

STORIES OF EAST LONDON BY C.J.L

by C.J.L.

Stories of life and ministry in East London, following the author on rambles through the streets and neighborhoods of this working-class district. The narratives bring to life the joys, struggles, and faith of ordinary people.

12 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01 Chapter 1. Jute Hands.
2. 02 Chapter 2. Blind Maria.
3. 03 Chapter 3. Among the Match Girls.
4. 04 Chapter 4. Match Box Makers.
5. 05 Chapter 5. Fancy Boxes.
6. 06 Chapter 6. Toy Makers.
7. 07 Chapter 7. Working in the Dark.
8. 08 Chapter 8. Working Girls.
9. 09 Chapter 9. Brush Makers and Braille Writers.
10. 10 Chapter 10. Among the Hop-Pickers.
11. 11 Chapter 11. Surgical Bandage Makers.
12. 12 Chapter 12. A Rock-Bound Coast.

01 Chapter 1. Jute Hands.

Chapter 1.

Jute Hands. Who is willing to join me in a ramble to-day? We have taken some pleasant ones together. Many a bright autumn morning has found us on the sands or by the shore, hunting among sea-weeds and pebbles for crabs or starfish, learning a little more than we might have known before of the wisdom and power of God in His care for such weak tiny things as sea snails or hermit crabs. But our walks on this occasion will not take us within sight or sound of the sea; we are not going to the fields to gather flowers or to the woods to return with baskets well filled with nuts.

Ah! I see you are beginning to wonder where I am going to take you. To pay some visits, and get a few peeps at the working girls of East London.

Edith looks up with a smile and says, "It will be delightful," for she has read of little children who work at match box making, and would very much like to see some of them.

Match box making is only one of many occupations in which we shall find the girls we are going to see employed, and though I am glad to be able to tell you that the amount of child-labour in East London is not nearly so large as it was before the law of England required that every child in Great Britain should receive some education, still we shall find much that will, I hope, prove interesting. Where shall we begin?

Suppose we visit a jute factory, and take a peep at "the hands," as the working girls are called, who spend so much of their week-day lives within its walls. But perhaps before we ring the bell I had better tell you where all the jute comes from.

It does not grow in England, so has to be sent over from some other country. Much of it comes from Russia and the cold countries north of the Baltic.

Frank says, "It is an import."

He is quite right, and I should have used the word myself, only I was afraid some of my very little friends might not know its meaning.

Many shiploads of jute come into the Port of London every year. If we were to visit the Docks we should see it lying about in large bales.

It is a vegetable fibre, not unlike flax or hemp. It is largely used in making ropes, coarse sacks, and for other purposes. Some of the very same jute, too, spun and dyed, re-enters the market under another name. It is the ice wool some of our girls are so fond of working into shawls, caps and other pretty and useful birthday or New Year presents. But the jute as we see it in the Docks is what is called in its raw state and must pass through many hands, as it needs to be cleaned, combed, sorted, etc., before it will be ready for use.

Let us go into the factory. What a busy scene it is! Great numbers of girls are at work picking or combing the jute. They seem very poor, but most of them are clean, and we are glad to notice the rooms are airy and well lighted in which their work has to be done.

Many of the young work-people attend Sunday school or Bible class, so they have heard the sweet story of a Saviour's love, and there is reason to hope that a few at least have not only heard but believed the gospel message, and are seeking in their daily walk and ways to please and honour the Lord Jesus.

One who knows the jute girls better than I do, has often told me how for quite a long time any attempt to bring them under the sound of the gospel seemed such very discouraging, almost hopeless work, that several who had tried, gave it up, saying, "It is of no use." For, though perhaps it would be going too far to say that even at the time of which I write there were not one or two christian girls in the jute factory, taking them as a class they were perhaps the wildest and roughest of all the working girls of East London: hardly one went to Sunday school, and when any were invited to attend they would refuse, saying, We don't like to sit with girls who wear better clothes than ourselves." But "God, who is rich in mercy," had thoughts of peace and blessing even for these poor neglected girls: He wanted them to hear of His love to sinners, and the story of how a Bible class for them grew from a very small beginning will, I feel sure, be read with interest by all our young friends.

02 Chapter 2. Blind Maria.

Chapter 2.

Blind Maria.

Oh, how I wish I could get just a few of those poor jute girls to come to my house sometimes! I would, with the blessing of the Lord, teach them to read their Bibles, and tell them of the love of God in the gift of His Son. But I have asked them ever so many times and they will not come.

Thoughts something like these you have just been reading were passing through the mind of an earnest worker for Christ as one Sunday afternoon he passed the jute factory on his way to school, where, as he knew, the girls of his Bible class would be waiting for him.

He might not like me to tell you his real name, so we will call him Mr. Marks. That he had very often tried to make friends with the jute girls was quite true; but perhaps it was because they were so little used to kind words they seemed afraid to trust him.

Sometimes they would run away laughing loudly, in a way that seemed to say, "Oh, you don't want us, we are only jute hands;" or, what was even more trying, now and then one would say, "Yes; I should like to learn to read," and would promise to go to his house for the first lesson on the very next evening, a promise that had never been kept. But Mr. Marks had done more, he had taken his desire to help and teach the jute girls to God in prayer, asking Him to shew him a way by which they could be reached. And though I think he hardly knew himself how it came about, on that very afternoon he closed his Bible five minutes before the time for lessons was up and began telling his girls of his great wish to form an evening class among the workers in the jute mill. He asked any who had begun to pray for themselves to pray for the talked-of class, and said he should be glad of any help they could give.

