

LITTLE MEG'S
CHILDREN AND
ALONE IN LONDON





LOOKING OUT FOR FATHER.

[see p. 58.]

Little Meg's Children

AND

Alone in London

BY

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LITTLE MEG'S CHILDREN

LITTLE MEG'S CHILDREN



Chapter I

MOTHERLESS

IN the East End of London, more than a mile from St. Paul's Cathedral, and lying near to the docks, there is a tangled knot of narrow streets and lanes, crossing and running into one another, with blind alleys and courts leading out of them, and low arched passages, and dark gullies, and unsuspected slums, hiding away at the back of the narrowest streets; forming altogether such a labyrinth of roads and dwellings, that one needs a guide to thread a way among them, as upon pathless solitudes or deserts of shifting sands. In the wider streets it is possible for two conveyances to pass each other; for in some of them, towards the middle of their length, a sweeping curve is taken out

of the causeway on either side to allow of this being done ; but in the smaller and closer streets there is room spared only for the passage to and fro of single carts, while here and there may be found an alley so narrow that the neighbours can shake hands, if they would, from opposite windows. Many of the houses are of three or four stories, with walls, inside and out, dingy and grimed with smoke, and with windows that scarcely admit even the gloomy light which finds a way through the thick atmosphere, and down between the high, close buildings.

A few years ago in one of these dismal streets there stood a still more dismal yard, bearing the name of Angel Court, as if there yet lingered among those grimy homes and their squalid occupants some memories of a brighter place and of happier creatures. Angel Court was about nine feet wide, and contained ten or twelve houses on each side, with one dwelling at the further end, blocking up the thoroughfare, and commanding a view down the close, stone-paved yard, with its interlacing rows of clothes-lines stretched from window to window, upon which hung the yellow, half-washed rags of the inhabitants. This end house was three stories

high, without counting a raised roof of red tiles, forming two attics; the number of rooms in all being eight, each one of which was held by a separate family, as were most of the other rooms in the court. To possess two apartments was almost an undreamed-of luxury.

There was certainly an advantage in living in the attics of the end house in Angel Court, for the air was a trifle purer there and the light clearer than in the stories below. From the small windows might be seen the prospect, not only of the narrow court, but of a vast extent of roofs, with a church spire here and there, and the glow of the sky behind them, when the sun was setting in a thick purplish cloud of smoke and fog. There was greater quiet also, and more privacy up in the attics than beneath, where all day long people were trampling up and down the stairs, and past the doors of their neighbours' rooms. The steep staircase ended in a steeper ladder leading up to the attics, and very few cared to climb up and down it. It was perhaps for these reasons that the wife of a sailor, who had gone to sea eight months before, had chosen to leave a room lower down, for which he had paid

the rent in advance, in order to mount into higher and quieter quarters with her three children.

Whatever may have been her reason, it is certain that the sailor's wife, who had been ailing before her husband's departure, had, for some weeks past, been unable to descend the steep ladder into the maze of busy streets, to buy the articles necessary for her little household, and that she had steadily refused all aid from her neighbours, who soon left off pressing it upon her. The only nurse she had, and the only person to whom she would entrust her errands, was her eldest child, a small, spare, stunted girl of London growth, whose age could not be more than ten years, though she wore the shrewd, anxious air of a woman upon her face, with deep lines wrinkling her forehead and puckering about her keen eyes. Her small bony hands were hard with work; and when she trod to and fro about the crowded room, from the bedside to the fireplace, or from the crazy window to the creaking door, which let the cold draughts blow in upon the ailing mother, her step was slow and silent, less like that of a child than of a woman who was already weary

with much labour. The room itself was not large enough to cause a great deal of work; but little Meg had had many nights of watching lately, and her eyes were heavy for want of sleep, with the dark circles underneath them growing darker every day.

The evening had drawn in, but Meg's mother, her head propped up with anything that could be made into a pillow, had watched the last glow of the light behind the chimneys and the church spires, and then she turned herself feebly towards the glimmer of a handful of coals burning in the grate, beside which her little daughter was undressing a baby twelve months old, and hushing it to sleep in her arms. Another child had been put to bed already, upon a rude mattress in a corner of the room, where she could not see him; but she watched Meg intently, with a strange light in her dim eyes. When the baby was asleep at last, and laid down on the mattress upon the floor, the girl went softly back to the fire, and stood for a minute or two looking thoughtfully at the red embers.

'Little Meg!' said her mother, in a low, yet shrill voice.

Meg stole across with a quiet step to the bedside, and fastened her eyes earnestly upon her mother's face.

'Do you know I'm going to die soon?' asked the mother.

'Yes,' said Meg, and said no more.

'Father 'll be home soon,' continued her mother, 'and I want you to take care of the children till he comes. I've settled with Mr. Grigg downstairs as nobody shall meddle with you till father comes back. But, Meg, you've got to take care of that your own self. You've nothing to do with nobody, and let nobody have nothing to do with you. They're a bad crew downstairs, a very bad crew. Don't you ever let any one of 'em come across the door-step. Meg, could you keep a secret?'

'Yes, I could,' said Meg.

'I think you could,' answered her mother, 'and I'll tell you why you mustn't have nothing to do with the crew downstairs. Meg, pull the big box from under the bed.'

The box lay far back, where it was well hidden by the bed; but by dint of hard pulling Meg dragged it out, and the sailor's wife gave her the key from under her pillow. When the lid

was open, the eyes of the dying woman rested with interest and longing upon the faded finery it contained—the bright-coloured shawl, and showy dress, and velvet bonnet, which she used to put on when she went to meet her husband on his return from sea. Meg lifted them out carefully one by one, and laid them on the bed, smoothing out the creases fondly. There were her own best clothes, too, and the children's; the baby's nankeen coat, and Robin's blue cap, which never saw the light except when father was at home. She had nearly emptied the box, when she came upon a small but heavy packet.

‘That’s the secret, Meg,’ said her mother in a cautious whisper. ‘That’s forty gold sovereigns, as doesn’t belong to me, nor father neither, but to one of his mates as left it with him for safety. I couldn’t die easy if I thought it wouldn’t be safe. They’d go rooting about everywhere; but, Meg, you must never, never, never let anybody come into the room till father’s at home.’

‘I never will, mother,’ said little Meg.

‘That’s partly why I moved up here,’ she continued. ‘Why, they’d murder you all if they

couldn't get the money without. Always keep the door locked, whether you're in or out; and, Meg dear, I've made you a little bag to wear round your neck, to keep the key of the box in, and all the money I've got left; it'll be enough till father comes. And if anybody meddles, and asks you when he's coming, be sure say you expect him home to-day or to-morrow. He'll be here in four weeks, on Robin's birthday, may be. Do you know all you've got to do, little Meg?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'I'm to take care of the children, and the money as belongs to one of father's mates; and I must wear the little bag round my neck, and always keep the door locked, and tell folks I expect father home to-day or to-morrow, and never let nobody come into our room.'

'That's right,' murmured the dying woman. 'Meg, I've settled all about my burial with the undertaker and Mr. Grigg downstairs; and you'll have nothing to do but stay here till they take me away. If you like, you and Robin and baby may walk after me; but be sure see everybody out, and lock the door safe afore you start.'

She lay silent for some minutes, touching one after another the clothes spread upon the bed as Meg replaced them in the box, and then, locking it, put the key into the bag, and hung it round her neck.

‘Little Meg,’ said her mother, ‘do you remember one Sunday evening us hearing a sermon preached in the streets?’

‘Yes, mother,’ answered Meg promptly.

‘What was it he said so often?’ she whispered. ‘You learnt the verse once at school.’

‘I know it still,’ said Meg. ‘“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?”’

‘Ay, that’s it,’ she said faintly; ‘and he said we needn’t wait to be God’s children, but we were to ask Him for good things at once, because He had sent His own Son to be our Saviour, and to die for us. “Them that ask Him, them that ask Him”; he said it over and over again. Eh! but I’ve asked Him a hundred times to let me live till father comes home, or to let me take baby along with me.’

'May be that isn't a good thing,' said Meg. 'God knows what are good things.'

The dying mother pondered over these words for some time, until a feeble smile played upon her wan face.

'It 'ud be a good thing anyhow,' she said, 'to ask Him to forgive me my sins, and take me to heaven when I die—wouldn't it, Meg?'

'Yes, that's sure to be a good thing,' answered Meg thoughtfully.

'Then I'll ask Him for that all night,' said her mother, 'and to be sure take care of you all till father comes back. That 'ud be another good thing.'

She turned her face round to the wall with a deep sigh, and closed her eyelids, but her lips kept moving silently from time to time. Meg cried softly to herself in her chair before the fire, but presently she dozed a little for very heaviness of heart, and dreamed that her father's ship was come into dock, and she, and her mother, and the children were going down the dingy streets to meet him. She awoke with a start; and creeping gently to her mother's side, laid her warm little hand



MEG CRIED SOFTLY TO HERSELF IN HER CHAIR BEFORE THE FIRE.

upon hers. It was deadly cold, with a chill such as little Meg had never before felt; and when her mother neither moved nor spoke in answer to her repeated cries, she knew that she was dead.

Chapter II

LITTLE MEG AS A MOURNER

FOR the next day, and the night following, the corpse of the mother lay silent and motionless in the room where her three children were living. Meg cried bitterly at first; but there was Robin to be comforted, and the baby to be played with when it laughed and crowed in her face. Robin was nearly six years old, and had gained a vague, dim knowledge of death by having followed, with a troop of other curious children, many a funeral that had gone out from the dense and dirty dwellings to the distant cemetery, where he had crept forward to the edge of the grave, and peeped down into what seemed to him a very dark and dreadful depth. When little Meg told him mother was dead, and lifted him up to kneel on the bedside and kiss her icy lips for the last time, his childish heart was filled with an awe which almost made him

shrink from the sight of that familiar face, scarcely whiter or more sunken now than it had been for many a day past. But the baby stroked the quiet cheeks, whilst chuckling and kicking in Meg's arms, and shouted, 'Mam! mam! mam!' until she caught it away, and pressing it tightly to her bosom, sat down on the floor by the bed, weeping.

