

## WOMEN WHO WORK.

## CHARWOMEN.



E.S, m'm,  
please,  
m'm—it's  
me as  
chared fur  
Mrs. Wallis  
as 'd the  
'ouse afore  
you, m'm,  
an' used to  
come reglar  
every Saturday  
was a month,  
an' give the  
'ole 'ouse a  
thorough

cleanin' out, which need it, it did, for a dirtier pack of servants I never see'd, an' never lifted mop nor broom more than they could 'elp the livelong month. "What'd be the good of 'aving you elseways, Mrs. Nuttle?" they'd say right out, an' larfin' like, when I'd grumble a bit at the ground-down an' grubbed-in blackness o' the boards an' things. Well, m'm, they'd the larf; but I do ensure you it made a deal of differ to me, as 'ad to take hextra strength to get the dirt out anyways; and Mrs. Wallis a-callin' out to the 'ousemaid—

"Do see what that charwoman is a-doing of, Em'ly; for she've been down at that kitchen floor this two hours, as it 'adn't ought to ha' took 'er the 'alf o' one."

Yes—an' it wouldn't ha' took me as much as 'alf, if Mrs. Wallis 'ad but looked one quarter as sharp arter 'er own 'ousemaid, a strong, 'ealthy, well-fed young 'ooman, as arter me, a poor creatur with one nussing baby eleven weeks old, an' four other children, which the eldest was but nine, an' the youngest could just make out to run by 'isself.

I do think charwomen leads a 'arder life than most people; an' partly fur the reason that they're nearly always married folks whose 'usbands can't support 'em, an' with small children to provide for. Now, m'm, there's my 'usband, for instance. When 'e married me, I was a 'ousemaid myself, an' he were a bricklayer's foreman, an' earnin' very good wages, so even my missus didn't think but I'd done very fairly fur myself; but you see John was rather a superior sort o' man, fond of 'is bit o' readin' an' the like; an' he used to take in a paper wi' some o' th' other men; an' then they got to talkin' it over at the public; an' then the landlord he said, "Why not 'ave a debating s'ciety," says he, "and all the members meet 'ere every Saturday evenin'?" An' in course, m'm, you know what was the end o' that; fur fust John took to the drink, an' then he foun' out as the papers said

workin' men was bein' ill-used; so he comes 'ome about midnight, rantin' an' ravin', an' smashin' a chair to show 'ow the gentry folk were a-smashin' 'im, an' near sent the baby inter a fit; an' me beggin' an' prayin' 'im to shut up an' come to bed; but bless you, m'm, it's no manner o' use talkin' to a man wi' the drop in 'im; an' only a week arter that he jined a strike wi' 'alf o' 'is feller-men; an' every penny o' my savin's went in keepin' us afore it come to a end; an' I don't think he were not to say sober two days out o' th' week the 'ole time. He's never got a foreman's place agin, nor kept steady since; an' afore the third child came, I 'ad to begia goin' out charing, to make sure o' 'aving food enough, 'nd the rent paid up to time. But about a year ago 'e tumbled off a ladder when 'e'd 'ad a drop too much, an' broke 'is right arm, as 'ad to be tuk off, an' 'urt 'is leg so as he can only make out to 'obble ever since, an' the 'ole keepin' of the fam'ly comes on me; for what 'e earns, pore feller, in mindin' cabs an' odd jobs o' that sort, 'e thinks 'e's got a clear right to; an' thankful I am when he don't come on me fur drink-money out o' my earnings as well.

So that's 'ow I come to be charing, m'm, you see, as there's nothin' else I could do; an' 'ard enuff it is to keep an 'ungry man 'an four children on the little one manages to earn day by day.