Among the girls who had listened to him was one who was quite blind, Maria as she was called by all who knew her.

She went home that day with one great desire filling her heart, a longing to please and help her much-loved teacher. It did not seem as if a blind girl could do much, but Maria was going to try.

She knew one of the jute girls, whose mother had often worked for her mother, and in some way she contrived to get to her house at a time when she knew Rose would be likely to be at home.

"Please, Rose, I have come to ask you if you would do something very kind for me. Will you take me to school next Sunday?" Maria said, and gaining courage as she went on, continued, "I do love going, and sometimes my brother has to go out on Sunday for the gentleman he works for, and then I have to stay at home, for you know I can't go alone, only when somebody takes me." The last appeal was too much for Rose. While she did not care about going herself, she felt as if she could not refuse to take a little trouble to give so much pleasure to her sightless friend, and though I think she began to make some excuse about not having any clothes fit to go in, you may be sure

Maria did not leave till Rose had promised to call for her the next Sunday.

She kept her promise most faithfully, and I shall leave you to judge for yourselves of Maria's delight as she said to her teacher, "Please, sir, Rose works at the jute mill."

After school Rose found herself staying behind with Maria and Mr. Marks, talking to the latter as if he were an old friend.

"Yes," she said; if he did not mind beginning a class with only two girls, she would be willing to attend, and she could, she thought, promise that the girl who worked next to her in the mill would join it too, for they were great friends and always loved to do the same things and go to the same places. And so the class was begun, and though for some weeks Rose and her friend were the only ones who came, it soon grew into quite a large one, and before the winter came on, a christian lady, on hearing that many of these poor girls had never been taught to sew, offered to teach any who would meet her after work hours in a bright, pleasant room, how to cut out as well as how to make and mend their clothes.

After a few months it was encouraging to see how much more tidy many of the girls began to look; their manners, too, were less rude and noisy.

But, better still, a few were beginning to ask, each one for herself, "What must I do to be saved?" And we know one only answer to that question could meet the need of any soul who, led by the Holy Spirit, really longs to know Christ as a Saviour — "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:30.)

03 Chapter 3. Among the Match Girls.

Chapter 3.

Among the Match Girls. A visit to a match factory, would, I think, surprise most of us greatly. We should say on leaving that we had never even guessed that half so much work needed to be done before the logs of wood, sent by shiploads from abroad, and brought to the factory on waggons so heavily laden that a whole team of horses is often needed to draw them, can be sent out again as matches, neatly packed into the small boxes we all see, and perhaps use, so often.

It would be interesting to go through all the sheds and rooms in which the different parts of the work are done, and to listen while the manager tells us the names and uses of the different machines, many of them working by steam, needed for splitting, sawing, and in other ways getting the wood ready for the use to which it is to be put. We should notice with pleasure that the rooms in which the girls work are airy and well lighted. But as an account of such a visit would perhaps not be quite the kind of story suited for this little volume, I am going to propose, by way of a change, that instead of watching the girls busy at their work we meet them as they are leaving and ask one or two of those we know to tell us a little about their employment. Shall we suppose ourselves in East London, just outside the gates of Bryant and May's, one of (if not the largest) the East End factories? The handsome clock on the outside of the building is on the point of striking six, and as the last stroke dies away the gates will open and the work-people, to the number of several hundred, come out. Here they are, and for a few minutes Fairfield Road will be a very busy scene. The girls we are waiting for are not among the first comers, so we shall have time to look a little at their companions.

Taking them as a whole they are a rather rough class of girls; many of them say that they like working in the factory better than to go to service. Nearly all wear clean white aprons, and we cannot help noticing that almost every girl has a large feather (blue, white, green, or red) in her hat.

Here are two, neater in dress and quieter in manner than most who have passed us — Carrie and Emma.

They greet us with a pleasant "good evening," and we soon find they love to hear and speak of the Lord Jesus as the Saviour they have begun to trust. They say there are some decided Christians among the workgirls, and we know that each one, if true to Christ, will be a "light shining for Him," for we, who "have tasted that the Lord is gracious," need to be often reminded that we are to be here for Christ. But Carrie says she cannot quite understand what it means. Only the Holy Spirit can really teach any of us how very real and blessed it is to be for Christ here now; but perhaps some words that helped me may help Carrie too.

I am not sure that I remember them exactly, but their meaning is, that if we are Christians we belong to Christ, and so everything we do is to be done in a way that will suit and please Him. Our bodies, too, are the Lord's, and so we are to use them in His service, just as a slave would use his

time and strength in doing the very kind of work his owner wanted.

Carrie and Emma are sisters, and their mother, who is a widow, is very often ill, and does not seem quite willing that her daughters should leave home, so they go on working at the factory, and their earnings are a great help in keeping the little home together.

Emma says, "We had rather a rough time with the other girls when we were first converted; but it did us good, for it made us feel we needed to pray very often that we might be kept from doing or saying anything that would grieve the Lord. But when they saw we did not mind being laughed at or called names, many of them left it off and began to be kind to us, and one or two have gone with us to the Bible class or to hear the gospel preached." Are the match boxes made in the factory?

"Oh, no; they are the work of our outdoor hands, who make them at their own homes and bring them in ready to be filled." In our next chapter we may perhaps take a peep at "Match Box Makers," and learn a few of the secrets of one-room life.

04 Chapter 4. Match Box Makers.

Chapter 4.

Match Box Makers. The poor children who are employed in making match boxes we have all heard of, or read about, but perhaps few of us have really seen them at work.