'You've got no mam but me now, baby,' cried little Meg. She sat still for a while, with Robin lying on the ground beside her, his face hidden in her ragged frock; but the baby set up a pitiful little wail, and she put aside her own grief to soothe it.

'Hush! hush!' sang Meg, getting up, and walking with baby about the room. 'Hush, hush, my baby dear! By-by, my baby, by-by!'

Meg's sorrowful voice sank into a low, soft, sleepy tone, and presently the baby fell fast asleep, when she laid it upon Robin's little mattress, and covered it up gently with an old shawl. Robin was standing at the foot of the bed, gazing at his mother with wide-open, tearless eyes; and little Meg softly drew the sheet again over the pale and rigid face.

'Robbie,' she said, 'let's sit in the window a bit.'

They had to climb up to the narrow window-sill by a broken chair which stood under it; but when they were there, and Meg had her arm round Robin, to hold him safe, they could see down into Angel Court, and into the street beyond, with its swarms of busy and squalid people. Upon the stone pavement far below them a number of children of every age and size, but all ill-clothed and ill-fed, were crawling about, in and out of the houses, and their cries and shrieks came up to them in their lofty seat; but of late their mother had not let them run out to play in the streets, and they were mostly strangers to them except by sight. Now and then Meg and Robin cast a glance inwards at the quiet and still form of their mother, lying as if silently watching them with her half-closed eyes, and when they spoke to one another they spoke in whispers.

'Mother is going to live with the angels,' said Meg.

'What are angels?' asked Robin, his glittering black eyes glancing at the bed where she lay in her deep sleep.

‘Oh, I’m not quite sure,’ answered Meg. ‘Only they’re beautiful people, who are always white and clean, and shining, like that big white cloud up in the sky. They live somewhere up in the sky, where it’s always sunny, and bright, and blue.’

‘How ’ll mother get up there?’ inquired Robin.

‘Well, I suppose,’ replied Meg, after some reflection, ‘after they’ve put her in the ground, the angels ’ll come and take her away. I read once of a poor beggar, oh such a poor beggar! full of sores, and he died, and the angels carried him away somewhere. I thought, may be, they’d come for mother in the night; but I suppose they let people be buried first now, and fetch ’em away after.’

‘I should like to see some angels,’ said Robin.

They were silent again after that, looking down upon the quarrelling children, and the drunken men and women staggering about the yard below. Now and then a sharper scream rang through the court, as some angry mother darted out to cuff one or another of the brawling groups, or to yell some shrill reproach at the drunken men.

No sound came to the ears of the listening children except the din and jarring tumult of the crowded city ; but they could see the white clouds floating slowly across the sky over their heads, which seemed to little Meg like the wings of the waiting angels, hovering over the place where her mother lay dead.

‘Meg,’ said Robin, ‘why do they call this Angel Court? Did the angels use to live here?’

‘I don’t think they ever could,’ she answered sadly, ‘or it must have been a long, long time ago. Perhaps they can’t come here now, so they’re waiting for mother to be taken out to the burying-ground afore they can carry her up to the sky. May be that’s it.’

‘Meg,’ whispered Robin, pressing closer to her side, ‘what’s the devil?’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ cried Meg; ‘only he’s dreadfully, dreadfully wicked.’

‘As wicked as father is when he’s drunk?’ asked Robin.

‘Oh, a hundred million times wickeder,’ answered Meg eagerly. ‘Father doesn’t get drunk often; and you mustn’t be a naughty boy and talk about it.’

It was already a point of honour with little

Meg to throw a cloak over her father's faults ; and she spoke so earnestly that Robin was strongly impressed by it. He asked no more questions for some time.

'Meg,' he said at last, 'does the devil ever come here?'

'I don't think he does,' answered Meg, with a shrewd shake of her small head ; 'I never see him, never. Folks are bad enough without him, I guess. No, no ; you needn't be frightened of seeing him, Robbie.'

'I wish there wasn't any devil,' said Robin.

'I wish everybody in London was good,' said Meg.

They sat a while longer on the window-sill, watching the sparrows, all fluffy and black, fluttering and chattering upon the house-tops, and the night fog rising from the unseen river, and hiding the tall masts, which towered above the buildings. It was dark already in the court below ; and here and there a candle had been lit and placed in a window, casting a faint twinkle of light upon the gloom. The baby stirred, and cried a little ; and Meg lifted Robin down from his dangerous seat, and put two or three small bits of coal upon the fire, to boil up the kettle for

their tea. She had done it often before, at the bidding of her mother ; but it seemed different now. Mother's voice was silent, and Meg had to think of everything herself. Soon after tea was over she undressed Robin and the baby, who soon fell asleep again ; and when all her work was over, and the fire put out, little Meg crept in beside them on the scanty mattress, with her face turned towards the bed, that she might see the angels if they came to carry her mother away. But before long her eyelids drooped over her drowsy eyes, and, with her arm stretched lightly across both her children, she slept soundly till daybreak.

No angels had come in the night ; but early in the morning a neighbouring undertaker, with two other men, and Mr. Grigg, the landlord, who lived on the ground-floor, carried away the light burden of the coffin which contained Meg's mother. She waited until all were gone, and then she locked the door carefully, and with baby in her arms, and Robin holding by her frock, she followed the funeral at a distance, and with difficulty, through the busy streets. The brief burial service was ended before they reached the cemetery, but Meg was in time to show Robin the

plate upon the coffin before the grave-digger shovelled down great spadefuls of earth upon it. They stood watching, with sad but childish curiosity, till all was finished; and then Meg, with a heavy and troubled heart, took them home again to their lonely attic in Angel Court.

Chapter III

LITTLE MEG'S CLEANING DAY

FOR a few days Meg kept up closely in her solitary attic, playing with Robin and tending baby; only leaving them for a few necessary minutes, to run to the nearest shop for bread or oatmeal. Two or three of the neighbours took the trouble to climb the ladder, and try the latch of the door, but they always found it locked; and if Meg answered at all, she did so only with the door between them, saying she was getting on very well, and she expected father home to-day or to-morrow. When she went in and out on her errands, Mr. Grigg, a gruff, surly man, who kept everybody about him in terror, did not break his promise to her mother, that he would let no one meddle with her; and very quickly the brief interest of Angel Court in the three motherless children of the absent sailor died away into complete indifference, unmingled

with curiosity : for everybody knew the full extent of their neighbours' possessions ; and the poor furniture of Meg's room, where the box lay well hidden and unsuspected under the bedstead, excited no covetous desires. The tenant of the back attic, a girl whom Meg herself had seen no oftener than once or twice, was away on a visit of six weeks, having been committed to a House of Correction for being drunk and disorderly in the streets ; so that by the close of the week in which the sailor's wife died no foot ascended or descended the ladder, except that of little Meg.

There were two things Meg set her heart upon doing before father came home : to teach Robin his letters, and baby to walk alone. Robin was a quick, bright boy, and was soon filled with the desire to surprise his father by his new accomplishment ; and Meg and he laboured diligently together over the Testament, which had been given to her at a night school, where she had herself learned to read a little. But with the baby it was quite another thing. There were babies in the court, not to be compared with Meg's baby in other respects, who, though no older, could already crawl about the dirty pavement and down into the gutter, and who could

even toddle unsteadily, upon their little bare feet, over the stone flags. Meg felt it as a sort of reproach upon her, as a nurse, to have her baby so backward. But the utmost she could prevail upon it to do was to hold hard and fast by a chair, or by Robin's fist, and gaze across the great gulf which separated her from Meg and the piece of bread and treacle stretched out temptingly towards her. It was a wan, sickly baby with an old face, closely resembling Meg's own, and meagre limbs, which looked as though they would never gain strength enough to bear the weight of the puny body; but from time to time a smile kindled suddenly upon the thin face, and shone out of the serious eyes—a smile so sweet, and unexpected, and fleeting, that Meg could only rush at her, and catch her in her arms, thinking there was not such another baby in the world. This was the general conclusion to Meg's efforts to teach her to walk, but none the less she put her through the same course of training a dozen times a day.

Sometimes, when her two children were asleep, little Meg climbed up to the window-sill and sat there alone, watching the stars come out in that sky where her mother was gone to live. There were nights when the fog was too thick for her

to see either them or the many glittering specks made by the lamps in the maze of streets around her ; and then she seemed to herself to be dwelling quite alone with Robin and baby, in some place cut off both from the sky above and the earth beneath. But by-and-by, as she taught Robin out of the Testament, and read in it herself two or three times a day, new thoughts of God and His life came to her mind, upon which she pondered, after her childish fashion, as she sat in the dark, looking out over the great vast city with its myriads of fellow-beings all about her, none of whom had any knowledge of her loneliness, or any sympathy with her difficulties.

After a week was past, Meg and her children made a daily expedition down to the docks, lingering about in any out-of-the-way corner till they could catch sight of some good-natured face, which threatened no unkind rebuff, and then Meg asked when her father's ship would come in. Very often she could get no satisfactory answer, but whenever she came across anyone who knew the Ocean King, she heard that it would most likely be in dock by the end of October. Robin's birthday was the last day in October, so her mother's reckoning had been correct. Father

would be home on Robbie's birthday; yet none the less was Meg's anxious face to be seen day after day about the docks, seeking someone to tell her over again the good news.

The last day but one arrived, and Meg set about the scrubbing and the cleaning of the room heartily, as she had seen her mother do before her father's return. Robin was set upon the highest chair, with baby on his lap, to look on at Meg's exertions, out of the way of the wet flooring, upon which she bestowed so much water that the occupant of the room below burst out upon the landing, with such a storm of threats and curses as made her light heart beat with terror. When the cleaning of the room was done, she trotted up and down the three flights of stairs with a small can, until she had filled, as full as it would hold, a broken tub, which was to serve as a bath for Robin and baby. It was late in the evening when all was accomplished, and Meg looked around her with a glow of triumph on the clean room and the fresh faces of the children. Very weary she felt, but she opened her Testament, in which she had not had time to give Robin a lesson that day, and she read a verse half aloud to herself.

