but a little labour; and you have nothing else to do just now." "Ah, then," replied she; "see here, now. I was just gettin' the mug ready for that same, whenever ye wor comin' into the yard, I was." Here she turned sharply round, and said to one of the girls, who was standing in the background, "Go on, wid ye, now; and clane the flure. Didn't I tell ye many a time this day?" The girl smiled, and shuffled away into a dingy little room at the rear of the cottage. "Faith, sir," continued the woman, beating time with her hand in the air; "faith, sir, it is not aisy for a poor woman to manage unbiddable childer." What part of Ireland do you come from, Mrs K——?" said I. She hesitated a second or two, and played with her chin; then, blushing slightly, she replied in a subdued tone,

"County Galway, sir." "Well," said I, "you've no need to be ashamed of that." The woman seemed reassured, and answered at once, "Oh, indeed then, sir, I am not ashamed—why would I? I am more nor seventeen year now in England, an' I never disguised my speech, nor disowned my country— nor I never will, aither, plase God." She had said before that her husband was forty-five years of age; and now I inquired what age she was. "I am the same age as my husband," replied she. "Forty-five," said I. "No, indeed, I am not forty-five," answered she; "nor forty naither." "Are you thirty-eight?" "May be I am; I dunno. I don't think I am thirty-eight naither; I am the same age as my husband." It was no use talking, so the subject was dropped. As we came away, the woman followed my friend to the door. earnestly pleading the cause of some family in the neighbourhood, who were in great distress. "See now," said she, "they are a large family, and the poor crayters are starvin'. He is a shoemaker, an' he doesn't be gettin' any work this long time. Oh, indeed, then, Mr Lea, God knows thim people is badly off." My friend promised to visit the family she had spoken of, and we came away. The smell of the house, and of the court altogether, was so sickening that we were glad to get into the air of the open street again. It was now about half-past eleven, and my friend said, "We have another workroom for young women

in the schoolroom of St Catherine's Church. It is about five minutes' walk from here; we have just time to see it before they break up for dinner." It was a large, square, brick building, standing by the road side, upon high ground, at the upper end of Scholes. The church is about fifty yards east of the schoolhouse. This workroom was more airy, and better lighted than the one at the Mechanics' Institution. The floor was flagged, which will make it colder than the other in winter time. There were four hundred girls in this room, some engaged in sewing and knitting, others in reading and writing. They are employed four days in the week, and they are paid ninepence a day, as at the other two rooms in the town. It really was a pleasant thing to see their clear, healthy, blond complexions; their clothing, so clean and whole, however poor; and their orderly deportment. But they had been accustomed to work, and their work had given them a discipline which is not sufficiently valued. There are people who have written a great deal, and know very little about the influence of factory labour upon health,—it would be worth their while to see some of these workrooms. I think it would sweep cobwebs away from the corners of their minds. The clothing made up in these workrooms is of a kind suitable for the wear of working people, and is intended to be given away to the neediest among them, in the coming

winter. I noticed a feature here which escaped me in the room at the Mechanics' Institution. On one side of the room there was a flight of wooden stairs, about six yards wide. Upon these steps were seated a number of children, with books in their hands. These youngsters were evidently restless, though not noisy; and they were not very attentive to their books. These children were the worst clad and least clean part of the assembly; and it was natural that they should be so, for they were habitual beggars, gathered from the streets, and brought there to be taught and fed. When they were pointed out to me, I could not help thinking that the money which has been spent upon ragged schools is an excellent investment in the sense of world-wide good. I remarked to one of the ladies teaching there, how very clean and healthy the young women looked. She said that the girls had lately been more in the open air than usual. "And," said she, speaking of the class she was superintending, "I find these poor girls as apt learners as any other class of young people I ever knew." We left the room just before they were dismissed to dinner. A few yards from the school, and by the same roadside, we came to a little cottage at the end of a row. "We will call here," said my friend; "I know the people very well." A little, tidy, good-looking woman sat by the fire, nursing an infant at the breast. The house

was clean, and all the humble furniture of the poor man's cottage seemed to be still in its place. There were two shelves of books hanging against the walls, and a pile of tracts and pamphlets, a foot deep, on a small table at the back of the room. I soon found, however, that these people were going through their share of the prevalent suffering. The family was six in number. The comely little woman said that her husband was a weaver of "Cross-over;" and I suppose he would earn about six or seven shillings a week at that kind of work; but he had been long out of work. His wife said, "I 've had to pop my husban's trousers an' waistcoat many a time to pay th' rent o' this house." She then began to talk about her first-born, and the theme was too much for her. "My owdest child was thirteen when he died," said she. "Eh, he was a fine child. We lost him about two years sin'. He was killed. He fell down that little pit o' Wright's, Mr Lea,—he did." Then the little woman began to cry, "Eh, my poor lad! Eh, my fine little lad! Oh dear,—oh dear o' me!" What better thing could we have done than to say nothing at such a moment. We waited a few minutes until she became calm, and then she began to talk about a benevolent young governess who used to live in that quarter, and who had gone about doing good there, amongst "all sorts and conditions of men," especially the poorest.