I have many times, and I am going to tell my young readers a little about their work and the places in which it is done.

What is Nellie saying? She thinks our story, as it is all true, ought to begin by telling you where the match box makers live.

Match box making is carried on in many parts of East London — Shoreditch, Spitalfields, Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, Hackney Wick, and several others.

We cannot visit them all at once, we know, but a short journey by train will take us to Old Ford, and a walk of only a few minutes from the railway station will bring us into a road where quite a number of match box makers live.

It is quite early in the afternoon, but as it is holiday time the Board schools we pass on our way are closed, and we know we shall be likely to find the children at their work. The houses, though not large, are often let to two or three families; in many cases the rent of one room is all that the people, most of whom are very poor, can afford to pay, and the boxes are made in the room in which father and three or four children live, eat and sleep; sometimes it is done in a small kitchen or washhouse. Our knock at one of the doors is answered by a bright-looking little girl about ten years of age. "Yes," she says, they are quite busy; work has been very slack, but mother got an order this morning for six gross of boxes, they will be wanted tomorrow, so they must all work away."

We follow her, and find her mother and four other children sitting round a low table. Each worker has a pile of very thin strips of wood, a tin of paste and a packet of printed labels.

How quickly their fingers move! In less time than it takes to write about it the flat strips of wood are one at a time folded into boxes, pasted, labelled and thrown on to the heap of those already finished.

Talking need not stop working, and the mother, who seems glad to have a visitor, says, "There is not much doing in the trade now, so many of the cheap matches being made in Sweden and Germany."

She used to help her mother to make boxes when quite a little girl herself, not more than six or seven years old, often working from six in the morning till eight or nine o'clock at night, and was always kept away from school in busy times.

Children, she tells us, do not work such long hours now, they get more play and all attend school, but hers are always willing to "help mother" when she has any work. Can they earn much? we ask. She shakes her head, saying, "Not a great deal, as the price paid for the work is very low, and though the wood and labels are supplied when the work is given out, they have to find their own paste and keep a good fire for drying, as wet work would not be passed by the overlooker." Would the children like to hear a true story while they work?

It is pleasant to see how their eyes brighten, and we know by the look on their faces they are all going to listen,

"Not very long ago a young girl, who had begun to trust the Lord Jesus as her own precious Saviour, left her home in the country and went to a place of service in London. It was a large household where many servants were kept.

"Mary, as I am going to call her, was the kitchen-maid, an under-servant, the youngest and in a way the lowest of them all. She saw it would not be her place to talk much to people so much older than herself, but she prayed that the Lord would give her grace to live for Him, and I am going to tell you how her prayer was answered.

"Her master was obliged to leave his town house, and was away for many weeks.

"On his return he told his servants that he was so pleased with the way in which they had served him during his absence, he was going to give them what he thought would be a great treat, every one was to have a free ticket for the theatre. All but Mary had got their tickets; when her name was called she went up to her master, saying in a shy way, 'Thank you all the same, sir; but if you please, sir, I don't want to go.'

"Don't want to go! what a strange girl you are, you must tell me why not.'

"Because, if you please, sir, the Lord Jesus loves me and I love Him, and I know He will not be there.'"

05 Chapter 5. Fancy Boxes.

Chapter 5.

Fancy Boxes.

Please do not think, dear young readers, that because in our last chapter we took a peep at "one-room life," and saw just a few of the children whose work is done very often after school-hours in their own homes, that match boxes are the only kind wanted, or in making of which we shall find large numbers of girls employed.

We have all seen the pretty fancy boxes so largely used by drapers, grocers and confectioners; and although it is quite true that a few of the large firms have the boxes in which their sweets and chocolates are to be packed made on the premises, so many kinds of boxes are wanted that it would surprise some of us to hear how many gross can (in busy times) be sent out in a single week from some of the warehouses in Hoxton or Bethnal Green.

Very few of the fancy box hands work at their own homes.

Some of the warehouses employ from fifty to sixty girls, while by others the work is given out to persons who will promise to get a large quantity done, and who engage and pay a few girls to help them. Shall we look into one of the smaller workrooms and see what the girls are doing?

Piles of cardboard, reams of coloured paper, and cans or tins of paste are on the tables, while at one end of the room two girls are pasting bright scraps or pictures on boxes that are soon, we are told, to be filled with cracker bon-bons. Their fingers move very quickly, and they seem to work in a willing, cheerful way. Nearly all are doing what is called piecework, and are paid for just as many boxes as they make; their earnings are not more than five or six shillings weekly, though a few earn more. A great deal of time is often lost by having to wait for work.

We know several of the girls, one or two are old scholars, and as the forewoman does not object, we soon find ourselves talking, not about boxes and how they are made, but about a gospel meeting some of us attended not very long ago, and a sweet, true story we heard from the evangelist who spoke to us in his Master's name.

"A story," Maggie and George are saying, and Nellie asks if I would mind telling it over again. Well, dear, I am quite free to do so, for it interested me so greatly that I told Mr. M. I should like all the boys and girls I know to read or hear it too, and he was kind enough to say I might have it for my new volume.

"Caught up, caught up." The words seemed to be saying themselves over and over again to George F. as he went home from a meeting where an address on the coming of the Lord had been given. The son of christian parents, from a child he had known "the holy scriptures," but till that night had never really felt his own need of salvation. As he drew near his house he noticed how dark it looked. He had been used to find a bright fire and lamp, supper and a loving welcome had

always been ready for him, but on that night all these were wanting.