Ladies often says to me, "Mrs. Nuttle," says they, "we do wish as you could manage to dress a little more decent, for," says they, "your clothes are that old, they aren't fit to be seen cleanin' of the dore-step; an' you know we don't like to recommend you to good 'ouses, becos you rarely don't look decent at times." An' it's true, m'm; but what'd you have? fur what time 'ave I to mend my things, when arter I do get 'ome of a night there's the master's supper to get, an' the baby to nuss, an' its bits o' things to wash, an' the other children's clothes to mend; an' I 'most dead already from workin' like a 'orse from six o'clock in the mornin', an' boun' to be at my place by six on the morrer?

Stands to reason I can't 'ave no time fur smartenin' myself, an' yet I were a sprucer girl in my 'ousemaid days than many a one I see in the 'ouses I go to now. As to buying new thinks—where's the money to come from? Why, I've got a real decent Paisley shawl, as was given me by my old missus when I married, in pawn this fourteen months, an' I've never been able to 'ave it out since, an' don't believe as I ever will.

What do I usually get? Eighteenpence a day, m'm; that's the general rate everywhere; though two or three times I 'ave got as much as two shillings. 'Alf-days a shillin'. No, m'm—it aren't no more in proportion, an' I'd rather do the 'ole day any time, for the mornin's far the 'ardest 'alf; an' then ladies very seldom wants you of an arternoon; so that you loses sixpence which you can't afford, 'owever glad you might be of an arternoon to yourself. Eighteenpence

a day *and* your food? Oh! yes, m'm—that in course; an' some ladies are very kind, an' will let me 'ave bits o' broken meat an' bread, an' the like, to take 'ome to the master an' the children. In most well-to-do 'ouses, indeed, it's a reg'lar reckonised thing as the charwoman may 'ave the scraps from dinner; but since I've got too poor to dress decent enuff for good 'ouses, I've 'ad to be content wi' poor gentry, an' people livin' in a small way; an' as often as not they wants all the scraps to bile down or use for themselves; so it's only now an' then I come in fur summat fur the children. I generally take 'em part o' my own supper, anyways, poor lambs, fur I can't bear 'em to be disappointed when they comes runnin' out to meet me, an' see what I've got for 'em; but that comes 'ard on me again, you see, m'm, an' I aren't a very strong woman, so to speak. I've 'ad seven children in ten years, an' buried two; an' it's tuk it out o' me in the way o' strength.

Who minds 'em in the day? Well, m'm, I 'as to pay a neighbour to do it. At fust it was only the baby, an' a neighbour's little gurl used to come and mind it, an' bring it me twice a day to nuss, fur a shillin' a week; an' Polly—that's my eldest—she minded the others; but now, by token o' that there School Board, Polly 'as to go to school along of the others as is big enough, an' my neighbour's darter as well; an' I've to pay 'er mother two shillin's a week for mindin' Tim an' the baby, an' two more fur their food; not that the baby takes much—bless 'is 'art!—as I nusses 'im at night and afore I goes out of a mornin'.

Rent, m'm? Well, you know, we've one room, an' a sort o' little washus at the back, an' we pays three-an'-sixpence a week for it; so you see, m'm, countin' I earns nine shillin's a week, four an' three-an'-six is—let me see—seven-an'-six, an' leaves only two shillin's over fur food, an' clothes, an' everythink for the rest.

*Couldn't* do on it? No, m'm, we couldn't, nohow, if the parish didn't allow us somethink; but since the master 'ad 'is accident, they've allowed me a shillin' a week for 'im, an' four loaves o' bread. 'Tain't much, but we manage to do on it; an' we couldn't otherways. We should 'ave to go into the 'Ouse altogether; an', God 'elpin', I mean to keep clear o' that while I can.

But all charwomen ain't quite as 'ard up as me? No, m'm—that's true; but it's a poor life fur the best on 'em, an' a very 'ard-workin' one; fur you can't kalkilate on being al'ays in work, an' you might lose a good place thro' layin' by fur a day's rest to prevent you from breakin' down altogether.