"Eh," said she; "that was a good woman, if ever there was one. Hoo teached a class o' fifty at church school here, though hoo wur a Dissenter. An' hoo used to come to this house every Sunday neet, an' read th' Scripturs; an' th' place wur olez crammed—th' stairs an o'. Up-groon fellows used to come an' larn fro her, just same as childer—they did for sure—great rough colliers, an' o' mak's. Hoo used to warn 'em again drinkin', an' get 'em to promise that they wouldn't taste for sich a time. An' if ever they broke their promise, they olez towd her th' truth, and owned to it at once. They like as iv they couldn't for shame tell her a lie. There 's one of her scholars, a blacksmith—he 's above fifty year owd—iv yo were to mention her name to him just now, he 'd begin a-cryin', an' he 'd ha' to walk eawt o'th heause afore he could sattle hissel'. Eh, hoo wur a fine woman; an' everything that hoo said wur so striking. Hoo writes to her scholars here, once a week; an' hoo wants 'em to write back to her, as mony on 'em as con do. See yo; that 's one ov her letters!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Come, child of misfortune, come hither!
I'll weep with thee, tear for tear."
—Tom Moore.

THE weaver's wife spoke very feelingly of the young governess who had been so good to the family. Her voice trembled with emotion as she told of her kindnesses, which had so won the hearts of the poor folk thereabouts, that whenever they hear her name now, their tongues leap at once into heart-warm praise of her. It seems to have been her daily pleasure to go about helping those who needed help most, without any narrowness of distinction; in the spirit of that "prime wisdom" which works with all its might among such elements as lie nearest to the hand. Children and gray-haired working men crowded into the poor cottages to hear her read, and to learn the first elements of education at her free classes. She left the town, some time ago, to live in the south of

England; but the blessings of many who were ready to perish in Wigan will follow her all her days, and her memory will long remain a garden of good thoughts and feelings to those she has left behind. The eyes of the weaver's wife grew moist as she told of the old blacksmith, who could not bear to hear her name mentioned without tears. On certain nights of the week he used to come regularly with the rest to learn to read, like a little child, from that young teacher. As I said in my last, she still sends a weekly letter to her poor scholars in Wigan to encourage them in their struggles, and to induce as many of them as are able to write to her in return. "This is one of her letters," said the poor woman, handing a paper to me. The manner of the handwriting was itself characteristic of kind consideration for her untrained readers. The words stood well apart. The letters were clearly divided, and carefully and distinctly written, in Roman characters, a quarter of an inch long; and there was about three-quarters of an inch of space between each line, so as to make the whole easier to read by those not used to manuscript. The letter ran as follows:—"Dear friends,—I send you with this some little books, which I hope you will like to try to read; soon, I hope, I shall be able to help you with those texts you cannot make out by yourselves. I often think of you, dear friends, and wish that I

could sometimes take a walk to Scholefield's Lane. This wish only makes me feel how far I am from you, but then I remember with gladness that I may mention you all by name to our one Father, and ask Him to bless you. Very often I do ask Him, and one of my strongest wishes is that we, who have so often read His message of love together, may all of us love the Saviour, and, through Him, be saved from sin. Dear friends, do pray to Him. With kind love and best wishes to each one of you, believe me always, your sincere friend, ——." I have dwelt a little upon this instance of unassuming beneficence, to show that there is a great deal of good being done in this world, which is not much heard of, except by accident. One meets with it, here and there, as a thirsty traveller meets with an unexpected spring in the wilderness, refreshing its own plot of earth, without noise or ostentation. My friend and I left the weaver's cottage, and came down again into a part of Scholes where huddled squalor and filth is to be found on all sides. On our way we passed an old tattered Irishwoman, who was hurrying along, with two large cabbages clipt tight in her withered arms. "You 're doin' well, old lady," said I. "Faith," replied she, "if I had a big lump ov a ham bone, now, wouldn't we get over this day in glory, anyhow. But no matter. There 's not wan lafe o' them two fellows but will be clane out o'

sight before the clock strikes again." The first place we called at in this quarter was a poor half-empty cottage, inhabited by an old widow and her sick daughter. The girl sat there pale and panting, and wearing away to skin and bone. She was far gone in consumption. Their only source of maintenance was the usual grant of relief from the committee, but this girl's condition needed further consideration. The old widow said to my friend, "Aw wish yo could get me some sort o' nourishment for this lass, Mr Lea; aw cannot get it mysel', an' yo see'n heaw hoo is." My friend took a note of the case, and promised to see to it at once. When great weltering populations, like that of Lancashire, are thrown suddenly into such a helpless state as now, it is almost impossible to lay hold at once of every nice distinction of circumstances that gives a speciality of suffering to the different households of the poor. But I believe, as this time of trouble goes on, the relief committees are giving a more careful and delicate consideration to the respective conditions of poor families. After leaving the old widow's house, as we went farther down into the sickly hive of penury and dirt, called "Scholes," my friend told me of an intelligent young woman, a factory operative and a Sunday-school teacher, who had struggled against starvation, till she could bear it no longer; and, even after she had accepted