"I hope the Lord has not come yet," he said, as he entered the house, "Father and mother, and all who belong to Christ would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but I should be left for judgment." He sat down and fell asleep. How long he slept he could not tell, but when he awoke the house was still dark and silent.

He could bear it no longer. Lighting a candle he went to his father's room, it was empty; the Bible George had so often seen him reading lay open on the dressing table, but neither his father nor mother were in the room.

"If the Lord has really come I am sure Mr. M. has gone too," was the boy's next thought. It was not far to his house and George felt he must go and see.

He was soon there, and creeping along the garden path saw to his great delight, as the blinds had not been quite closed, the well-known form of his friend, who, though it was very late, was still busy writing.

"The Lord has not come, I have another opportunity, I may be saved tonight," George said with a great sigh of relief. That very night he owned to God that he was a lost sinner, and trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his own precious Saviour.

Three evenings later he went to Mr. M.'s with such a bright, happy face, that his friend almost guessed the good news he had to tell before he had time to say, "I came on Tuesday night to see if you had been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but if He comes to-night I know He will take me too, for I do trust Him now, and I am saved through His precious blood."

Caught up to glory, or left for judgment. It must be one or the other when the Lord comes. Which will be your portion?

06 Chapter 6. Toy Makers.

Chapter 6.

Toy Makers.

If we want to see the toy makers really "at home," we shall have to say good-bye to the working-girls of East London and pay a visit to one of the quaint old towns of Germany.

We should find numbers of children, some of them not more than five or six years of age, very busy making toys, not to play with, but to sell, for quite a number of the toys we see in the windows of the toy-shops are made by the children of Holland and Germany, who do not seem to think it at all hard to have to begin early to help their parents by working. But we cannot take such a long journey to-day, and yet I shall, I think, be able to shew you a few of the child toy makers, for a great many Germans live in the East of London, and some of them work at their old trade in the land of their adoption. Who will go with me to a poor but quiet street in Shoreditch?

Lizzie and Florence are quite ready for a walk, but before we reach the house we are going to Lizzie has noticed that though the houses are small, many of the windows are large and flat, and wants to know why they are all of one shape?

Ah Lizzie, the windows you are looking at always interest me greatly, for the very old houses in which we still see them were built many years ago; in them French silk weavers set up their looms and worked at their own trade, weaving rich silks and soft velvets, costing I should be afraid to say how many shillings a yard.

Nearly all these weavers, or their fathers, had made a noble choice to suffer for Christ's sake rather than deny His name, to leave their pleasant homes and pretty gardens in France rather than give up their Bibles. But what is Florrie saying? That she has heard of these weavers, who were sometimes called Huguenots, but thought they lived at Spitalfields.

Florrie is right, by far the largest number really settled there; but we are only a short walk from Spitalfields, and so many of the houses in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green are built with the windows Lizzie noticed, and which are, I believe, called "side lights," and we may be sure that many of them lived and worked in this neighbourhood. But if we talk any more about the weavers we shall not have time for our visit to the doll makers.

How busy they all are — father, mother and four children. What are they making? Wooden dolls. Can they get enough work to keep them employed all the year round?

"Oh, no," the father, who speaks English very well, says. There is not much doing in the doll line, for it is really cheaper to get toys from Germany than to have them made in England; but now and then, when they are wanted in a hurry, he gets an order for a few dozen, and then the whole family work till they are ready to be sent to the warehouse.

He is cutting out dolls from pieces of wood, while the eldest son rounds off all the arms on a small turning lathe. When ready they are passed on to a girl, who fastens arms and legs on to the bodies. The mother paints the faces. Two younger children are busy "helping mother," and we think of the old proverb "Many hands make light work."

It is cheering to find that this industrious family have a Bible in their own language, a Bible that is greatly valued and often read. The father sometimes tells his children stories of Germany, "the Fatherland," as he loves to call it. One they like very much begins something like this: "Through an old town in Germany, Four hundred years ago, A little boy, barefooted, Went singing through the snow." And goes on to tell how Martin Luther, of whom we have all heard and read so much, was, when a boy, so poor that while attending school and working hard at his lessons, was often obliged to go, with a few other schoolboys as needy as himself, into the streets and sing, hoping to receive a little food or a few small coins. But God was leading him on step by step to the great work of his life. A time came when, after having long felt the burden of sin and tried in many ways to save himself, he was at last enabled to turn away from his own doings and trust only in the finished work of the Lord Jesus. Then, but not till then, he was free to tell others of the Saviour who had sought and found him.

Perhaps another time I may tell you how graciously the Lord helped him to place numbers of gospel books and tracts in the hands of thousands of German readers.

07 Chapter 7. Working in the Dark.

Chapter 7.

Working in the Dark.

Lily is saying, "What a strange title!" while Harold, who is fond of guessing, says he expects that instead of having our usual talk about working girls I am going to ask you to visit some home where no ray of sunlight ever enters, and where all would be in darkness if the lamps of the miners did not shine brightly and throw a few gleams of light into its long winding passages.

Ah Harold, you have guessed wrongly this time, for our walk to-day will not take us out of London. We have been invited to pay an afternoon visit to a school for the blind and watch the pupils busy at their work.

Before entering the classroom we are shewn quite a number of articles made in the institution: brushes of various kinds: baskets, some very large and strong, others so light and pretty that we cannot help being surprised at the skill and taste displayed, as we remember with perhaps a shade of sadness that they were made in the dark.