'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

'I wish I could go to Jesus,' sighed little Meg, 'for I've worked very hard all day; and He says He'd give me rest. Only I don't know where to go.'

She laid her head down on the pillow beside the baby's slumbering face, and almost before it rested there a deep sleep had come. Perhaps Meg's sigh had gone to Jesus, and it was He who gave her rest; 'for so He giveth His beloved sleep.'

Chapter IV

LITTLE MEG'S TREAT TO HER CHILDREN

ROBIN'S birthday dawned brightly, even into the dark deep shadows of Angel Court, and Meg was awakened by the baby's two hands beating upon her still drowsy face, and trying to lift up her closed eyelids with its tiny fingers. She sprang up with a light heart, for father was coming home to-day. For the first time since her mother's death she dragged the box from under the bed, and with eager hands unlocked the lid. She knew that she dare not cross the court, she and the children, arrayed in the festive finery, without her father to take care of them; for she had seen other children stripped of all their new and showy clothes before they could reach the shelter of the larger streets.

But Meg was resolved that Robin and baby at least should not meet their father in rags. She took out the baby's coat and hood, too small

now even for the little head it was to cover, and Robin's blue cap and brown holland pinafore. These things she made up into a bundle, looking longingly at her own red frock, and her bonnet with green ribbons: but Meg shook her head at herself admonishingly. It never would do to risk an appearance in such gorgeous attire. The very utmost she could venture upon was to put some half-worn shoes on her own feet and Robin's; for shoes were not in fashion for the children of Angel Court, and the unusual sound of their tread would attract quite as much attention as little Meg dare risk. She dressed her children and set them on the bed, while she put her own rough hair as smooth as she could by a little glass in the lid of the trunk. Her bonnet, which had originally belonged to her mother, had been once of black silk, but it was now brown with years, and the old shawl she pinned over the ragged bodice of her frock was very thin and torn at the edges; but Meg's heart was full of hope, and nothing could drive away the smile from her careworn face this morning. With the baby in her arms she carefully descended the ladder, having put the door-key into the bag round her neck along with

the key of the box and her last half-crown. Then with stealthy steps she stole along under the houses, hushing Robin, who was inclined to make an unnecessary clatter in his shoes ; but fortunately the inhabitants of Angel Court were not early risers, and Meg was off in good time, so they reached the outer streets safely, without notice or attack.

Before going down to the docks Meg drew Robin into an empty archway, and there exchanged his ragged cap and pinafore for those she had put up into her bundle. Having dressed the baby also, she sat and looked at them both for a minute in mute admiration and delight. There could not be a prettier boy than Robin in all London, she was sure, with his bright black eyes and curly hair, that twisted so tightly round her fingers. As for the baby with her shrewd old-womanish face, and the sweet smile which spoke a good deal plainer than words, Meg could scarcely keep from kissing her all the time. How pleased and proud father would be ! But when she remembered how she should have to tell him that mother was dead and buried, and none of them would ever see her again, Meg's eyes were blinded with tears, and hiding her face

in the baby's neck, she cried, whether for joy or sorrow she could hardly tell; until Robin broke out into a loud wail of distress and terror, which echoed noisily under the low vault of the archway.

Little Meg roused herself at the sound of Robin's cry, and taking his hand in hers, with the baby upon her arm, she loitered about the entrance to the dockyard, till a good-tempered looking burly man came near to them. Meg planted herself bravely in his way, and looked up wistfully into his red face.

'Please, sir,' she said, 'could you tell me if father's ship's come in yet?'

'Father's ship!' repeated the man in a kindly voice. 'Why, what's the name of father's ship?'

'The Ocean King,' said Meg, trembling.

'It's in the river, my little lass,' he said, 'but it won't be in dock till night. Father can't be at home afore to-morrow morning at the soonest.'

'Thank you kindly, sir,' answered Meg, her voice faltering with her great joy. Her task *was* ended, then. To-morrow she would give up the key of the box with its secret treasure, which she hardly dared to think about, and then

she could feel like a child once more. She did feel almost as gay as Robin, who was pattering and stamping proudly along in his shoes, and in the consciousness that it was his birthday. Nobody else had such a thing as a birthday, so far as he knew; certainly none of his acquaintances in Angel Court, not even Meg herself, for Meg's birthday was lost in the depth of the ten years which had passed over her head. He scarcely knew what it was, for he could neither see it nor touch it; but he had it, for Meg told him so, and it made him feel glad and proud. It was a bright, warm, sunny autumn day, with enough freshness in the breeze coming off the unseen river to make the air sweet and reviving; for Meg was skirting about the more open streets, without venturing to pass through the closer and dirtier alleys.

'Robbie,' she said after a time, when they had come to a halt upon the steps of a dwelling-house, 'Robbie, I'll give you a treat to-day, because it's your birthday. We'll not go home till it's dark; and I'll take you to see Temple Gardens.'

'What are Temple Gardens?' demanded Robin, his eyes eager for an answer.

'Oh, you'll see,' said Meg, not quite able to explain herself. 'I went there once, ever so many years ago, when I was a little girl. You'll like 'em ever so!'

'Do we know the road?' asked Robin doubtfully.

'I should think so!' replied Meg; 'and if we didn't, there's the police. What's the police good for, if they couldn't tell a person like me the road to Temple Gardens? We'll have such a nice day!'

The children trotted along briskly till they reached the broad thoroughfares and handsome shops of the main streets which traverse London, where a constant rush of foot passengers upon the pavement, and of conveyances in the roadway, hurry to and fro from morning to midnight. Poor little Meg stood for a few minutes aghast and stunned, almost fearful of committing herself and her children to the mighty stream; but Robin pulled her on impatiently. He had been once as far as the Mansion House, before the time when their mother's long illness had made them almost prisoners in their lonely attic; and Meg herself had wandered several times as far as the great

church of St. Paul. After the first dread was over, she found a trembling, anxious enjoyment in the sight of the shops, and of the well-dressed people in the streets. At one of the windows she was arrested by a full-size vision of herself, and Robin, and the baby, reflected in a great glass, a hundred times larger than the little square in the box-lid at home. She could not quite keep down a sigh after her own red frock and best bonnet; but she comforted herself quickly with the thought that people would look upon her as the nurse of Robin and baby, sent out to take them a walk.

They did not make very rapid progress, for they stopped to look in at many shop windows, especially where there were baby-clothes for sale, or where there were waxen figures of little boys, life-size, dressed in the newest fashions, with large eyes of glass beads, not unlike Robin's own black ones. The passage of the crossings was also long and perilous. Meg ran first with the baby, and put her down safely on the other side in some corner of a doorway; then with a sinking and troubled heart, lest any evil person should pick her up, and run away with her as a priceless treasure, she returned for Robin. In

this way she got over several crossings, until they reached the bottom of Ludgate Hill, where she stood shivering and doubting for a long time, till she fairly made up her mind to speak to the majestic policeman looking on calmly at the tumult about him.

'Oh, if you please, Mr. Police,' said Meg, in a plaintive voice, 'I want to get these two little children over to the other side, and I don't know how to do it, except you'd please to hold baby while I take Robbie across.'

The policeman looked down from his great height, without bending his stiff neck, upon the childish creature who spoke to him, and Meg's spirit sank with the fear of being ordered back again. But he picked up Robin under his arm, and bidding her keep close beside him, he threaded his way through the throng of carriages. This was the last danger; and now with restored gaiety Meg travelled on with her two children.

By-and-by they turned from the busy Fleet Street under a low archway, and in a minute they were out of the thunder of the streets which had almost drowned their voices, and found themselves in a place so quiet and so calm, with a sort of grave hush in the very air,

that Robin pressed close to Meg's side, with something of the silent and subdued awe with which he might have entered a church. There were houses here, and courts, but not houses and courts like those from which they had come. Here and there they came upon a long corridor, where the sun shone between the shadows of the pillars supporting the roof; and they looked along them with wondering eyes, not knowing where they could lead to, and too timid to try to find out. It was not a deserted place, but the number of people passing to and fro were few enough to make it seem almost a solitude to these poor children, who had travelled hither from the overcrowded slums of the East End. They could hear their own voices, when they spoke, ring out in such clear, echoing tones, that Meg hushed Robin, lest some of the grave, stern, thoughtful gentlemen who passed them should bid them begone, and leave the Temple to its usual stillness. The houses seemed to them so large and grand, that Meg, who had heard once of the Queen, and had a dim notion of her as a lady of extraordinary greatness and grandeur, whispered to Robin confidentially that she thought the Queen must live here.

They came upon a fountain in the centre of a small plot of grass and flowers, enclosed within high railings; and Robin uttered a shrill cry of delight, which rang noisily through the quiet court where its waters played in the sunshine. But at last they discovered, with hearts as eagerly throbbing as those of the explorers of some new country, the gardens, the real Temple Gardens! The chrysanthemums were in full blossom, with all their varied tints, delicate and rich, glowing under the brightness of the noon-tide sun; and Robin and Meg stood still, transfixed and silent, too full of an excess of happiness to speak.

'Oh, Meg, what is it? what is it?' cried Robin at last, with outstretched hands, as if he would fain gather them all into his arms. 'Is it gardens, Meg? Is this Temple Gardens?'

Meg could not answer at first, but she held Robin back from the flowers. She did not feel quite at home in this strange, sweet, sunny place; and she peeped in cautiously through the half-open iron gate before entering. There were a few other children there, with their nursemaids, but she felt there was some untold difference between her and them. But Robin's delight had

given him courage, and he rushed in tumultuously, running along the smooth walks in an ecstasy of joy; and Meg could do nothing else but follow. Presently, as nobody took any notice of her, she gave herself up to the gladness of the hour, and toiled up and down, under the weight of the baby, wherever Robin wished to go, until he consented to rest a little while upon a seat which faced the river, where they could see the boats pass by. This was the happiest moment to Meg. She thought of her father's ship coming up the river, bringing him home to her and the children; and she had almost lost the recollection of where she was, when Robin, who had been very quiet for some time, pulled her by the shawl.