the grant of relief, she "couldn't for shame" fetch the tickets herself, but waited outside whilst a friend of hers went in for them. The next house we visited was a comfortable cottage. The simple furniture was abundant, and good of its kind, and the whole was remarkably clean. Amongst the wretched dwellings in its neighbourhood, it shone "like a good deed in a naughty world." On the walls there were several Catholic pictures, neatly framed; and a large old-fashioned wooden wheel stood in the middle of the floor, with a quantity of linen yarn upon it. Old Stephen I—— and his cosy goodwife lived there. The old woman was "putting the place to rights" after their noontide meal; and Stephen was "cottering" about the head of the cellar steps when we went in. There were a few healthy plants in the windows, and everything gave evidence of industry and care. The good-tempered old couple were very communicative. Old Stephen was a weaver of diaper; and, when he had anything to do, he could earn about eight shillings a week. "Some can get more than that at the same work," said he; "but I am gettin' an old man, ye see. I shall be seventy-three on the 10th of next October, and, beside that, I have a very bad arm, which is a great hindrance to me." "He has had very little work for months, now," said his wife; "an' what makes us feel it more, just now, is that my son is over here on a visit to us, from Oscott

College. He is studying for the priesthood. He went to St John's, here, in Wigan, for five years, as a pupil teacher; an' he took good ways, so the principals of the college proposed to educate him for the Church of Rome. He was always a good boy, an' a bright one, too. I wish we had been able to entertain him better. But he knows that the times are again us. He is twenty-four years of age; an' I often think it strange that his father's birthday and his own fall on the same day of the month—the 10th of October. I hope we 'll both live to see him an ornament to his profession yet. There is only the girl, an' Stephen, an' myself left at home now, an' we have hard work to pull through, I can assure ye; though there are many people a dale worse off than we are." From this place we went up to a street called "Vauxhall Road." In the first cottage we called at here the inmates were all out of work, as usual, and living upon relief. There happened to be a poor old white-haired weaver sitting in the house,—an aged neighbour out of work, who had come in to chat with my friend a bit. My friend asked how he was getting on. "Yo mun speak up," said the woman of the house, "he 's very deaf." "What age are yo, maister?" said I. "What?" "How old are yo?" "Aw'm a beamer," replied the old man, "a twister-in,—when there 's ought doin'. But it 's nowt ov a trade neaw. Aw'll tell yo what ruins me; it's these

lung warps. They maken 'em seven an' eight cuts in, neaw an' then. There 's so mony 'fancies' an' things i' these days; it makes my job good to nought at o' for sich like chaps as me. When one gets sixty year owd, they needen to go to schoo again neaw; they getten o'erta'en wi' so mony kerly-berlies o' one mak and another. Mon, owd folk at has to wortch for a livin' connot keep up wi' sich times as these,—nought o'th sort." "Well, but how do you manage to live?" "Well, aw can hardly tell,—aw 'll be sunken iv aw can tell. It 's very thin pikein'; but very little does for me, an' aw 've nought but mysel'. Yo see'n, aw get a bit ov a job neaw an' then, an' a scrat amung th' rook, like an owd hen. But aw 'll tell yo one thing; aw 'll not go up yon, iv aw can help it,—aw 'll not." ("Up yon" meant to the Board of Guardians.) "Eh, now," said the woman of the house, "aw never see'd sich a mon as him i' my life. See yo, he 'll sit an' clem fro mornin' to neet afore he 'll ax oather relief folk or onybody else for a bite." In the same street we called at a house where there was a tall, pale old man, sitting sadly in an old arm-chair, by the fireside. The little cottage was very sweet and orderly. Every window was cleaned to its utmost nook of glass, and every bit of metal was brightened up to the height. The flagged floor was new washed; and everything was in its own place. There were a few books on little shelves,

and a Bible lay on the window-sill; and there was a sad, chapel-like stillness in the house. A clean, staid-looking girl stood at a table, peeling potatoes for dinner. The old man said, "We are five, altogether, in this house. This lass is a reeler. I am a weighver; but we'n bin out o' wark nine months, now. We'n bin force't to tak to relief at last; an' we'n getten five tickets. We could happen ha' manage't better,—but aw'm sore wi' rheumatism, yo see'n. Aw 've had a bit o' weighvin' i'th heawse mony a day, but aw 've th' rheumatic so bad i' this hond—it 's hond that aw pick wi'—that aw couldn't bide to touch a fither with it, bless yo. Aw have th' rheumatic all o'er mo, nearly; an' it leads one a feaw life. Yo happen never had a touch on it, had yo?" "Never." "Well; yo 're weel off. When is this war to end, thinken yo?" "Nay; that 's a very hard thing to tell." "Well, we mun grin an' abide till it 's o'er, aw guess. It 's a mad mak o' wark. But it 'll happen turn up for best i'th end ov o'."

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Mother, heaw leets we han no brade,—
Heawever con it be?
Iv aw don't get some brade to eat,
Aw think 'at aw mun dee."
—*Hungry Child.*

IT was about noon when we left the old weaver, nursing his rheumatic limbs by the side of a dim fire, in his chapel-like little house. His daughter, a tall, clean, shy girl, began to peel a few potatoes just before we came away. It is a touching thing, just now, to see so many decent cottages of thrifty working men brought low by the strange events of these days; cottages in which everything betokens the care of well-conducted lives, and where the sacred fire of independent feeling is struggling through the long frost of misfortune with patient dignity. It is a touching thing to see the simple joys of life, in homes like these, crushed into a speechless endurance of penury, and the native spirit of self-reliance writhing in unavoidable

prostration, and hoping on from day to day for better times. I have seen many such places in my wanderings during these hard days — cottages where all was so sweet and orderly, both in person and habitation, that, but for the funereal stillness which sat upon hunger-nipt faces, a stranger would hardly have dreamt that the people dwelling there were undergoing any uncommon privation. I have often met with such people in my rambles,—I have often found them suffering pangs more keen than hunger alone could inflict, because they arose from the loss of those sweet relations of independence which are dear to many of them as life itself. With such as these—the shy, the proud, the intelligent and uncomplaining endurers—hunger is not the hardest thing that befalls :—

> " When the mind 's free,
> The body 's delicate; the tempest in their minds
> Doth from their senses take all else,
> Save what beats there."