Here is a pile of mats; one or two of the older boys have had a few lessons in wood-turning, and the spoons, bowls and other things they have made shew good progress.

Now we are asked to look at knitted stockings, socks, comb-bags and shawls; some of the latter are very fine and the patterns and work are really beautiful. A white shawl, knitted in Shetland wool by the pupils of a blind school in the North of England, was one among the many presents received by the Princess May on her marriage.

We should like to see how brushes are made, so we follow our guide into one of the workrooms. Quite a number of girls and women are at work, each sitting before a small vice firmly screwed on to a long wooden table, and for a few minutes we watch, without speaking, what is going on.

How quickly many of them take just the right number of bristles from the heap placed near each worker, fix them for a moment in the vice, and in less time than it takes to tell it, draw and fasten them into their proper places.

Hair-brushes are being made to-day, and the part of the work we are watching is called brush-drawing. Putting backs on the brushes is men's work, also finishing.

We are told of some who learnt brush-drawing when at school who carry it on at their own homes, and so are able to earn, if not quite a living, still what they find a great help.

"Are the girls taught basket making?"

"No, not now, only boys and men; for some years we taught the girls, too, and found they learnt just as quickly; but as the canes used in making baskets have to be kept wet or they would break

instead of bending, and so many of our girls took bad colds from working in damp clothes, it was thought best to employ them in other work."

We have only time for one more visit, so we go to the schoolroom, where a party of blind children are busy in the Kindergarten class, stick-weaving, paper-folding, bead-threading, and even making clay models of fruit, walnuts, etc., and several other occupations are shewn, and the teacher, who is herself blind, seems really pleased by our interest in the children and their work. But we should feel quite disappointed if we had nothing to remember about our visit but having seen a number of useful things made by the blind.

All the pupils are taught to read, and though we may not find one who has a whole Bible, it is a cheer to notice with what real pleasure most of the young people answer our questions by saying that they have one or two gospels or a few of the epistles in raised or dotted type which they read by passing their fingers lightly over the letters or dots.

Several say they have friends who write "Braille," and sometimes they get a real letter.

One has a daily text-book with verses of scripture and hymns for a month. But she says she has learnt every word in it, and though it has been a great comfort, she shall be so glad when the friend who sent it has time to dot her another.

She had a New Year's card with such a lovely text "But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." (Psalms 40:17.) But we must say "good-bye" to our new friend, so we leave, commending her and all her sightless companions to the love and care of that great, good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep.

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." (Isaiah 42:16.)

08 Chapter 8. Working Girls.

Chapter 8.

Working Girls. Shall we, dear young friends, take a peep today into City workrooms, and see how some of the girls we meet so often in a Bible class are occupied? Our first visit shall be to a large factory, where about three hundred girls are employed, though, of course, they do not all work in one room.

They are capmakers, and, as we enter, the click of quite a number of sewing machines makes the scene rather a noisy one.

All work quietly as long as the forewoman is present, but she has just got a message that she is wanted elsewhere, and as soon as she leaves the room there is a good deal of loud talking and laughing. It is almost leaving-off time, so we shall not have long to wait for Jessie.

Here she comes, looking a little tired, and there is a cloud on her face.

We think of the time, not many months ago, when, as we believe, the Holy Spirit led Jessie to decide for Christ. The Bible class was just over when Jessie's teacher, who felt sure that for some time she had been anxious and unhappy, felt she could not let her go without a few whispered words as to her personal need of salvation.

She felt and owned her need, and it was not long before she was enabled to rejoice in knowing that she was saved through the work and by the precious blood of Christ. And now came the question, how could she serve and please the One who had loved and given Himself for her — the Lord Jesus?

She must, she knew, go on with her daily work; but she longed to do the old work in a new way, as one should who belonged to the Lord, and though, like most who are only just converted, I do not think she knew or thought much about the new power that could alone enable her to do this, the Spirit of God, for a time Jessie was very bright and happy.

Why, then, was she looking so sad? Her story was soon told. "When I was first brought to the Lord," she said, "I thought I should never be tempted to do wrong any more, and that even if the girls I work with were rude or unkind to me, I should not mind it at all, but would go on praying for them; but I do not find it easy work, and sometimes I almost wonder if I have ever been converted."

You will wonder, Jessie dear, as long as your eye rests on yourself. Peace is in looking to another Person altogether, "Looking unto Jesus."

One of the lessons we all have as children of God to learn is, that we were not only a great deal worse than we thought ourselves, but that there is no good thing (apart from Christ) in us at all. But it is a great comfort to remember that God knew just what we were before He took us up in grace. He allows us to find out how bad we are that we may turn away from ourselves and trust simply in

Christ, glad, so glad, to be set free by His death to enjoy His love in the new place where He now is.

"All thy sins were laid upon Him, Jesus bore them on the tree; God who knew them laid them on Him, And believing thou art free." And as Jessie looked away from herself to her Saviour the clouds passed from her face, the trouble died out of her voice and she was again enabled to rejoice in the Lord, who had loved her and washed her from her sins in His own blood.

I know that this book will be read by quite a number of boys and girls who can say of the Lord Jesus, "He is my own precious Saviour," and perhaps one of those who may get it given them is just a little "discouraged because of the way" and is saying sadly, "Jessie's trouble is my trouble." Is it, dear young believer? Then let Jessie's Saviour be your Deliverer too. Let Christ set you free.

I have seen sometimes when a shop has been shut up, a bill pasted on the shutters or in the window saying it would be re-opened under new management. Let the Lord who bought you take the management of your life. Let Him do for you by His power, the power of the Holy Spirit, just what you cannot do for yourself. But I must not forget that we have other workrooms to visit, and in closing this chapter will give you a sweet little text, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19.)