‘Look, Meg,’ he whispered.

He pointed to a seat not far from them, where sat a lady, in a bright silk dress, and a velvet bonnet with a long rich feather across it. There were two children with her, a girl of Meg's age, and a boy about as big as Robin, dressed like a little Highlander, with a kilt of many colours, and a silver-mounted pouch, and a dirk, which he was brandishing about before his mother, who looked on, laughing fondly and proudly at her boy. Meg gazed, too, until she heard Robin

sob, and turning quickly to him, she saw the tears rolling quickly down his sorrowful face. 'Nobody laughs to me, Meg,' said Robin.

'Oh yes, Robbie, I laugh to you,' cried Meg; 'and father 'll laugh when he comes home to-morrow; and maybe God laughs to us, only we can't see His face.'

'I'd like to go home,' sobbed Robin; and Meg took her baby upon her tired arm, and turned her steps eastward once more. As they left Temple Gardens, languid and weary, Meg saw the friendly man who had spoken kindly to them that morning at the docks passing by in an empty dray, and meeting her wistful eyes, he pulled up for a minute.

'Hullo, little woman!' he shouted. 'Are you going my way?'

He pointed his whip towards St. Paul's, and Meg nodded, for her voice could not have reached him through the din.

'Hoist them children up here, that's a good fellow,' he said to a man who was standing by idle; and in a few seconds more they were riding triumphantly along Fleet Street in such a thrill and flutter of delight as Meg's heart had never felt before, while Robin forgot his sorrows, and

cheered on the horses with all the power of his shrill voice. The dray put them down at about half a mile from Angel Court, while it was still broad daylight, and Robin was no longer tired. Meg changed her last half-crown, and spent sixpence of it lavishly in the purchase of some meat pies, upon which they feasted sumptuously, in the shelter of a doorway leading to the back of a house.

Chapter V

LITTLE MEG'S NEIGHBOUR

WHEN their feast was over, the children sauntered on slowly, not wishing to enter Angel Court till it was dark enough for Robin's and baby's finery to pass by unseen ; but as soon as it was dark they turned out of the main thoroughfare into the dingy streets more familiar to them. As they entered the house Meg heard the deep gruff voice of Mr. Grigg calling to her, and she went into his room, trembling, and holding the baby very tightly in her arms. It was a small room, the same size as their own attic, and the litter and confusion throughout made it impossible to go in more than a step or two. Mr. Grigg was seated at a stained wooden table, upon which stood two large cups and a black bottle of gin, with a letter lying near to Mr. Grigg's large and shaking hand. Coming in from the fresh air of the night,

Meg coughed a little with the mingled fumes of gin and tobacco ; but she coughed softly for fear of giving offence.

‘Here’s a letter come for your mother, little Meg,’ said Mr. Grigg, seizing it eagerly. ‘I’ll read it to you if you like.’

‘Oh no, thank you, sir,’ answered Meg quickly ; ‘father’s coming home, and he’ll read it to-morrow morning. His ship’s in the river, and it’ll be in dock to-night for certain. So he’ll be home to-morrow.’

Upon hearing this news Mr. Grigg thought it best to deliver up the letter to Meg, but he did it so reluctantly that she hurried away lest he should reclaim it. Robin was already half-way upstairs, but she soon overtook him, and a minute afterwards reached their own door. She was about to put the baby down to take out the key, when, almost without believing her own eyes, she saw that it was in the lock, and that a gleam of firelight shone through the chinks of the door. Meg lifted the latch with a beating heart, and looked in before venturing to enter. The fire was lighted, but there seemed to be no other disturbance or change in the attic since the morning, except that in her mother’s low chair

upon the hearth there sat a thin slight woman, like her mother, with the head bowed down, and the face hidden in the hands. Meg paused, wonder-stricken and speechless, on the door-sill; but Robin ran forward quickly, with a glad shout of 'Mother! mother!'

At the sound of Robin's step and cry the woman lifted up her face. It was a white, thin face, but younger than their mother's, though the eyes were red and sunken, as if with many tears, and there was a gloom upon it, as if it had never smiled a happy smile. Meg knew it in an instant as the face of the tenant of the back attic, who had been in jail for six weeks, and her eye searched anxiously the dark corner under the bed, where the box was hidden. It seemed quite safe and untouched, but still Meg's voice was troubled as she spoke.

'I thought I'd locked up all right,' she said stepping into the room, while Robin took refuge behind her, and regarded the stranger closely from his place of safety.

'Ay, it was all right,' answered the girl, 'only you see my key 'd unlock it; and I felt cold and low coming out of jail to-day; and I'd no coal, nor bread, nor nothing. So I came in here, and

made myself comfortable. Don't you be crusty, little Meg. You'd be the same if you'd been locked up for six weeks. I wish I were dead, I do.'

The girl spoke sadly, and dropped her head again upon her hands, while Meg stood in the middle of the floor, not knowing what to do or say. She sat down after a while upon the bedstead, and began taking off the baby's things, pondering deeply all the time what course of action she ought to follow. She could place herself so as to conceal completely the box under the bed; but if the girl's key would unlock her attic door, how was she ever to leave it for a moment in safety? Then the thought flashed across her that father would be at home to-morrow, and she would no longer have to take care of the hidden treasure. In the meantime Robin had stolen up to the stranger's side, and after closely considering her for some moments, he stroked her hand with his own small fingers.

'I thought you were mother, I did,' he said. 'It's my birthday to-day.'

For one instant the girl looked at him with a smile in her sunken eyes, and then she lifted

him on to her lap, and laid her face upon his curly head, sobbing bitterly.

'Little Meg,' she said, 'your mother spoke kind to me once, and now she's dead and gone. I wonder why I wasn't took instead o' her?'

Meg's tender heart closed itself no longer against the stranger. She got up from her seat, and crossing the floor to the fireside, she put the baby down by Robin on her lap.

'You didn't ought to go into a person's room without asking leave,' she said; 'but if you'll hold baby for me, I'll soon get tea. I've got a little real tea left, and father 'll buy some more to-morrow. You mind the children till it's ready.'

It was soon ready, and they drank and ate together, with few words. Meg was intent upon getting her weary children to bed as soon as possible, and after it was over she undressed them at once. Before Robin got into bed she addressed the girl hesitatingly.

'Robbie always says his prayers aloud to me,' she said; 'you won't mind, will you?'

'Go on,' answered the girl, with a sob.

'Robbie,' said Meg, as he knelt at her knee, with his hands held up between both her hands,

'Robbie, it's your birthday to-day; and if I was you I'd ask God for something more than other days. I'd ask Him to bless everybody as well as us if I was you. If everybody was good, it'd be so nice.'

'Yes, Meg,' replied Robin promptly, closing his black eyes before he began his prayer. 'Pray God, bless father on the big sea, and bless me, and Meg, and baby, and take care of us all. Pray God, bless everybody, 'cept the devil. Amen.'

But Robin did not get up from his knees. He dropped his head upon Meg's lap, and when she moved he cried, 'Stop a minute!' Meg waited patiently until he lifted up his face again, and shutting his eyes very tightly, said, 'Pray God, bless everybody, and the devil, and make him a good man. Amen.'

'Robbie,' said Meg mournfully, 'I don't think the devil can be made good. He doesn't want to be good. If anybody wants to be good, God can make 'em good, anybody in all the world; but He won't if they don't want to.'

Robin was already half asleep, and gave little heed to Meg's words. She tucked him snugly into his place beside baby, and stooping over

them, kissed both their drowsy faces with a loving and lingering tenderness. Then she turned to the fire, and saw the strange girl there upon her knees before her mother's chair, weeping again in a passion of tears.

Chapter VI

LITTLE MEG'S LAST MONEY

‘WHAT’S the matter with you?’ asked Meg, laying her small rough hand upon the girl’s head.

‘Oh, Meg, Meg!’ she cried, ‘I do want to be good, and I can’t. You don’t know how wicked I am; but once I was a good little girl like you. And now I can never, never be good again.’

‘Yes, you can,’ answered little Meg, ‘if you ask God.’

‘You don’t know anything about it,’ she said, pushing away Meg’s hand.

‘I don’t know much, replied Meg meekly; ‘but Jesus says in the Bible, that if our fathers ’ll give us good things, God ’ll much more give good things to anybody as asks for ’em.’

‘But I’m too bad to ask Him,’ said the girl.

‘I don’t know what’s to be done, then,’

answered Meg. 'The Bible says, "Those that ask Him"; and if you are too bad to ask Him, I suppose He won't give you any good things.'

The girl made no reply, but crouching down upon the hearth at Meg's feet, she sat looking into the fire with the expression of one who is thinking deeply. Meg too was silent for a time, smiling now and then as she recollected that father would be at home to-morrow.

'I don't know what you're called,' said Meg, after a very long silence.

'Oh, they call me Kitty, and Puss, and Madcap, and all sorts o' names,' answered the girl, with a deep sigh.

'But that's not your christen name?' said Meg.

'No,' she replied.

'What does your mother call you?' asked Meg.

For a moment little Meg was terrified, for the girl seized her hands in a strong and painful grasp, and her red eyes flamed with anger; but she loosed her hold gradually, and then, in a choking voice, she said, 'Don't you never speak to me about my mother!'

'Have you got any money, Kitty?' inquired Meg, by way of turning the conversation.

'Not a rap,' said Kitty, laughing hoarsely.

'I've got two shillings left,' continued Meg, 'and I'll give you one; only, if you please, you mustn't come into my room again, at least till father's at home. I promised mother not to let anybody at all come here. You'll not be angry, will you?'

'No, I'm not angry,' said Kitty gently, 'and you must always do what your mother told you, little Meg. She spoke kind to me once, she did. So I'll go away now, dear, and never come in again: but you wouldn't mind me listening at the door when Robbie's saying his prayers sometimes?'

'No,' answered Meg; 'and you may listen when I read up loud, if you like. I always read something afore I go to bed, and I'll speak up loud enough for you to hear.'