People of this temper are more numerous amongst our working population than the world believes, because they are exactly of the kind least likely to be heard of. They will fight their share of the battle of this time out as nobly as they have begun it; and it will be an ill thing for the land that owns them if full justice is not done to their worth, both now and hereafter.

In the same street where the old weaver lived, we called upon a collier's family—a family of ten in number. The colliers of Wigan have been suffering a good deal lately, among the rest of the community, from shortness of labour. It was dinner-time when we entered the house, and the children were all swarming about the little place clamouring for their noontide meal. With such a rough young brood, I do not wonder that the house was not so tidy as some that I had seen. The collier's wife was a decent, good-tempered-looking woman, though her face was pale and worn, and bore evidence of the truth of her words, when she said, "Bless your life, aw 'm poo'd to pieces wi' these childer!" She sat upon a stool, nursing a child at the breast, and doing her best to still the tumult of the others, who were fluttering about noisily. "Neaw, Sammul," said she, "theaw 'll ha' that pot upo th' floor in now,—thae little pousement thae! Do keep eawt o' mischief,—an' make a less din, childer, win yo: for my yed 's fair maddle't wi' one thing an' another. . . . . Mary, tak' th' pon off th' fire, an' reach me yon hippin' off th' oondur; an' then sit tho deawn somewheer, do,—thae 'll be less bi th' legs." The children ranged seemingly from about two months up to fourteen years of age. Two of the youngest were sitting upon the bottom step of the stairs, eating off one plate. Four rough

lads were gathered round a brown dish, which stood upon a little deal table in the middle of the floor. These four were round-headed little fellows, all teeming with life. "Yo'n catched us eawt o' flunters, (out of order,)" said the poor woman when we entered; "but what con a body do?" We were begging that she would not disturb herself, when one of the lads at the table called out, "Mother; look at eawr John. He keeps pushin' me off th' cheer!" "Eh, John," replied she; "I wish thy feyther were here! Thae'rt olez tormentin' that lad. Do let him alone, wilto—or else aw'll poo that toppin' o' thine, smartly—aw will! An' do see iv yo connot behave yorsels!" "Well," said John; "he keeps takkin' my puddin'!" "Eh, what a story," replied the other little fellow; "it wur thee, neaw!" "Aw'll tell yo what it is," said the mother, "iv yo two connot agree, an' get your dinner quietly, aw'll tak that dish away; an' yo'st not have another bite this day. Heaw con yo for shame!" This quietened the lads a little, and they went on with their dinner. At another little table under the back window, two girls stood, dining off one plate. The children were all eating a kind of light pudding, known in Lancashire by the name of "Berm-bo," or, "Berm-dumplin'," made of flour and yeast, mixed with a little suet. The poor woman said that her children were all "hearty-etten," (all hearty eaters,) especially the

lads; and she hardly knew what to make for them, so as to have enough for the whole. "Berm-dumplin'," was as satisfying as anything that she could get, and it would "stick to their ribs" better than "ony mak o' swill;" besides, the children liked it. Speaking of her husband, she said, "He were eawt o' wark a good while; but he geet a shop at last, at Blackrod, abeawt four mile off Wigan. When he went a-wortchin' to Blackrod, at first, nought would sarve but he would walk theer an' back every day, so as to save lodgin' brass,—an sich like. Aw shouldn't ha' care't iv it had nobbut bin a mile, or two even; for aw'd far rayther that he had his meals comfortable awhoam, an' his bits o' clooas put reet; but Lord bless yo,—eight mile a day, beside a hard day's wark,—it knocked him up at last,—it were so like. He kept sayin', 'Oh, he could do it,' an' sich like; but aw could see that he were fair killin' hissel', just for the sake o' comin' to his own whoam ov a neet; an' for th' sake o' savin' two or three shillin'; so at last aw turned Turk, an' made him tak lodgin's theer. Aw'd summut to do to persuade him at first, an' aw know that he's as whoam-sick as a chylt that's lost its mother, just this minute; but then, what's th' matter o' that,—it wouldn't do for mo to have him laid up, yo known. . . . Oh, he's a very feelin' mon. Aw've sin him when he