09 Chapter 9. Brush Makers and Braille Writers.

Chapter 9.

Brush Makers and Braille Writers. Have you, my dear girls, ever tried to work in the dark?

I do not mean just running upstairs after the evening closed in and before the lamps were lighted, but doing real work such as sewing or knitting.

Nellie answers with a merry laugh that when she was quite a little girl she used very often to shut her eyes and try to go on with her sewing, but she found it almost impossible to work neatly and so soon gave it up; and Percy, who is fond of reading about mines and mining, reminds us that a great deal of work must be done in darkness before we can enjoy the warmth and light of a coal fire. No ray of sunshine ever finds its way into the long winding passages and galleries of a mine.

Each miner, however, carries a small lamp covered with a network of very fine wire, and the light from these lamps shines out so brightly that there is always light enough to work by.

Percy is quite right, but as a visit to a mine would take us quite away from East London, and Mabel and Ruth would like to see a few more of our working girls, they shall go with me to pay an afternoon visit to two of my blind friends who live together, and though it would be too much to say "earn a living," are yet able to add a little to their small income by working each with her own hands, one as a brushmaker, the other as a Braille copyist.

There is no need to tell them who their visitors are, for the present is far from being our first visit, and they are quick to learn and remember voices.

"What a nice light room yours is," some one is saying.

One of the blind girls, Annie, as we will call her, answers with a pleased smile, "We thought of that in coming here, for though we cannot see the light for ourselves we know a room that is always dark cannot be a healthy one, and we enjoy pure fresh air."

Mabel is looking at the knitted window curtains, which are really very pretty, and seems quite surprised at being told they are the work of Annie's blind friend, Ellen.

Ellen is a brushmaker by trade, but not having had many orders lately has been able to do a great deal of knitting, and shews us a shawl made of wool so fine that it looks almost like lace.

We have seen blind brushmakers busy at their work, so after watching Ellen for a little while we ask what Annie is doing.

"Copying Braille," she says, and hands us a sheet of paper covered with rows of dots hardly larger than the pricks of a pin.

Ruth says she cannot make out even one letter of the alphabet, and finds it rather difficult to believe that dots mean not only letters but very often words.

Annie replies in such a bright pleasant way, "Ah, you would find it easy if you had learnt the system," and holding out her hand for the pricked sheet begins to read aloud: "Now have I seen Thee and found Thee, For Thou hast found Thy sheepl fled, but Thy love would follow — I strayed, but Thy love would keep." Do Annie and Ellen know anything of the joy of having been sought and found by the Lord Jesus, the Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep? This is a true story, and I am very glad that I can say "Yes" in answer to your question. So our blind friends have "light in their dwelling" — the light of a risen Saviour's love. Like the blind man of whom we read in the Gospel of John, Annie and Ellen can say each for herself, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." (John 9:25.)

Annie tells us that Ellen and she were converted when quite young before leaving school, and were happy in knowing that their sins were forgiven for the sake of the Saviour who had loved and given Himself for them, and so for some years they went on content to know that they were saved through the precious blood of Christ, but going on with many things that they see now were not suited to the Lord. But a time came when the Holy Spirit led them on, and they saw from the word of God that the Lord Jesus Christ has present thoughts and desires for His dear people. His heart wants to have gathered to His name where He is owned as Lord, and the Holy Spirit ungrieved and unhindered is free to lead in worship, and so in obedience to His word our blind friends are found with those who while they wait for their Lord's return shew forth His death in the breaking of bread. (See 1 Corinthians 11:26.)

10 Chapter 10. Among the Hop-Pickers.

Chapter 10.

Among the Hop-Pickers.

Alice is saying that I promised to tell you stories of East London, and she is sure hops would not grow in the small gardens that we who live in London or even a little way out of it see so often.

Alice is quite right, and I agree with her in thinking that a chat about hops and hop-pickers does look a little like running away from my promise; yet so many girls whose homes are in East London are found every year in the hop gardens of Kent and Surrey, that it seems only fair to give them a place among our working girls.

Many of my readers will have been away for a pleasant two or three weeks in the country or by the sea during the summer months, and will, I think, like to know something of the way in which hundreds of poor children enjoy a holiday that is not "all play."

If we could pay a visit quite early in the summer to one of the crowded streets in Limehouse or Bethnal Green, or join the children in the playground of a Board school, we should most likely hear a good deal of talking about hops, and find that by the end of August whole families — fathers, mothers and children — would be quite ready and very glad to join the hop-pickers, and so get into the country for a few weeks.

Nearly all the railway companies run cheap trains from London to the hopping districts, and some of us who have been on the platform of a city station just before one of these trains started will not easily forget many things we noticed.

Taking the pickers as a whole they are cheerful and good-tempered, and though Carrie wonders why so many babies and children too young to pick are of the party, those of us who have visited the hop gardens know that even these tiny ones will give very little trouble; those who are old enough to run about are sure to have a good time on the soft grass, while a cosy nesting-place quite close to mother's bin will be found for the babies.

Most of us have seen hops grow, and will hardly need to be reminded that the plant is a climbing stem, and if not tied to a pole would be spoiled by trailing on the ground. When the hops are ready to be gathered, these poles are pulled up by men, who in doing so break or cut the stalk of the plant.

