

a desk, and a bench and table. I found there a foreman and a "nipper," the latter being a boy of about thirteen, whose business it is to keep up the ganger's fire, and do various odd jobs for him. The ganger himself was out, "working his dinner-hour," they said; that is what the "hurry-up" policy often means for a conscientious ganger—and this one is an out-and-out Christian, whose devotion to duty wins the respect of all that know him. Many a time there is a slight landslip, or some other accident that must be put right at once, if the men are to go straight ahead when "blow-up" sounds (the signal for returning to work). A bit of slovenly work may mean serious accidents and loss of life. We little know what judgment, patience and strength of purpose are needed to ensure the work being well done; but anyone who has ever had to supervise workmen has some idea of the difficulties.

The foreman was eating his dinner, and invited me to sit down and wait. "Times is bad; things is gettin' worse and worse; the outlook is as black as ever it can be," grumbles my companion, even hinting that he and his family are on the verge of starvation. I sympathise, and we get quite confidential, till gradually it comes out that he has a banking account and goes away for a little holiday in the summer! I remonstrated with him for talking so gloomily, and he admitted, "I'm a worrit; that's where it is; I was born that way, and I can't help it." After more conversation I made up my mind that it was time to make a move; the other worker was not likely to turn up then, and I didn't mean to go home without doing anything, so I plunged forth once more into the mud and entered the cook-house, taking my courage in both hands, and finding it non-existent. By this time most of the men had finished their dinner; some were gambling, and all were smoking of course. The roaring fire, the smell of cooking and rank tobacco-smoke, not to speak of the steam from so many wet clothes and boots, all went to make up the back ground, though, at the time, I was scarcely conscious of them. I looked round; no one spoke, and I had no idea how to begin a conversation under such strange circumstances. The shed was crowded, and there was no place that could possibly be used as a platform, so I stood in the only available spot, feeling as if I must sink through the earth, and opened my hymn-book. Would my voice come out at all? I wondered, as I began to sing. To my astonishment it was perfectly clear and steady, and I knew that God had taken the frail human vessel, and filled it with His own marvellous power. The men were perfectly quiet, and though the gamblers went on with their game, most of the others listened intently. It seemed quite natural to stop between the verses and say a few straight, simple words, and then, after the hymn, to say a little more. Speaking in public had always been a perfect night-mare to me before, but this time I found myself thoroughly enjoying it. I had tried to do the impossible, and God had taken the matter out of my hands, for it was He who spoke and sang that day, and what

a joy it was—this sudden, vivid consciousness that He was doing through me what I could not possibly have done myself!

Can one imagine a violin refusing to be played upon by the hands that fashioned it? Yet that is the case with us too often. We will not let God have His own glorious way with us, but we let His enemy strike out harsh, jarring notes that fill the sweet world with discord, when we might have the joy of yielding to the caressing touch of those strong hands.

When I had finished, I said "Good-day," and walked out amid an embarrassing silence. Some no doubt, strongly objected to any intrusion; and the rest were too shy and awkward to say anything, though the earnest looks on their faces were plentiful reward.

I fancy I hear some wise persons grunting to themselves: "Humph! we all know what this sort of religious excitement leads to; the next thing will be a nervous break-down!" I have often been so over-wrought that I could not sleep both before and after speaking in public, but this time I went home and slept soundly all the rest of the afternoon and again all night!

Since that day, I have talked to many navvies, sometimes in the densely-populated lowlands, sometimes in lovely spots among the mountains, whence the water is carried to our great cities; and everywhere the men have proved interesting and loveable. They have failings in plenty, and of the kind that shew most conspicuously, but they are never rude to one, and among them I have found a kind thoughtfulness that puts to shame the ways of so-called *gentle-folk*. At first one is a little bit inclined to suspect that this kind attentiveness, if one may so call it, is merely the conventional tribute to one's social position, but I do not think it really is so, for a poor hut-keeper told me that when she was feeling weak and ill, after the birth of her little baby, the lodgers (navvies, of course), would carry the water, and even wash up for her. It gladdens one's heart to know that the poorest woman, if she be only true, has the power to call out the best in these rough men; and there seems to be a peculiar beauty and effectiveness in the work done by women amongst them. Not for a moment would I belittle the yeoman service of the navy missionaries who spend their whole time preaching and teaching under very trying circumstances, but it is they who are most ready to acknowledge the need of our work to supplement their own. At one time some felt very strongly that our place ought to be filled by clergymen, but when it was put to a meeting of the men themselves the answer was emphatic. "We don't want to change our ladies"—"We want somebody that cares for us"—"Who wants to change his mother?" and other replies in the same strain, showed something of the reality and power of spiritual relationship, a thing so often disregarded and misunderstood. Is it any wonder that we love them? If we have a misgiving, it is lest we should prove unworthy of their love for us.

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