couldn't finish his bit o' dinner for thinkin' o' somebody that were clemmin'." Speaking of the hardships the family had experienced, she said, "Eh, bless yo! There's some folk can sit i'th heawse an' send their childer to prow eawt a-beggin' in a mornin', regilar,—but eawr childer wouldn't do it,—an', iv they would, aw wouldn' let 'em,—naw, not iv we were clemmin' to deeoth,—to my thinkin'." The woman was quite right. Among the hard-tried operatives of Lancashire I have seen several instances in which they have gone out daily to beg; and some rare cases, even, in which they have stayed moodily at home themselves and sent their children forth to beg; and anybody living in this county will have noticed the increase of mendicancy there, during the last few months. No doubt professional beggars have taken large advantage of this unhappy time to work upon the sympathies of those easy givers who cannot bear to hear the wail of distress, however simulated—who prefer giving at once, because it "does their own hearts good," to the trouble of inquiring or the pain of refusing,—who would rather relieve twenty rogues than miss the blessing of one honest soul who was ready to perish,—those kind-hearted, free-handed scatterers of indiscriminate benevolence who are the keen-eyed, whining cadger's chief support, his standing joke, and favourite prey;

and who are more than ever disposed to give to whomsoever shall ask of them in such a season as this. All the mendicancy which appears on our streets does not belong to the suffering operatives of Lancashire. But, apart from those poor, miserable crawlers in the gutters of life, who live by habitual and unnecessary beggary, great and continued adversity is a strong test of the moral tone of any people. Extreme poverty, and the painful things which follow in its train—these are "bad to bide" with the best of mankind. Besides, there are always some people who, from causes within themselves, are continually at their wits' end to keep the wolf from the door, even when employment is plentiful with them; and there are some natures too weak to bear any long strain of unusual poverty without falling back upon means of living which, in easy circumstances, they would have avoided, if not despised. It is one evil of the heavy pressure of the times; for there is fear that among such as these, especially the young and plastic, some may become so familiar with that beggarly element which was offensive to their minds at first—may so lose the tone of independent pride, and become "subdued to what they work in, like the dyer's hand,"—that they may learn to look upon mendicancy as an easy source of support hereafter, even in times of less difficulty than the present.

Happily, such weakness as this is not characteristic of the English people; but "they are well kept that God keeps," and perhaps it would not be wise to cramp the hand of relief too much at a time like this, to a people who have been, and will be yet, the hope and glory of the land.

## CHAPTER XX.

"Poor Tom's a-cold! Who gives anything to poor Tom?"
—*King Lear.*

ONE sometimes meets with remarkable differences of condition in the households of poor folk, which stand side by side in the same street. I am not speaking of the uncertain shelters of those who struggle upon the skirts of civilisation, in careless, uncared-for wretchedness, without settled homes, or regular occupation,—the miserable camp followers of life's warfare,—living habitually from hand to mouth, in a reckless wrestle with the world, for mere existence. I do not mean these, but the households of our common working people. Amongst the latter one sometimes meets with striking differences, in cleanliness, furniture, manners, intellectual acquirements, and that delicate compound of mental elements called taste. Even in families whose earnings have been equal in the past,

and who are just now subject alike to the same pinch of adversity, these disparities are sometimes very great. And, although there are cases in which the immediate causes of these differences are evident enough in the habits of the people, yet, in others, the causes are so obscure, that the wisest observer would be most careful in judging respecting them. I saw an example of this in a little bye-street, at the upper end of Scholes—a quarter of Wigan where the poorest of the poor reside, and where many decent working people have lately been driven for cheap shelter by the stress of the times. Scholes is one of those ash-pits of human life which may be found in almost any great town; where, among a good deal of despised stuff, which by wise treatment might possibly be made useful to the world, many a jewel gets accidentally thrown away, and lost. This bye-street of mean brick cottages had an unwholesome, outcast look; and the sallow, tattered women, lounging about the doorways, and listlessly watching the sickly children in the street, evinced the prevalence of squalor and want there. The very children seemed joyless at their play; and everything that met the eye foretold that there was little chance of finding anything in that street but poverty in its most prostrate forms. But, even in this unpromising spot, I met with an agreeable surprise. The first house we entered reminded me of those clean, lone dwellings, up in the

moorland nooks of Lancashire, where the sweet influences of nature have free play; where the people have a hereditary hatred of dirt and disorder; and where, even now, many of the hardy mountain folk are half farmers, half woollen weavers, doing their weaving in their own quiet houses, where the smell of the heather and the song of the wild bird floats in at the workman's window, blent with the sounds of rindling waters,—doing their weaving in green sequestered nooks, where the low of kine, and the cry of the moorfowl can be heard; and bearing the finished "cuts" home upon their backs to the distant town. All was so bright in this little cottage,—so tidy and serene,—that the very air seemed clearer there than in the open street. The humble furniture, good of its kind, was all shiny with "elbow grease," and some parts of it looked quaint and well-preserved, like the heirlooms of a careful cottage ancestry. The well polished fire-irons, and other metal things, seemed to gather up the diffuse daylight and fling it back in concentrated radiances that illuminated the shady cottage with cheerful beauty. The little shelf of books, the gleaming window, with its healthy pot flowers, the perfect order, and the trim sweetness of everything, reminded me, as I have said, of the better sort of houses where simple livers dwell, up among the free air of the green hills—those green hills of Lancashire, the remembrance of