They are carried to the bins, where the picking is done by women and children, who are paid, not for the number of hours they work, but for the quantity of hops they pick, and we may be sure that the work, that looks at first very much like play, becomes tiring when it has to be gone on with all day in the hot sun, or when the clothes of the pickers are wet and uncomfortable through being soaked with rain by the heavy showers we get sometimes even in the hot days of August and September. But I want very much to tell you a little about the way in which the gospel is carried

into the hop gardens, for we must not forget that the soul has needs deeper and more enduring than those of the body, and for many years past some who love to tell". . . . the old, old story Of Jesus and His love " have felt that the opportunity afforded by having so many people together is for gospel work a golden one and far too good to be lost.

Meetings for preaching are held nearly every evening, and a good deal of quiet but very happy work for the Master may be done during the day by going from bin to bin, giving gospel books or text cards or saying a few earnest words about salvation to the workers.

Now and then, too, the heart of the faithful servant is gladdened by finding one who can say of the Lord Jesus, "He is my own precious Saviour."

Then there is sure to be one or two gospel meetings for the children, and one only needs to look at their bright faces and listen to their hymn-singing to know they greatly enjoy their own meeting. A friend, who was speaking to some young people not very long ago, taught his hearers four lines of poetry. I do not know who they were composed by, but I thought them so good that I do not think I can close our talk about hops and hop-pickers better than by copying them.

"'Tis not for what I give Him, It is when I believe Him I feel His love and hear Him Bid me be happy near Him."

11 Chapter 11. Surgical Bandage Makers.

Chapter 11.

Surgical Bandage Makers. Is it to visit some hospital we are going today? and are we to pass from bed to bed seeking to cheer the sufferers by a few whispered words about the love of God in the gift of His Son, see some sad sights, and listen to still sadder stories?

No; we have been invited to take a peep into another workroom, and we accept the invitation with real pleasure, for two of our own girls are among the workers, and Lizzie and Mary would feel almost neglected if we passed them by without a smile or word of encouragement. The room in which the young people work, though smaller than some we have visited, has two large windows, and one side is almost taken up by a cupboard with glass doors.

What a stock of bandages, lint, splints, and other things of which we do not know even the names or uses are on its shelves. The forewoman, who has a pleasant face and a kind manner, explains by telling us that many of the oddly-shaped belts, etc., we are looking at will be returned in a few days to a maker of surgical instruments, who sends them to their firm to be lined, etc., a part of the work that requires not only great care and neatness but skilled fingers, as the slightest roughness or crease would give pain to the wearer and so render what was intended to be a help and comfort worse than useless.

We wonder where all the bandages, chest protectors, etc., will be wanted or used, and are told that some of them are intended for the children's ward in one of the London hospitals.

We remember a visit paid not so very long ago to a hospital in which all the patients were children, some of them dear little babies of not more than a few months old, and wish we could take all our young friends for an afternoon visit to one of its pretty wards.

Some of the tiny patients were asleep in dainty swing cots, vases of fresh, bright flowers were on the table, and a canary in a gilded cage sang his sweetest song at one of the open windows.

Ah! but we saw many things besides birds and flowers during that visit. There were little children with pale, pain-worn faces; children who would never walk again or join in the merry games of their playmates.

One small boy, who was run over nearly a year ago and so badly hurt that the doctors were obliged to cut off both his legs, gets about the ward quite quickly on his crutches and we notice a fair-haired little girl who looks very pale and ill. Her name is Jessie, and the nurse tells us that a fall when she was quite a baby caused such severe injury to the spine that Jessie has never walked and is always obliged to lie quite still in her white cot. She is a gentle, patient child and very fond of singing hymns, and there is reason to hope that her young heart has been touched and won by a Saviour's love.

We are shewn more bandages and told they are going to be sent to far-off India, where a missionary, who is also a doctor, will be very glad of them for use in a small hospital he has opened, where any of the natives who are ill can go and have advice and medicine without having to pay for it. The hospital is open all the year round, and day after day its small waiting-room is crowded by dark-faced people who speak a strange language.

Many of them worship idols, and come to the mission hospital, glad to get a little medicine for their sick bodies and with little thought of their never-dying souls. But before the doctor sees one of his patients the doors are closed, and for a few moments every one is very quiet, for they are listening to Bible words as some one reads one of the Lord's parables or miracles of healing, and then they hear — some, perhaps, for the first time — of the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and of His love in sending His only Son to die upon the cross for sinners. But this wonderful story, so wonderful because it is all true, would be only half told if Mr. S. did not go on to speak of the Lord Jesus as a risen, living Saviour and of the new place where He now is.

Mabel says, in almost a whisper, "He is in heaven."

Yes; and if we turn for a moment to one of the letters written by Peter, we shall read: "who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God." (1 Peter 3:22.)

12 Chapter 12. A Rock-Bound Coast.

Chapter 12. A Rock-Bound Coast. My dear girls, please do not think because we have visited quite a number of workrooms during the year that nothing is left to be seen or learnt about the working girls of East London.

Lillie and Florence are, we fear, feeling just a little hurt on finding that our walks have not taken us so far Citywards as Fleet Street, for there we should have found them each busy at her work: Lillie among the bookbinders, Florence as an envelope-folder in one of our large city firms.

We know both girls well, we have met them so often in a Bible class, and it would really have been pleasant to watch their bright faces and busy fingers for a little while. But if we cannot stop to visit City workrooms, it will be pleasant, and I hope profitable, to spend half an hour in the inspection of the "South London Workshops for the Blind."