The woman as lives in the front parlour over me, she goes out a-charin' too; an' she'd been out the 'ole week at one 'ouse, gettin' ready fur a new fam'ly to come in. Well, I don't know no harder work going nor that; an' on Friday when she come in she were all in a tremble, an' looked that beat, says I to 'er—

"Mrs. Chores," says I, "when that job's done you do ought to take a rest for a day or so, or you'll knock up, an' my word for it."

"It's done now," says she, "an' I'm goin' fur to

take your advice. I wouldn't go out to-morrer if it were to 'arn a gooden guinea, I'm that used out."

Well, m'm, 'alf an hour arterwards there come to the 'ouse a lady as sometimes employed Mrs. Chores, a-wantin' 'er to go up to 'er 'ouse that evenin', if she could, an' stay all next day; fur 'er sarvint 'ad left all on a suddent, an' they wanted 'er to clean the 'ouse up ready fur the new one. Mrs. Chores she wa: a-lyin' down, looking quite ill an' shivery like, an'—"Jinny," says she, "does she know I'm in?"

"Yes," says I, "as I said so at onst, not thinkin'." So she comes down, an' told the lady the troof, as she were too knocked-up to stir out again that night. Madam she seemed a good deal put out, but she asked could she come to-morrer. Mrs. Chores said she couldn't. She didn't dur give the simular reason, so she jest said as she were engaged.

Well, the lady she went away; an' if Mrs. Chores got five minutes' sleep that night I shouldn't ha' guessed it, she were that sick an' ill. The fac' was, she were a dilicate 'ooman, an' 'ad been liftin' o' 'eavy weights, as 'ad overset 'er. She didn't come down till ten o'clock next mornin', an' were jest settin' at the door with a cup o' tea I'd made 'er, when the very lady passed by. She didn't say nothin', but she just looked at Mrs. Chores, an' gave a sort o' jerk o' 'er 'ead to 'er darter as was with 'er; an' from that day to this they've never given the poor 'ooman a job, an' never will neither; an' it was a good 'ouse—'ard work, but good pay an' food; an' very often a 'andkercher of broken meats to bring 'ome. But there! I dare say she thought as Mrs. Chores 'ad behaved badly to 'er; fur I 'eard 'er once say to a lady in whose 'ouse I were charin' that there was no end to the 'umbug an' deceit of pore people; an' 'ow they were so well off, they wouldn't take work when it was offered 'em. If she knew a little more what poverty is, an' 'ow 'ard we do work—sometimes till we downright drop—she'd change 'er tune, I'm thinkin'.

Why, there's Mary Keefe, a poor widowed Irish-woman as lives opposite. First she lost 'er 'usband, and then 'er married daughter came 'ome deserted and dyin' of consumption, an' bringin' a baby with 'er, wot died fust, poor lamb! an' then 'er son went to Ameriky, as that last was a kind o' relief, fur 'e'd been in prison fust, along of 'is mother bein' so took up with the sick darter she'd no time to look arter 'im, an' when food grew scarce he went to the bad. Well, m'm, *that* nearly broke Mary's 'art. She'd al'ays been a decent 'ooman, an' while 'er 'usband lived, a well-to-do one, rentin' the 'ole of that little 'ouse; but sickness an' death swept it all away; an' when she'd paid the boy off to Ameriky, she 'ad to come down to a little back room 'alf the size o' mine in the 'ouse as 'ad been all 'ers, an' went out charin' fur 'er bread. No, nor I never 'eard 'er say a word o' growlin' or complaint all along; but al'ays as clean as clean, an' the cheerfullest creatur' going, ready to give you a cup o' tea if she 'adn't another pinch in the 'ouse, an' to share 'er loaf o' bread with any neighbour as asted 'er.