which will always stir my heart as long as it can stir to anything. This cottage, in comparison with most of those which I had seen in Scholes, looked like a glimpse of the star-lit blue peeping through the clouds on a gloomy night. I found that it was the house of a widower, a weaver of diaper, who was left with a family of eight children to look after. Two little girls were in the house, and they were humbly but cleanly clad. One of them called her father up from the cellar, where he was working at his looms. He was a mild, thoughtful-looking man, something past middle age. I could not help admiring him as he stood in the middle of the floor with his unsleeved arms folded, uttering quiet jets of simple speech to my friend, who had known him before. He said that he hardly ever got anything to do now, but when he was at work he could make about 7s. 2d. a week by weaving two cuts. He was receiving six tickets weekly from the Relief Committee, which, except the proceeds of a little employment now and then, was all that the family of nine had to depend upon for food, firing, clothes, and rent. He said that he was forced to make every little spin out as far as it would; but it kept him bare and busy, and held his nose "everlastingly deawn to th' grindlestone." But he didn't know that it was any use complaining about a thing that neither master nor man could help. He durst say that he

could manage to grin and bide till things came round, th' same as other folk had to do. Grumbling, in a case like this, was like "fo'in eawt wi' th' elements," (quarrelling with a storm.) One of his little girls was on her knees, cleaning the floor. She stopped a minute, to look at my friend and me. "Come, my lass," said her father, "get on wi' thi weshin'." "I made application for th' watchman's place at Leyland Mill," continued he, "but I wur to lat. . . . There's nought for it," continued he, as we came out of the house, "there's nought for it but to keep one's een oppen, an' do as weel as they con, till it blows o'er." A few yards from this house, we looked in at a slip of a cottage, at the corner of the row. It was like a slice off some other cottage, stuck on at the end of the rest, to make up the measure of the street; for it was less than two yards wide, by about four yards long. There was only one small window, close to the door, and it was shrouded by a dingy cotton blind. When we first entered, I could hardly see what there was in that gloomy cell; but when the eyes became acquainted with the dimness within, we found that there was neither fire nor furniture in the place, except at the far end, where an old sick woman lay gasping upon three chairs, thinly covered from the cold. She was dying of asthma. At her right hand there was another rickety chair, by the help of which she raised her-

self up from her hard bed. She said that she had never been up stairs during the previous twelve months, but had lain there, at the foot of the stairs, all that time. She had two daughters. They were both out of the house; and they had been out of work a long time. One of them had gone to Miss B——'s to learn to sew. "She gets her breakfast before she starts," said the old woman, "an' she takes a piece o' bread with her, to last for th' day." It was a trouble to her to talk much, so we did not stop long; but I could not help feeling sorry that the poor old soul had not a little more comfort to smooth her painful passage to the grave. On our way from this place, we went into a cottage near the "Coal Yard," where a tall, thin Irishwoman was washing some tattered clothes, whilst her children played about the gutter outside. This was a family of seven, and they were all out of work, except the father, who was away, trying to make a trifle by hawking writing-paper and envelopes. This woman told us that she was in great trouble about one of her children—the eldest daughter, now grown up to womanhood. "She got married to a sailor about two year ago," said she, "an' he wint away a fortnit after, an' never was heard of since. She never got the scrape ov a pen from him to say was he alive or dead. She never heard top nor tail of him since he wint from her; an' the girl is just pinin' away."

Poor folk have their full share of the common troubles of life, apart from the present distress. The next place we visited was the "Fleece Yard," another of those unhealthy courts, of which there are so many in Scholes—where poverty and dirt unite to make life doubly miserable. In this yard we went up three or four steps into a little disorderly house, where a family of eleven was crowded. Not one of the eleven was earning anything except the father, who was working for 1s. 3d. a day. In addition to this the family received four tickets weekly from the Relief Committee. There were several of the children in, and they looked brisk and healthy, in spite of the dirt and discomfort of the place; but the mother was sadly "torn down" by the cares of her large family. The house had a sickly smell. Close to the window, a little, stiff-built, bullet-headed lad stood, stript to the waist, sputtering and splashing as he washed himself in a large bowl of water, placed upon a stool. By his side there was another lad three or four years older, and the two were having a bit of famous fun together, quite heedless of all else. The elder kept ducking the little fellow's head into the water, upon which the one who was washing himself sobbed, and spat, and cried out in great glee, "Do it again, Jack!" The mother, seeing us laugh at the lads, said, "That big un's been powin' tother, an' th' little monkey's gone an' cut

every smite o' th' lad's toppin' off." "Well," said the elder lad, "Aw did it so as nobody can lug him." And it certainly was a close clip. We could see to the roots of the little fellow's hair all over his round, hard head. "Come," said the mother, "yo two are makin' a nice floor for mo. Thae 'll do, mon; arto beawn to lother o' th' bit o' swoap away that one has to wash wi'; gi 's howd on 't this minute, an' go thi ways an' dry thisel', thae little pouse, thae." We visited several other places in Scholes that day, but of these I will say something hereafter. In the evening I returned home, and the thing that I best remember hearing on the way was an anecdote of two Lancashire men, who had been disputing a long time about something that one of them knew little of. At last the other turned to him, and said, "Jem; does thae know what it is that makes me like thee so weel, owd brid?" "Naw; what is it?" "Why; it 's becose thae 'rt sich a —— foo!" "Well," replied the other, "never thee mind that;" and then, alluding to the subject they had been disputing about, he said, "Thae knows, Joe, aw know thae 'rt reet enough; but, by th' mon, aw 'll not give in till mornin'."