Stockrooms and a shop in which articles made by blind workmen and workwomen are exposed for sale occupy by far the greater part of the ground floor. But when the manager says "Would you like to see our basket and matmakers busy at their trades?" in such a bright, pleasant way that we feel sure he will not mind the trouble of shewing us over the building, we are glad to avail ourselves of his kind invitation, and follow our guide. The basket-makers are very busy, several fresh orders having been received by the morning's post, and as we watch how quickly and deftly the willow-canes, after having been first steeped in water to soften them, are handled and woven into baskets differing greatly in shape and size, it seems difficult to believe, and still more so to realise, that all the workmen are blind. But baskets are far from being the only things made in this department, though it is called the "basket-shop." Cane and bamboo chairs, bed and leg-rests (the latter to be used in the surgical wards of one of our London hospitals) and many useful things are the work of their skilled fingers. And when we remember how many difficulties had to be faced, and often the temptation to say "I'll give it up; I cannot work in the dark" must have come to these blind workmen, one cannot but feel ashamed of so often giving way to fits of depression and not always trying to do our very best. But our guide has more to shew and more to tell. The mat-makers are busy people, too. Though their work is not so varied as that of the basket-shop, their mats are so strong and well made that they will stand hard wear and often last for many years. The brush-shop also presents a busy scene. It would take up far too much space were I even to attempt to give the names of all the different kinds of brushes required for use in yard or stable, to say nothing of household and toilet use. The smaller and finer kinds are generally made by girls and women; each works upon a board in which a number of very fine holes have been drilled, through which the bristles are drawn or passed; this part of the work is called brush-drawing. When ready the brushes are taken to another department, in which the backs are shaped and fastened by male workers. But I must not stop to introduce you to blind shorthand typists, teachers of music, pianoforte tuners, carpenters, picture-frame makers, and other workers who have found ways and means of making themselves useful. As we say good-bye to our sightless friends our hearts thrill with the longing that each dear, blind worker may learn what it

means to "walk in the light" in the simple, happy consciousness of being "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." For such the darkness in which their outer lives must be spent cannot last long. Soon, it may be very soon, the shadows and gloom of earth will give place to the cloudless light and joy of being for ever with the One they have through grace learnt to love and trust. This may be my last opportunity of having a quiet talk by way of pen and ink, and I want very much to tell you another true story of a young girl who in her far-away home in one of the Shetland Isles was allowed to do a work that will last when everything we can see with our eyes, or touch with our hands, has been worn out and forgotten, for it was work for God, and when any who belong to Christ work from the sweet constraint of love to Him, it is really of no consequence how small or feeble the work may be, it is sure to last.

Some of our friends who have been to the Shetlands tell us it would be difficult to find a more delightful place in which to spend a long summer holiday.

Live seals may often be seen basking in the sunshine or sporting among the rocks, and the silence is broken by the shrill cry of many a sea bird, almost if not quite unknown on our southern coasts. The simple islanders, too, will not be easy to forget by those who have spent even a short time among them. The only way in which people who live in the different islands can get at each other is by boat, and some of the smaller islands can only be reached by such narrow openings among the rocks that visitors can only approach them in fine, calm weather. On one of these islands lives a fisherman — I am not sure that he would like me to tell you his real name, so I will call him Donald.

Donald was a very busy man, but at the time our story begins he was not a happy one.

Light from heaven had shined into his heart, and in that light he had seen himself to be a lost sinner, and the thought that one day (he did not know how soon) he must leave his fishing, and then, ah, then! his soul — that soul that must, he knew, live for ever — would go into eternity, made him very unhappy. But the light came from God, a God who loves to bless, and as it grew clearer he saw that there was salvation for him as the free gift of God (Romans 6:23), so in simple faith Donald took the gift and thanked the Giver, and a strange new joy, the joy of forgiveness, filled his soul. But for a long time he treated this joy in much the same way in which a miser hoards and hides his gold, he kept it to himself, he did not tell his friends or neighbours of the Saviour who had sought and found him.

He only talked of these things to his little daughter Agnes, and she, too, loved and trusted the same precious Saviour, and so you may be sure that father and daughter were great friends. But the One who had saved Donald and Agnes wanted to have a witness for Himself in that lonely sea-girt isle.

Other fishermen and their families lived near Donald's cottage and the Lord Jesus loved and longed to bless and save them too. He wanted them to hear through Donald's simple words of His great love.

Donald, however, was not quite ready to be His messenger. He had to learn in the school of sorrow that the Lord who is mighty to save is also able to comfort.

Agnes was taken ill, and before many days her almost broken-hearted father saw that his dearly-loved little girl was dying. But even on her sick bed there was a work for Agnes that perhaps no one but herself could have done. The Lord had given Agnes a deep, faithful love for souls, and she longed that not only the fisher children she used to play with, but their fathers and mothers should know the One who had saved her. So she asked her father if he would promise her "one thing," that when she had gone to be with the Lord he would get the neighbours together and, preach Christ to them.

He said, "It is of no use for me to promise, I cannot preach."

Such a troubled look came over the face of the dying girl, and for a moment she seemed disappointed. But only for a moment, for she asked, "But, dear father, if you cannot preach to the grown-up people, we have no Sunday school here, won't you tell the children about the Lord Jesus?"

Donald said, "I'll try," in a voice almost choked with sobs. And he has kept his promise, too.

He began very soon after dear Agnes fell asleep by holding a meeting for children in his cottage, but very soon fathers and mothers began to attend, and now Lord's day after Lord's day Donald is telling "the old, old story" of Jesus and His love to nearly all the people who live in his island home.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net