Well, m'm, bein' a good washier she were often 'ired out fur that puppose by the day; an' went down two

days every fortnight to wash at one 'ouse, a grocer's I think it were. It were a bitter cold winter three years ago, d' you remember, m'm? everythink froze up 'ard; an' 'e'd tuk it inter 'is 'ead to 'ave all the basement new painted, so when she went down one week the missus told 'er she must take the tubs out inter the

Well, Mary she didn't say no more, but went to 'er washin' an' stood at it all day, tho' 'twas that cold that the end of 'er apron an' skirt, where they got splashed with the water, froze 'ard as a board, an' she 'ad to keep breakin' ice on the pails o' cold water when she went to rinse the things. The servants they pitied



"WHATEVER'S COME TO YOU, MARY KEEFE?" (p. 189).

little yard at the back an' wash thur; fur Mr. Gulch, he wouldn't 'ave the nice yaller paint all splashed with soapsuds an' water.

"Shure, ma'am, I'm feared it's very could 'twill be," says Mary, in 'er smilin' way; fur she knew the yard were paved with stones, an' a damp, gashly little place, as 'ould give you the shivers in summer.

"Oh! no, it won't," says the missus, smilin' too; "there's no draught with that 'igh wall at the side, an' the 'ot water'll keep your 'ands nice an' warm. I'd like to 'ave mine in some all day long."

her dreadful when she come in to her dinner, she looked so blue, an' 'er pore arms all chapped with takin' 'em out of the 'ot water inter the nipping air; an' says they—

"We wouldn't be you, Mary, fur somethink;" but Mary she says—

"Shure Misther Gulch was the kind man in helpin' me to git me boy away, an'," says she, "I aren't the one to make difficulties wid him ef I can hilp it. P'raps the morrer'll be thawed," says she.

It wasn't a thaw. It were frost and fog too, an'

when Mary come they all saw as she'd got a bad cold on her chist, an' one o' the servants up an' told the missis it were the washing.

"Oh! that's nonsense," says she; "Mary said nothink about it last night, an' every one has colds at this time o' the year. Give 'er 'er breakfast 'ot an' comfortable, an' let 'er get to work. There's not much left to be done."

Well, m'm, it got done, though Mary telled me she kept feelin' wuss an' wuss till she could 'ardly breathe; an' when the last things were 'ung out, an' they called 'er inter 'er tea, she couldn't touch bite nor sup. She sat down, but she felt 'alf crazy an' chokin' like; an' she 'ad to get up agin an' say she must go 'ome, fur she were too ill to stay. Ma'am, it were a thick yeller fog an' frost then, an' she's telled me since she never quite knew 'ow she got 'ome. Her chist seemed like as 'twas on fire; an' every now an' then she 'ad to sit down on a dore-step an' gasp. She got 'alf feared to do that at last, lest she mightn't ha' got up agin; an' when she reached the dore of 'er 'ouse, the woman as lodged down-stairs said to 'er—

"Whatever's come to you, Mary Keefe? Ye look like a corp itself."

"Och, shure! Mrs. Donovan," says she, "an' I think it's dyin' I am. Go up wid me, fur the luv o' th' Almighty, an' light me a bit o' fire, fur I can't lift a han' to it at all, at all."

"Indade an' yer not fit to go inter yer cowl'd room," says Mrs. Donovan. "Take a strich on me bed below whilst I light yer fire an' make ye a cup o' tea. Ye'll not be afther goin' up-stairs till it's warm for ye."

An' 'ow long d'you think it was afore she did go up-stairs, m'm? Three weeks, an' for the best part o' that time she wasn't out o' Mrs. Donovan's bed onst. It were 'flammat'ion on the lungs an' bronchitis she 'ad, an' she's never got over 'em. You can 'ear 'er cough, cough, coughin' of a summer's day at her work, an' of a winter she'll be laid up fur days an' weeks, onable to 'arn anythin'. The cold took such a grip on 'er lungs, the doctor said as there warn't no curin' 'er, an' fur my part I don't think as she can last long; but she's just as proud as proud, an' 'ould rather die at 'er work than ask charity, or go into the 'ouse; an' if you'll believe me, she's al'ays ready to do a day's work fur them Gulches, an' won't 'ear nothink laid agin 'em. "For shure," says she, "how could they tell it was doin' me harm? Wasn't the mistrhiss rale sorry whin I was laid up, an' sint me a poun' o' tea, she did, the Lord reward her!"