## CHAPTER XXI.

"Here, take this purse, thou whom the Heaven's plagues
Have humbled to all strokes."

—*King Lear.*

ON the afternoon of the last day I spent in Wigan, as I wandered with my friend from one cottage to another, in the long suburban lane called "Hardy Butts," I bethought me how oft I had met with this name of "Butts" connected with places in or close to the towns of Lancashire. To me the original application of the name seems plain, and not uninteresting. In the old days, when archery was common in England, the bowmen of Lancashire were famous; and it is more than likely that these yet so-called "Butts" are the places where archery was then publicly practised. When Sir Edward Stanley led the war-smiths of Lancashire and Cheshire to Flodden Field, the men of Wigan are mentioned as going with the rest. And among those "fellows fearce and freshe for feight," of whom the quaint old alliterative ballad describes the array:—

"A stock of striplings strong of heart,
Brought up from babes with beef and bread,
From Warton unto Warrington
From Wigan unto Wiresdale—"

and, from a long list of the hills, and cloughs, and old towns of the county—the bowmen of Lancashire did their share of work upon that field. The use of the bow lingered longer in Lancashire than in some parts of the kingdom—longer in England generally than many people suppose. Sir Walter Scott says, in a note to his "Legend of Montrose:" "Not only many of the Highlanders in Montrose's army used these antique missiles, but even in England the bow and quiver, once the glory of the bold yeomen of that land, were occasionally used during the great civil wars." But I have said enough upon this subject in this place. My friend's business, and mine, in Wigan, that day, was connected with other things. He was specially wishful that I should call upon an acquaintance of his, who lived in "Hardy Butts," an old man and very poor; a man heavily stricken by fortune's blows, yet not much tamed thereby; a man "steeped to the lips" in poverty, yet of a jocund spirit; a humorist and a politician, among his humble companions. I felt curious to see this "Old John," of whom I heard so much. We went to the cottage where he lived. There was very little furniture in the place, and, like the house itself, it was neither good nor clean; but then the poverty-

stricken pair were very old, and, so far as household comfort went, they had to look after themselves. When we entered, the little wrinkled woman sat with her back to us, smoking, and gazing at the dirty grate, where a few hot cinders glowed dimly in the lowmost bars. "Where's John?" said my friend. "He hasn't bin gone eawt aboon five minutes," said she, turning round to look at us, "Wur yo wantin' him?" "Yes, I should like to see him." She looked hard at my friend again, and then cried out, "Eh, is it yo? Come, an' sit yo deawn! aw 'll go an' see iv aw can root him up for yo!" But we thought it as well to visit some other houses in the neighbourhood, calling at old John's again afterwards; so we told the old woman, and came away. My friend was well known to the poor people of that neighbourhood as a member of the Relief Committee, and we had not gone many yards down "Hardy Butts" before we drew near where three Irishwomen were sitting upon the doorsteps of a miserable cottage, chattering, and looking vacantly up and down the slutchy street. As soon as they caught sight of my friend, one of the women called out, "Eh, here's Mr Lea! Come here, now, Mr Lea, till I spake to ye. Ah, now; couldn't ye do somethin' for old Mary beyant there? Sure the colour of hunger 's in that woman's face. Faith, it 's a pity to see the way she is,—naither husband nor

son, nor chick nor child, nor bit nor sup, barrin' what folk that has nothin' can give to her,—the crayter." "Oh, indeed, then, sir," said another, "I'll lave it to God; but that woman is starvin'. She is little more nor skin an' bone,—and that's goin' less. Faith, she's not long for this world, any how. . . . Bridget, ye might run an' see can she come here a minute. . . . But there she is, standin' at the corner. Mary! Come here, now, woman, till ye see the gentleman." She was a miserable-looking creature; old, and ill, and thinly-clothed in rags, with a dirty cloth tied round her head. My friend asked her some questions, which she answered slowly, in a low voice that trembled with more than the weakness of old age. He promised to see to the relief of her condition immediately; and she thanked him, but so feebly, that it seemed to me as if she had not strength enough left to care much whether she was relieved or not. But, as we came away, the three Irishwomen, sitting upon the door-steps, burst forth into characteristic expressions of gratitude. "Ah! long life to ye, Mr Lea! The prayer o' the poor is wid ye for evermore. If there was ony two people goin' to heaven alive, you 'll be wan o' them. . . . . That ye may never know want nor scant,—for the good heart that's batein' in ye, Mr Lea." We now went through some of the filthy alleys behind "Hardy Butts," till we came to the

cottage of a poor widow and her two daughters. The three were entirely dependent upon the usual grant of relief from the committee. My friend called here to inquire why the two girls had not been to school during the previous few days; and whilst their mother was explaining the reason, a neighbour woman who had seen us enter, looked in at the door, and said, "Hey! aw say, Mr Lea!" "Well, what 's the matter?" "Whaw, there 's a woman i'th next street at 's gettin' four tickets fro th' relief folk, reggilar, an' her husban 's addlin' thirty shillin' a week o' t' time, as a sinker—he is for sure. Aw 'm noan tellin' yo a wort ov a lie. Aw consider sich wark as that 's noan reet—an' so mony folk clemmin' as there is i' Wigan." He made a note of the matter; but he told me afterwards that such reports were often found to be untrue, having their origin sometimes in private spite or personal contention of some kind. In the next house we called at, a widow woman lived, with her married daughter, who had a child at the breast. The old woman told her story herself; the daughter never spoke a word, so far as I remember, but sat there, nursing, silent and sad, with half-averted face, and stealing a shy glance at us now and then, when she thought we were not looking at her. It was a clean cottage, though it was scantily furnished with poor things; and they were both neat and clean in person, though their