'I'll listen,' said Kitty, standing up to go to her own dark, cold attic, and looking round sadly at Meg's tidy room, all ready as it was for her father's arrival. 'I suppose you'd not mind me kissing the children afore I go?'

'Oh no,' said Meg, going with her to the

bedside, and looking down fondly upon the children's sleeping faces. The baby's pale small face wore a smile upon it, as did Robin's also, for he was dreaming of the gardens he had visited on his birthday. The girl bent over them, but she drew back without kissing them, and with a sharp painful tone in her voice she said, 'I wish I was dead, I do.'

Chapter VII

LITTLE MEG'S DISAPPOINTMENT

IF Meg had been up early on Robin's birthday, she was out of bed and about her preparations still earlier the next morning. She had time to go over again most of her brushing and rubbing of the scanty furniture before the children awoke. She reached out all their best clothes, and her own as well, for she did not intend to go down to the docks to meet her father, but thought it would be best to wait at home for his arrival. Her hands were full, and her thoughts also, for some time ; and it was not till the nearest clock struck eleven that she could consider all her preparations completed.

When all her work was done, Meg helped Robin up to the window-sill, and climbed after him herself to the perilous seat, with the baby held fast upon her lap. It was the first time the baby had been allowed to occupy this dangerous

place, and for the first few minutes Meg was not without her fears ; but it was weary and languid this morning, and sat quite still upon her lap, with its little head resting upon her shoulder, and its grave eyes looking out inquiringly upon the strange world in which it found itself. Meg and Robin watched every man who entered the court ; and every now and then Robin would clap his hands, and shout loudly, 'Father, father!' making Meg's arms tremble, and her heart beat fast with expectation. But it was nine months since he had gone away, and Robin had almost forgotten him, so that it always proved not to be her father. Hour after hour passed by, and Meg cut up the last piece of bread for the children and herself, and yet he never came ; though they stayed faithfully at their post, and would not give up looking for him as long as the daylight lasted. But the night drew near at last, an early night, for it was the first day in November, and London fogs grow thick then ; and Meg kindled the fire again, and sat down by it, unwilling to undress the children before he came. So she sat watching and waiting, until the baby fell into a broken, sobbing slumber on her lap, and Robin lay upon the floor fast asleep.

At length Meg resolved to lay the children in bed, dressed as they were, and steal down herself to the docks, under the shelter of the fog, to see if she could learn any news of the Ocean King. She drew the old shawl over her head, which well covered her red frock, and taking off her shoes and stockings—for father would not miss them in the night—she crept unseen and unheard down the dark staircase, and across the swarming, noisy court. The fog was growing thicker every minute, yet she was at no loss to find her way, so familiar it was to her. But when she reached the docks, the darkness of the night, as well as that of the fog, hid from her the presence of her good-natured friend, if indeed he was there. There were strange noises and rough voices to be heard, and from time to time the huge figure of some tall man appeared to her for an instant in the gloom, and vanished again before little Meg could find courage to speak to him. She drew back into a corner, and peered eagerly, with wistful eyes, into the thick yellow mist which hid everything from them, while she listened to the clank of iron cables, and the loud sing-song of the invisible sailors as they righted their vessels. If she could only hear her father's voice

among them! She felt sure she should know it among a hundred others, and she was ready to cry aloud the moment it reached her ears—to call ‘Father!’ and he would be with her in an instant, and she in his arms, with her own clasped fast about his neck. Oh, if he would but speak out of the darkness! Meg’s keen eyes grew dim with tears, and her ears seemed to become dull of hearing, from the very longing to see and hear more clearly. But she rubbed away the tears with her shawl, and pushed the tangled hair away behind her small ears, and with her hands pressed against her heart, to deaden its throbbing, she leaned forward to pierce, if possible, through the thick dark veil which separated her from her father.

She had been there a long time when the thought crossed her, that perhaps after all he had been knocking at the door at home, and trying to open it; waking up the children, and making them cry and scream with terror at finding themselves quite alone. She started up to hurry away; but at that moment a man came close by, and in the extremity of her anxiety Meg stopped him.

‘Please,’ she said earnestly, ‘is the Ocean King come in yet?’

'Ay,' was the answer. 'Came in last night, all right and tight.'

'Father must be come home, then,' thought Meg, speeding away swiftly and noiselessly with her bare feet along the streets to Angel Court. She glanced up anxiously to her attic window, which was all in darkness, while the lower windows glimmered with a faint light from within. The landlord's room was full of a clamorous, quarrelling crew of drunkards; and Meg's spirit sank as she thought—suppose father had been up to their attic, and finding it impossible to get in at once, had come down, and begun to drink with them! She climbed the stairs quickly, but all was quiet there; and she descended again to hang about the door, and listen, and wait; either to discover if he was there, or to prevent him turning in when he did come. Little Meg's heart was full of a woman's heaviest care and anxiety, as she kept watch in the damp and the gloom of the November night, till even the noisy party within broke up, and went their way, leaving Angel Court to a brief season of quietness.

Meg slept late in the morning, but she was not disturbed by any knock at the door. Robin

had crept out of bed and climbed up alone to the window-sill, where fortunately the window was shut and fastened; and the first thing Meg's eyes opened upon was Robin sitting there, in the tumbled clothes in which he had slept all night. The morning passed slowly away in mingled hope and fear; but no step came up the ladder to their door, and Kitty had gone out early in the morning, before Meg was awake. She spent her last shilling in buying some coal and oatmeal; and then, because it was raining heavily, she stationed herself on the topmost step of the stairs, with Robin and baby, waiting with ever-growing dread for the long-delayed coming of her father.

It was growing dark again before any footstep came further than the landing below, and then it was a soft, stealthy, slipshod step, not like the strong and measured tread of a man. It was a woman who climbed the steep ladder, and Meg knew it could be no one else but Kitty. The girl sat down on the top step beside them, and took Robin upon her lap.

'What are you all doing out here, little Meg?' she said, in a low, gentle voice, which Meg could scarcely believe to be the same as that which had

sometimes frightened her by its shrill shrieks of drunken merriment.

‘We’re looking for father,’ she answered wearily. ‘He’s never come yet, and I’ve spent all my money, and we’ve got no candles.’

‘Meg,’ said Kitty, ‘I can pay you back the shilling you gave me on Tuesday night.’

‘But you mustn’t come into our room, if you do,’ answered Meg.

‘No, no, I’ll not come in,’ said she, pressing a shilling into Meg’s hand. ‘But why hasn’t father come home?’

‘I don’t know,’ sobbed Meg. ‘His ship came in the night of Robbie’s birthday, that’s two days ago; and he’s never come yet.’

‘The ship come in!’ repeated Kitty, in a tone of surprise. ‘What’s the name o’ the ship, Meg?’

‘Father’s ship’s the Ocean King,’ said Robin proudly.

‘I’ll hunt him up,’ cried Kitty, rising in haste. ‘I’ll find him, if he’s anywhere in London. I know their ways, and where they go to, when they come ashore, little Meg. Oh! I’ll hunt him out. You put the children to bed, dear; and then you sit up till I come back, if it’s past

twelve o'clock, I'll bring him home, alive or dead. Don't cry no more, little Meg.'

She called softly up the stairs to say these last words, for she had started off immediately. Meg did as she had told her, and then waited with renewed hope for her return. It was past midnight before Kitty tapped quietly at the door, and she went out to her on the landing. But Kitty was alone, and Meg could hardly stand for the trembling which came upon her.

'Haven't you found father?' she asked.

'I've found out where he is,' answered Kitty. 'He's at the other end of the world, in hospital. He was took bad a-coming home—so bad, they was forced to leave him behind them; and he'll work his way back when he's well enough, so Jack says, one of his mates. He says he may come back soon, or come back late, and that's all he knows about him. What shall you do, little Meg?'

'Mother said I was to be sure to take care of the children till father comes home,' she answered, steadying her voice; 'and I'll do it, please God. I can ask Him to help me, and He will. He'll take care of us

'He hasn't took care o' me,' said Kitty bitterly.

'May be you haven't asked Him,' said Meg.

Kitty was silent for a minute, and then she spoke in a voice half choked with sobs.

'It's too late now,' she said, 'but He'll take care of you, never fear ; and oh ! I wish He'd let me help Him. I wish I could do something for you, little Meg ; for your mother spoke kind to me once, and made me think of my own mother. There, just leave me alone, will you ? I'm off to bed now, and you go to bed too. I'll help you all I can.'

She pushed Meg back gently into her attic, and closed the door upon her ; but Meg heard her crying and moaning aloud in her own room, until she herself fell asleep.

Chapter VIII

LITTLE MEG'S RED FROCK IN PAWN

MEG felt very forlorn when she opened her heavy eyelids the next morning. It was certain now that her father could not be home for some time, it might be a long time; and how was she to buy bread for her children and herself? She took down her mother's letter from the end of a shelf which supplied the place of a chimney-piece, and looked at it anxiously; but she dared not ask anybody to read it for her, lest it should contain some mention of the money hidden in the box; and that must be taken care of in every way, because it did not belong to her, or father even, but to one of his mates. She had no friend to go to in all the great city. Once she might have gone to the teacher at the school where she had learned to read a little; but that had been in quite a different part of London, on the other side of the river, and they had moved from

it before her father had started on his last voyage. Meg sat thinking and pondering sadly enough, until suddenly, how she did not know, her fears were all taken away, and her childish heart lightened. She called Robin, and bade him kneel down beside her, and folding baby's hands together, she closed her own eyes, and bowed her head, while she asked God for the help He had promised to give.