That decent old body in black crossin' the street is a charwoman, m'm—one as is employed by a reg'lar lot of 'ouses, as keeps 'er in pretty constant work. Her only slack time is when they goes away fur their summer 'olidays; and then she's often out o' work fur six or eight weeks, off an' on. She's a lone woman, too; but she's a married darter in the country, 'ose always sendin' to 'er fur 'elp; an' every now an' then a scamp of a son or 'ands when he runs away from a place, or gets kicked out; an' she 'as to keep 'im till she can fin' 'im another. Mrs. Bosely is 'er name; an' I don't know a more respected 'ooman nowhere. You

ask her minister, an' the ladies who employs 'er, that's all. There isn't one 'asn't a good word fur Mrs. Bosely, an' good cause too; for a decenter, quieter body never slept, an' that ain't all. She lives over a rag-an'-bottle shop, an' next room to 'er lives a crippled old 'ooman of seventy-six, who's lost the use on 'er 'ands sixteen years back with rheumatics. Well, m'm, Mrs. Bosely she've done everythink fur years fur old granny, just fur all as if she were 'er sister, an' they not kith nor kin. No matter what time she's to get up on a mornin', afore she goes out she lights granny's fire, puts the kettle on, tidies her room, an' dresses 'er for the day—not nohow, any'ow, either, but as careful an' tidy as a lady's-maid 'ould be; for granny she's pertic'lar, an' a bit fractious about things bein' arranged 'er own way. Yes, m'm, an' Mrs. Bosely won't go charin' nowhere where she's to sleep out, no matter how good the place is, becoss she don't consider 'erself free to leave granny; an' whatever scraps of cold puddin' an' meat an' the like as is giv' 'er she 'alves, an' more than 'alves, with granny; an' if the old 'ooman is ill, she gives up 'er work, an' stays in to nuss 'er; an' yet it's all she can do to make both ends meet, an' keep 'er rent paid reg'lar to the day; but it's just out o' religion.

"Me an' granny's goin' the same road," she says, "so I may as well 'elp 'er along it a bit in this world. Pshaw! didn't our Lord *tell* us to 'elp one another?" An' if you'll believe me, m'm, she's growed that fond of pore old granny along of waitin' on an' workin' fur 'er, that I don't think she'd be 'appy if any one else were to do it; an' the day she dies 'll be a sore one fur Mrs. Bosely.

Yes, m'm, there's a deal o' kindness an' charity among pore people for one another, and charwomen in special; for they generally are *so* pore, an' yet they're goin' about among rich people; but it's a 'ard life at best, fur some'ow ladies seem to think that a charwoman must al'ays be able to do at least three times an ord'nary servant's day's work, an' they expects 'er to do it too. They say it only comes now an' then, an' they want a *thorough* cleanin' onst in a while; but they forget that the charwoman can't afford to 'arn 'er eighteence only now an' then. She's been at one 'ouse yesterday, an' she's at yours to-day, an' 'll be at another to-morrer; an' it's al'ays "thorough cleanin'" day with 'er, so that she gets wore out an' old an' broken long afore 'er time; for remember, m'm, in most cases she've got to walk to an' from 'er work, no matter what the weather is, every day; an' to do 'er own 'ousework, an' see to 'er own fam'ly inter the bargain, and sometimes to come 'ome an' fin' a drunken 'usband, who takes 'er by the 'air an' bangs 'er about if she don't give 'im 'er 'ard earnings; or she's got to 'unt 'im up at the public, an' get 'im 'ome, p'raps with a baby in 'er arms, an' 'im abusin' of 'er all the way. But you're not to think as I'm illudin' to the master, m'm, now; fur 'e's never voilent, or scurcely so, an' a very good 'usband to me in 'is way, poor feller; leas'tways, 'e means to be, as is the same think. I've no call to complain on John, m'm, noways, an' don't think it.