clothing was meagre and far worn. I thought, also, that the old woman's language, and the countenances of both of them, indicated more natural delicacy of feeling, and more cultivation, than is common amongst people of their condition. The old woman said, "My daughter has been eawt o' work a long time. I can make about two shillings and sixpence a-week, an' we've a lodger that pays us two shillings a week; but we've three shillings a-week to pay for rent, an' we must pay it, too, or else turn out. But I'm lookin' for a less heawse; for we cannot afford to stop here any longer, wi' what we have comin' in, —that is, if we're to live at o'." I thought the house they were in was small enough and mean enough for the poorest creature, and, though it was kept clean, the neighbourhood was very unwholesome. But this was another instance of how the unemployed operatives of Lancashire are being driven down from day to day deeper into the pestilent sinks of life in these hard times. "This child of my daughter's," continued the old woman, in a low tone, "this child was born just as they were puttin' my husband into his coffin, an' wi' one thing an' another, we've had a deal o' trouble. But one half o'th world doesn't know how tother lives. My husban' lay ill i' bed three year; an' he suffered to that degree that he was weary o' life long before it were o'er. At after we lost him, these bad times

coom on, an' neaw, aw think we 're poo'd deawn as nee to th' greawnd as ony body can be. My daughter's husband went off a-seekin' work just afore that child was born,—an' we haven't heard from him yet." My friend took care that his visit should result in lightening the weight of the old woman's troubles a little. As we passed the doors of a row of new cottages at the top end of "Hardy Butts," a respectable old man looked out at one of the doorways, and said to my friend, "Could aw spake to yo a minute?" We went in, and found the house remarkably clean, with good cottage furniture in it. Two neighbour children were peeping in at the open door. The old man first sent them away, and then, after closing the door, he pointed to a good-looking young woman who stood blushing at the entrance of the inner room, with a wet cloth in her hands, and he said, "Could yo do a bit o' summat to help this lass till sich times as hoo can get wark again? Hoo 's noather feyther nor mother, nor nought i'th world to tak to, but what aw can spare for her, an' this is a poor shop to come to for help. Aw 'm uncle to her." "Well," said my friend, "and cannot you manage to keep her?" "God bless yo!" replied the old man, getting warm, "Aw cannot keep mysel'. Aw will howd eawt as lung as aw can; but, yo know, what 'll barely keep one alive 'll clem two. Aw should be thankful iv yo could give

her a bit o' help whol things are as they are." Before the old man had done talking, his niece had crept away into the back room, as if ashamed of being the subject of such a conversation. This case was soon disposed of to the satisfaction of the old man; after which we visited three other houses in the same block, of which I have nothing special to say, except that they were all inhabited by people brought down to destitution by long want of work, and living solely upon the relief fund, and upon the private charity of their old employers. Upon this last source of relief too little has been said, because it has not paraded itself before the public eye; but I have had opportunities for seeing how wide and generous it is, and I shall have abundant occasion for speaking of it hereafter. On our way back, we looked in at "Old John's" again, to see if he had returned home. He had been in, and he had gone out again, so we came away, and saw nothing of him. Farther down towards the town, we passed through Acton Square, which is a cleaner place than some of the abominable nooks of Scholes, though I can well believe that there is many a miserable dwelling in it, from what I saw of the interiors and about the doorways, in passing. The last house we called at was in this square, and it was a pleasing exception to the general dirt of the neighbourhood. It was the cottage of a stout old collier, who lost his right leg in

one of Wright's pits some years ago. My friend knew the family, and we called there more for the purpose of resting ourselves and having a chat than anything else. The old man was gray-haired, but he looked very hale and hearty—save the lack of his leg. His countenance was expressive of intelligence and good humour; and there was a touch of quiet majesty about his massive features. There was, to me, a kind of rude hint of Christopher North in the old collier's appearance. His wife, too, was a tall, strong-built woman, with a comely and a gentle face —a fit mate for such a man as he. I thought, as she moved about, her grand bulk seemed to outface the narrow limits of the cottage. The tiny house was exceedingly clean, and comfortably furnished. Everything seemed to be in its appointed place, even to the sleek cat sleeping on the hearth. There were a few books on a shelf, and a concertina upon a little table in the corner. When we entered, the old collier was busy with the slate and pencil, and an arithmetic before him; but he laid them aside, and, doffing his spectacles, began to talk with us. He said that they were a family of six, and all out of work; but he said that, ever since he lost his leg, the proprietors of the pit in which the accident happened (Wright's) had allowed him a pension of six shillings a week, which he considered very handsome. This allowance just kept the wolf from their little

door in these hard times. In the course of our conversation I found that the old man read the papers frequently, and that he was a man of more than common information in his class. I should have been glad to stay longer with him, but my time was up; so I came away from the town, thus ending my last ramble amongst the unemployed operatives of Wigan. Since then the condition of the poor there has been steadily growing worse, which is sure to be heard of in the papers.