'Pray God,' said little Meg, 'You've let mother die, and father be took bad at the other side of the world, and there's nobody to take care of us 'cept You, and Jesus says, if we ask You, You'll give us bread and everything we want, just like father and mother. Pray God, do! I'm not a grown-up person yet, and Robin's a very little boy, and baby can't talk or walk at all; but there's nobody else to do anythink for us, and we'll try as hard as we can to be good. Pray God, bless father at the other side of the world, and Robbie, and baby, and me; and bless everybody, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'

Meg rose from her knees joyfully, feeling sure that her prayer was heard and would be answered. She went out with her children to lay out the shilling Kitty had returned to her the

day before ; and when they came in she and Robin sat down to a lesson in reading. The baby was making a pilgrimage of the room from chair to chair, and along the bedstead ; but all of a sudden she balanced herself steadily upon her tiny feet, and with a scream of mingled dread and delight, which made Meg and Robin look up quickly, she tottered across the open floor to the place where they were sitting, and hid her face in Meg's lap, quivering with joy and wonder. Meg's gladness was full, except that there was a little feeling of sorrow that neither father nor mother was there to see it.

‘ Did God see baby walk ? ’ inquired Robin.

‘ I should think He did ! ’ said Meg confidently ; and her slight sorrow fled away. God could not help loving baby, she felt sure of that, nor Robin ; and if He loved them, would He not take care of them Himself, and show her how to take care of them, till father was at home ? The day passed almost as happily as Robin's birthday ; though the rain came down in torrents, and pattered through the roof, falling splash, splash into the broken tub, with a sound something like the fountain in Temple Gardens.

But when Kitty's shilling was gone to the last

farthing, and not a spoonful of meal remained in the bag, it was not easy to be happy. Robin and baby were both crying for food; and there was no coal to make a fire, nor any candle to give them light during the long dark evenings of November. Kitty was out all day now, and did not get home till late, so Meg had not seen her since the night she had brought the news about her father. But a bright thought came to her, and she wondered at herself for not having thought of it before. She must pawn her best clothes; her red frock and bonnet with green ribbons. There was a natural pang at parting with them, even for a time; but she comforted herself with the idea that father would get them back for her as soon as he returned. She reached them out of the box, feeling carefully lest she should take any of Robin's or the baby's by mistake in the dark; and then she set off with her valuable bundle, wondering how many shillings she would get for them, and whether she could make the money last till her father came. The pawnbroker's shop was a small, dingy place in Rosemary Lane; and it, and the rooms above it, were as full as they could be with bundles such as poor Meg carried under her old shawl. A

single gas-light was flaring away in the window, and a hard-featured, sharp-eyed man was reading a newspaper behind the counter. Meg laid down her bundle timidly, and waited till he had finished reading his paragraph; after which he opened it, spread out the half-worn frock, and held up the bonnet on his fist, regarding them both with a critical and contemptuous eye. Someone else had entered the shop, but Meg was too absorbed and too anxious to take any heed of it. The pawnbroker rolled the frock up scornfully, and gave it a push towards her.

‘Tenpence for the two,’ he said, looking back at his newspaper.

‘Oh! if you please,’ cried little Meg, in an agony of distress, ‘you must give me more than tenpence. I’ve got two little children, and no bread, nor coals, nor candles. I couldn’t buy scarcely anythink with only tenpence. Indeed, indeed, my red frock’s worth a great deal more; it’s worth I don’t know how many shillings.’

‘You go home, little Meg,’ said Kitty’s voice behind her, ‘and I’ll bring you three shillings for the frock, and one for the bonnet; four for the two. Mr. Sloman’s an old friend o’ mine, he is;

and he'll oblige you for my sake. There, you run away, and I'll manage this little bit o' business for you.'

Meg ran away as she was told, glad enough to leave her business with Kitty. By-and-by she heard her coming upstairs, and went out to meet her. Kitty placed four shillings in her hand.

'Meg,' she said, 'you let me do that sort o' work for you always. They'll cheat you ever so; but I wouldn't, not to save my life, if you'll only trust me. You ask me another time. Is that the way God takes care of you?'

'He does take care of me,' answered Meg, with a smile; 'or may be you wouldn't have come into the shop just now, and I should have got only tenpence. I suppose that's taking care of me, isn't it?'

'I don't know,' said Kitty. 'Only let me do that for you when you want it done again.'

It was not very long before it wanted to be done again; and then Meg by daylight went through the contents of the box, choosing out those things which could best be spared, but leaving Robin's and baby's fine clothes to the last. She clung to these with a strong desire to

save them, lest it should happen that her father came home too poor to redeem them. The packet of money, tied up and sealed, fell at last to the bottom of the almost empty box, and rolled noisily about whenever it was moved, but no thought of taking any of it entered into Meg's head. She was almost afraid of looking at it herself, lest the secret of it being there should get known in Angel Court; and whenever she mentioned it in her prayers, which she did every night, asking God to take care of it, she did not even whisper the words, much less speak them aloud, as she did her other requests, but she spoke inwardly only, for fear lest the very walls themselves should hear her. No one came near her attic, except Kitty, and she kept her promise faithfully. Since the four bearers had carried away her mother's coffin, and since the night Kitty came out of jail, the night of Robin's birthday, no stranger's foot had crossed the door-sill.

But November passed, and part of December, and Meg's stock of clothes, such as were of any value at the pawn-shop, was almost exhausted. At the end of the year the term for which her father had paid rent in advance would be over,

and Mr. Grigg might turn her and her children out into the streets. What was to be done? How was she to take care of Robin, and baby, and the money belonging to one of father's mates?

Chapter IX

LITTLE MEG'S FRIENDS IN NEED

THESE were hard times for little Meg. The weather was not severely cold yet, or the children would have been bitterly starved up in their cold attic, where Meg was obliged to be very careful of the coal. All her mother's clothes were in pledge now, as well as her own and Robin's; and it seemed as if it would soon come to pawning their poor bed and their scanty furniture. Yet Meg kept up a brave spirit, and, as often as the day was fine enough, took her children out into the streets, loitering about the cook-shops, where the heat from the cellar kitchens lent a soothing warmth to their shivering bodies.

About the middle of December the first sharp frost set in, and Meg felt herself driven back from this last relief. She had taken the children out as usual, but she had no shoes

to put on their feet, and nothing but their thin old rags to clothe them with. Robin's feet were red and blue with cold, like her own; but Meg could not see her own, and did not feel the cold as much for them as for Robin's. His face had lost a little of its roundness and freshness, and his black eyes some of their brightness since his birthday; and poor Meg's heart bled at the sight of him as he trudged along the icy pavement of the streets at her side. There was one cook-shop from which warm air and pleasant odours came up through an iron grating, and Meg hurried on to it to feel its grateful warmth; but the shutters of the shop were not taken down, and the cellar window was unclosed. Little Meg turned away sadly, and bent her bare and aching feet homewards again, hushing baby, who wailed a pitiful low wail in her ears. Robin, too, dragged himself painfully along, for he had struck his numbed foot against a piece of iron, and the wound was bleeding a little. They had turned down a short street which they had often passed through before, at the end of which was a small shop, displaying in its window a few loaves of bread, and some bottles containing different kinds

of sweetmeats, such as they had indulged in sometimes in the palmy days when father was at home. The door was divided in the middle, and the lower half was closed, while the upper stood open, giving a full view of the shop within. Meg's old brown bonnet just rose above the top of the closed half, and her wistful face turned for a moment towards the tempting sight of a whole shelf full of loaves; but she was going on slowly, when a kindly voice hailed her from the dark interior.

'Hollo, little woman!' it shouted. 'I haven't set eyes on you this many a day. How's Robbie and baby?'

'They're here, sir, thank you,' answered Meg, in a more womanly way than ever, for she felt very low to-day. 'We're only doing middling, thank you, sir.'

'Why, father's ship's come in,' said her good-natured friend from the docks, coming forward and wiping his lips, as if he had just finished a good meal. 'What makes you be doing only middling?'

'Father didn't come home in the ship,' replied Meg, her voice faltering a little.

'Come in and tell us all about it,' he said.

‘Hollo, Mrs. Blossom! just step this way, if you please.’

There was a little kitchen at the back of the shop, from which came a very savoury smell of cooking, as the door opened, and a round, fat, rosy-cheeked woman, of about fifty years of age, looked out inquiringly. She came a step or two nearer the door, as Meg’s friend beckoned to her with a clasp-knife he held in his hand.

‘These little ’uns look cold and hungry, don’t they, Mrs. Blossom?’ he said. ‘You smell something as smells uncommon good, don’t you?’ he asked of Meg, who had sniffed a little, unconsciously.

‘Yes, please, sir,’ answered Meg.

‘I’ve ate as much as ever I can eat for to-day,’ said her friend, ‘so you give ’em the rest, Mrs. Blossom, and I’ll be off. Only just tell me why father’s not come home in his ship.’

‘He was took bad on the other side of the world,’ replied Meg, looking up tearfully into his good-tempered face, ‘and they was forced to leave him behind in a hospital. That’s why.’

‘And what’s mother doing?’ he asked.

‘Mother’s dead,’ she answered.

'Dead!' echoed her friend. 'And who's taking care of you young 'uns?'

'There's nobody to take care of us but God,' said Meg, simply and softly.

'Well, I never!' cried Mrs. Blossom, seizing the baby out of Meg's, and clasping it in her own arms. 'I never heard anything like that.'

'Nor me,' said the man, catching up Robin and bearing him off into the warm little kitchen, where a saucepan of hot tripe was simmering on the hob, and a round table, with two plates upon it, was drawn up close to the fire. He put Robin down on Mrs. Blossom's seat, and lifted Meg into a large arm-chair he had just quitted.

'I guess you could eat a morsel of tripe,' he said, ladling it out in overflowing spoonfuls upon the plates. 'Mrs. Blossom, some potatoes, if you please, and some bread; and do you feed the baby whilst the little woman gets her dinner. Now, I'm off. Mrs. Blossom, you settle about 'em coming here again.'

He was off, as he said, in an instant. Meg sat in her large arm-chair, grasping a big knife and fork in her small hands, but she could not swallow a morsel at first for watching Robin

and the baby, who was sucking in greedily spoonfuls of potatoes, soaked in the gravy. Mrs. Blossom urged her to fall to, and she tried to obey; but her pale face quivered all over, and letting fall her knife and fork, she hid it in her trembling hands.

'If you please, ma'am, I'm only so glad,' said little Meg as soon as she could command her voice. 'Robbie and baby were so hungry, and I hadn't got anythink to give 'em.'

'I suppose you ain't hungry yourself neither,' observed Mrs. Blossom, a tear rolling down a little channel between her round cheeks and her nose.

'Oh, but ain't I!' said Meg, recovering herself still more. 'I've had nothink since last night, and then it were only a crust as Kitty give me.'

'Well, dear, fall to, and welcome,' answered Mrs. Blossom. 'And who's Kitty?'

'It's a grown-up person as lives in the back attic,' answered Meg, after eating her first mouthful. 'She helps me all she can. She's took all my things to the pawn-shop for me because she can get more money than me. She's as good as can be to us.'

'Are all your things gone to pawn?' inquired Mrs. Blossom.

'I've got baby's cloak and hood left,' she replied mournfully. 'He wouldn't give more than a shilling for 'em, and I thought it wasn't worth while parting with 'em for that. I tried to keep Robbie's cap and pinafore, that were as good as new, but I were forced to let 'em go. And our shoes, ma'am,' added Meg, taking Robin's bare and bleeding foot into her hand: 'see what poor Robbie's done to himself.'

'Poor little dear!' said Mrs. Blossom pityingly. 'I'll wash his poor little feet for him when he's finished his dinner. You get on with yours likewise, my love.'

Meg was silent for some minutes, busily feasting on the hot tripe, and basking in the agreeable warmth of the cosy room. It was a wonderfully bright little spot for that quarter of London, but the brightness was all inside. Outside, at about three feet from the window, rose a wall so high as to shut out every glimpse of the sky; but within everything was so clean and shining, even to the quarried floor, that it was difficult to believe in the mud and dirt of the streets without. Mrs. Blossom herself looked

fresh and comely, like a countrywoman; but there was a sad expression on her round face, plain enough to be seen when she was not talking.

'My dear,' she said when Meg laid down her knife and fork, and assured her earnestly that she could eat no more, 'what may you be thinking of doing?'

'I don't hardly know,' she answered. 'I expect father home every day. If I could only get enough for the children, and a crust or two for me, we could get along. But we can't do nothink more, I know.'

'You'll be forced to go into the house,' said Mrs. Blossom.

'Oh, no, no, no!' cried little Meg, drawing Robin to her, and with a great effort lifting him on to her lap, where he almost eclipsed her. 'I couldn't ever do that. We'll get along somehow till father comes home.'

'Where is it you live?' inquired Mrs. Blossom.

'Oh, it's not a nice place at all,' said Meg, who dreaded having any visitor. 'It's along Rosemary Lane, and down a street, and then down another smaller street, and up a court. That's where it is.'

Mrs. Blossom sat meditating a few minutes, with the baby on her lap, stretching itself lazily and contentedly before the fire; while Meg, from behind Robin, watched her new friend's face anxiously.

'Well,' she said, 'you come here again to-morrow, and I'll ask Mr. George what's to be done. That was Mr. George as was here, and he's my lodger. He took you in, and maybe he'll agree to do something.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Meg gratefully. 'Please, have you any little children of your own?'

The tears ran faster now down Mrs. Blossom's cheeks, and she was obliged to wipe them away before she could answer.

'I'd a little girl like you,' she said, 'ten years ago. Such a pretty little girl, so rosy, and bright, and merry, as all the folks round took notice of. She was like the apple of my eye, she was.'

'What was she called?' asked Meg, with an eager interest.

'Why, the neighbours called her Posy because her name was Blossom,' said Mrs. Blossom, smiling amidst her tears. 'We lived out in the

country, and I'd a little shop, and a garden, and kept fowls, and pigs, and eggs; fresh eggs, such as the like are never seen in this part o' London. Posy they called her, and a real posy she was.'

Mrs. Blossom paused, and looked sadly down upon the happy baby, shaking her head as if she was sorely grieved at heart.

'And Posy died?' said Meg softly.

'No, no!' cried Mrs. Blossom. 'It 'ud been a hundred times better if she'd died. She grew up bad. I hope you'll never live to grow up bad, little girl. And she ran away from home; and I lost her, her own mother that had nursed her when she was a little baby like this. I'd ha' been thankful to ha' seen her lying dead afore my eyes in her coffin.'

'That's bad,' said little Meg, in a tone of trouble and tender pity.

'It's nigh upon three years ago,' continued Mrs. Blossom, looking down still upon the baby, as if she were telling her; 'and I gave up my shop to my son's wife, and come here, thinking maybe she'd step in some day or other to buy a loaf of bread or something, because I knew she'd come up to London. But she's never so much as passed by the window—leastways when I've

been watching, and I'm always watching. I can't do my duty by Mr. George for staring out o' the window.'

'Watching for Posy?' said little Meg.

'Ay, watching for Posy,' repeated Mrs. Blossom, 'and she never goes by.'

'Have you asked God to let her go by?' asked Meg.

'Ay, my dear,' said Mrs. Blossom. 'I ask Him every blessed day o' my life.'

'Then she's sure to come some day,' said Meg joyfully. 'There's no mistake about that, because Jesus says it in the Bible, and He knows all about God. You've asked Him, and He'll do it. It's like father coming. I don't know whether he'll come to-day or to-morrow, or when it'll be; but he will come.'

'God bless and love you!' cried Mrs. Blossom, suddenly putting baby down in Meg's lap, and clasping all three of them in her arms. 'I'll believe it, I will. He's sent you to give me more heart. God love you all!'

It was some while before Mrs. Blossom regained her composure; but when she did, and it was time for Meg and the children to go home before it was quite dark, she bound up Robin's

foot in some rags, and gave Meg a loaf to carry home with her, bidding her be sure to come again the next day. Meg looked back to the shop many times before turning the corner of the street, and saw Mrs. Blossom's round face, with its white cap border, still leaning over the door, looking after them, and nodding pleasantly each time she caught Meg's backward glance. At the corner they all three turned round, Meg holding up baby as high as her arms could reach, and after this last farewell they lost sight of their new friend.

Chapter X

LITTLE MEG AS CHARWOMAN

MEG and her children did not fail to make their appearance the next morning at Mrs. Blossom's shop, where she welcomed them heartily, and made them comfortable again by the kitchen fire. When they were well warmed, and had finished some bread, and some coffee which had been kept hot for them, Mrs. Blossom put on a serious business air.

'Mr. George and me have talked you over,' she said, 'and he's agreed to something. I can't do my duty by him as I should wish, you know why; and I want a little maid to help me.'

'Oh, if you please,' faltered little Meg, 'I couldn't leave our attic. I promised mother I wouldn't go away till father comes home. Don't be angry, please.'

'I'm not angry, child,' continued Mrs. Blossom.

'I only want a little maid to come mornings, and go away nights, like a charwoman.'

'Mother used to go charing sometimes,' remarked Meg.

'I'm not a rich woman,' resumed Mrs. Blossom, 'and Mr. George has his old father to keep, as lives down in my own village, and I know him well; so we can't give great wages. I'd give you a half-quartern loaf a day, and Mr. George three-pence for the present, while it's winter. Would that suit your views?'

'What could I do with Robbie and baby?' asked Meg, with an air of perplexed thought.

'Couldn't you leave 'em with a neighbour?' suggested Mrs. Blossom.

Meg pondered deeply for a while. Kitty had told her the night before that she had got some sailors' shirts to sew, and would stay at home to make them. She could trust Robin and the baby with Kitty, and instead of lighting a fire in her own attic she could give her the coals, and so save her fuel, as part payment for taking charge of the children. Yet Meg felt a little sad at the idea of leaving them for so long a time, and seeing so little of them each day, and she knew they would miss her sorely. But nothing else

could be done, and she accepted Mrs. Blossom's offer thankfully.

'You needn't be here afore nine o' the morning,' said Mrs. Blossom; 'it's too early for Posy to be passing by; and you can go away again as soon as it's dark in the evening. You mustn't get any breakfast, you know, because that's in our bargain; and I'd never grudge you a meal's meat for the children either, bless 'em! They shall come and have a good tea with us sometimes, they shall—especially on Sundays, when Mr. George is at home; and if you'd only got your clothes out o' pawn, we'd all go to church together. But we'll see, we'll see.'

Meg entered upon her new duties the next morning, after committing the children, with many lingering kisses and last good-byes, into Kitty's charge, who promised faithfully to be as kind to them as Meg herself. If it had not been for her anxiety with regard to them, she would have enjoyed nothing better than being Mrs. Blossom's little maid. The good woman was so kindly and motherly that she won Meg's whole heart; and to see her sit by the shop window, knitting a very large long stocking for Mr.

George, but with her eyes scanning every woman's face that went by, made her feel full of an intense and childish interest. She began herself to watch for Posy, as her mother described her; and whenever the form of a grown-up girl darkened the doorway, she held her breath to listen if Mrs. Blossom called her by that pet name. Mr. George also was very good to Meg in his bluff way, and bought her a pair of nearly new shoes with his first week's wages, over and above the threepence a day which he paid her. With Mrs. Blossom she held many a conversation about the lost girl, who had grown up wicked, and was therefore worse than dead; and before long Mr. George observed that Meg had done her a world of good.

Christmas Day was a great treat to Meg; for though Mr. George went down into the country to see his old father, Mrs. Blossom invited her and the children to come to dinner, and to stay with her till it was the little ones' bedtime. When they sat round the fire in the afternoon she told them wonderful stories about the country—of its fields, and gardens, and lanes.

'I like gardens,' said Robin, 'but I don't like lanes.'

'Why don't you like lanes?' asked Mrs. Blossom.

'I know lots of lanes,' he answered. 'There's Rosemary Lane, and it's not nice, nor none of 'em. They ain't nice like Temple Gardens.'

'Rosemary Lane!' repeated Mrs. Blossom. 'Why, the lanes in the country are nothing like the lanes in London. They're beautiful roads, with tall trees growing all along 'em, and meeting one another overhead; and there are roses and honeysuckles all about the hedges, and birds singing, and the sun shining. Only you don't know anything about roses, and honeysuckles, and birds.'

'Are there any angels there?' asked Robin, fastening his glistening eyes upon her intently.

'Well, no,' said Mrs. Blossom, 'not as I know of.'

'Is the devil in the country?' pursued Robin.

'Yes,' answered Mrs. Blossom, 'I suppose he's there pretty much the same as here. Folks can be wicked anywhere, or else my Posy wouldn't have grown up bad.'

Robin asked no more questions, and Mrs. Blossom was glad to talk of something else. It was a very happy day altogether, but it came

too quickly to an end. Meg wrapped up her children well before turning out into the cold streets, and Mrs. Blossom gave them a farewell kiss each, with two to Meg because she was such a comfort to her.

When they reached their own attic they heard Kitty call to them, and Meg opened her door. She was sitting without any fire, stitching away as for her life at a coarse striped shirt, lighted only by a small farthing candle; but she laid down her task for a minute, and raised her thin pale face, and her eyes half blinded with tears and hard work.

‘Where have you been all day, little Meg?’ she asked.

‘Me and the children have been at Mrs. Blossom’s,’ answered Meg, ‘because it’s Christmas Day: and I wish you’d been there as well, Kitty. We’d such a good dinner and tea. She gave me a bit of cake to bring home, and you shall have some of it.’

‘No, no,’ said Kitty, ‘it ’ud choke me.’

‘Oh, it couldn’t; it’s as nice as nice can be,’ said Meg. ‘You must just have a taste of it.’

‘Did you go talking about that Posy again?’ asked Kitty, bending diligently over her work.

'We always talk about her,' answered Meg, 'every day. Mrs. Blossom's watching for her to go by all day long, you know.'

'She'll never go by,' said Kitty shortly.

'Oh, she's certain sure to go by some day,' cried Meg. 'Mrs. Blossom asks God to let her go by, every day of her life; and He's positive to do it.'

'If she's grown up so wicked,' argued Kitty, 'she didn't ought to go back to her mother, and her such a good woman. God won't send her back to her mother, you'll see.'

'But if God sent her back, her mother 'ud never think of her being wicked, she loves her so,' said little Meg. 'If Robbie were ever so naughty, I'd keep on loving him till he was good again.'

'Well, Posy 'll never go home no more,' said Kitty; and hot tears fell fast upon her work.

'She will, she will,' cried Meg. 'I expect her every day, like father. Perhaps they'll both come home to-morrow. I wish you'd ask God to let Posy and father come home to-morrow.'

'I'm too bad to ask God for anything,' sobbed Kitty.

'Well, I don't know,' said Meg sorrowfully.

'You're not bad to me or the children. But I must go to bed now. Let us kiss you afore we go. Mrs. Blossom kissed me twice, and said I was a comfort to her.'

Kitty threw down her work, and clasped Meg strongly in her arms, pressing down Meg's head upon her breast, and crying, 'Oh, my dear little Meg! My good little Meg!' Then she put them all three gently out of her room, and bade them good-night and God bless them, in a husky and tremulous voice.

Chapter XI

LITTLE MEG'S BABY

THE new year came, but Meg's father had not arrived. Kitty was having a mad outburst, as if she had so long controlled herself that now it was necessary to break out into extra wickedness. She came home late every night, very drunk, and shouting loud snatches of songs, which wakened up the inmates of the lower stories, and drew upon her a storm of oaths. But she continued always good-natured and kind to Meg, and insisted upon having the daily charge of Robin and the baby, though Meg left them in her care with a very troubled and anxious spirit. Things were looking very dark to the poor little woman ; but she kept up as brave a heart as she could, waiting from day to day for that long-deferred coming of her father, in which she believed so firmly.

It was a little later than usual one evening, for

the days were creeping out since the new year, when Meg climbed wearily upstairs to Kitty's attic, in search of her children, but found that they were not there. Mr. Grigg told her that he had seen Kitty take them out with her in the afternoon; and even while he was speaking, Meg saw her staggering and rolling into the court, with the baby fast asleep in her drunken arms. Meg took it from her without a word, and led Robin away upstairs. Robin's face was flushed, and his hand was very hot; but the baby lay in her arms heavily, without any movement or sign of life, except that the breath came through her parted lips, and her eyelids stirred a little. Meg locked the door of her attic, and laid her baby on the bed, while she lighted the fire and got their tea ready. Robin looked strange, but he chattered away without ceasing, while he watched her set the things in readiness. But the baby would not awake. It lay quite still on Meg's lap, and she poured a little warm tea into its mouth, but it did not swallow it, only slept there with heavy eyelids, and moving neither finger nor foot, in a strange, profound slumber. It was smaller and thinner than when mother died, thought Meg; and she lifted up the lifeless little hand to her lips, half



LITTLE MEG SAT UP ALL NIGHT, WITH THE BABY LYING ON HER LAP.

hoping that its eyes would unclose a little more, and that sweet, loving smile, with which it always welcomed her return, would brighten its languid face. But baby was too soundly asleep to smile.

Little Meg sat up all night, with the baby lying on her lap, moaning a little now and then as its slumbers grew more broken, but never lifting up its eyelids to look into her face and know it. When the morning dawned it was still the same. Could the baby be ill? asked Meg of herself. It did not seem to be in any pain; yet she carried it to the door, and called softly for Kitty to come and look at it; but there was no reply, only from below came up harsh sounds of children screaming and angry women quarrelling. Oaths and threats and shrieks were all the answer Meg's feeble cry received. She sat down again on her mother's low chair before the fire, and made the baby comfortable on her lap; while Robin stood at her knee, looking down pitifully at the tiny, haggard, sleeping face, which Meg's little hand could almost cover. What was she to do? There was no one in Angel Court whom she dare call to her help. Baby might even die, like the greater number of the babies born in that place, whose

brief lives ended quickly, as if existence was too terrible a thing in the midst of such din and squalor. At the thought that perhaps baby was going to die, two or three tears of extreme anguish rolled down little Meg's cheeks, and fell upon baby's face; but she could not cry aloud, or weep many tears. She felt herself falling into a stupor of grief and despair, when Robin laid his hand upon her arm.

'Why don't you ask God to waken baby?' he asked.

'I don't know whether it 'ud be a good thing,' she answered. 'Mother said she'd ask Him over and over again to let her take baby along with her, and that 'ud be better than staying here. I wish we could all go to heaven; only I don't know whatever father 'ud do if he come home and found us all dead.'

'Maybe God 'll take me and baby,' said Robbie thoughtfully, 'and leave you to watch for father.'

'I only wish baby had called me Meg once afore she went,' cried little Meg.

The baby stirred a little upon her knees, and stretched out its feeble limbs, opening its blue eyes wide and looking up into her face with its

sweet smile of welcome. Then the eyelids closed again slowly, and the small features put on a look of heavenly calm and rest. Meg and Robin gazed at the change wonderingly without speaking; but when after a few minutes Meg laid her hand gently upon the smooth little forehead, the same chill struck to her heart as when she had touched her mother's dead face.

It did not seem possible to little Meg that baby could really be dead. She chafed its puny limbs, as she had seen her mother do, and walked up and down the room singing to it, now loudly, now softly; but no change came upon it, no warmth returned to its death-cold frame, no life to its calm face. She laid it down at length upon the bed, and crossed its thin wee arms upon its breast, and then stretching herself beside it, with her face hidden from the light, little Meg gave herself up to a passion of sorrow.

'If I'd only asked God, for Christ's sake,' she cried to herself, 'maybe He'd have let baby wake, though I don't know whether it's a good thing. But now she's gone to mother, and father 'll come home, and he'll find nobody but me and Robbie, and the money safe. Oh! I wish I'd asked God.'

'Meg,' said Robin, after she had worn herself out with sobs and tears, and was lying silently beside baby, 'I'm very poorly. I think I'll go to live with the angels, where mother and baby are gone.'

Meg started up, and gazed anxiously at Robin. His bright eyes were dimmed, and his face was flushed and heavy; he was stretched on the floor near the fire, in a listless attitude, and did not care to move, when she knelt down beside him, and put her arm under his head. It ached, he said; and it felt burning hot to her touch. Meg's heart stood still for a moment, and then she dropped her tear-stained, sorrowful face upon her hands.

'Pray God,' she cried, 'don't take Robbie away as well as baby. Maybe it wasn't a good thing for baby to stay, now mother's dead, though I've done everythink I could, and there's been nobody to take care of us but You. But, pray God, do let Robbie stay with me till father comes home; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'

Meg rose from her knees, and lifted up Robin as gently as she could, soothing him, and talking fondly to him as she took off his clothes. When

that was finished she laid him on the same bed where the baby was sleeping its last long sleep, with its tiny face still wearing an unspeakable calm ; for Robin's little mattress had been sold some time ago. The day was just at an end, that sorrowful day, and a lingering light from the west entered through the attic window, and lit up the white, peaceful features with the flushed and drowsy face of Robin beside it. Meg felt as if her heart would surely break as she stooped over them, and kissed them both, her lips growing cold as they touched baby's smiling mouth. Then drawing her old shawl over her head, she locked the attic door securely behind her, and ran as fast as her feet could carry her to Mrs. Blossom's house.

'Robbie's very ill,' gasped Meg breathlessly, as she burst into the shop, the shutters of which were already put up, though it was still early in the night, 'and I want a doctor for him. Where shall I find a doctor?'

Mrs. Blossom had her bonnet and cloak on, and looked very pale and flurried. When she answered Meg she kept her hand pressed against her heart.

'I'm just a-going to one,' she said, 'the best at

this end o' London, Dr. Christie, and you'd better come along with me. He knows me well. Meg, I've seen somebody go by to-day as was like Posy, only pale and thin; but when I ran out, she was gone like a shadow. I'm a-going to tell Dr. Christie; he knows all about Posy and me.'

But Meg scarcely heard what Mrs. Blossom said. All her thoughts and interest centred in Robin, and she felt impatient of the slow progress of her companion. They seemed to her to be going a long, long way, until they came to better streets and larger houses; and by-and-by they saw a carriage standing before a door, and a gentleman came out and got into it hurriedly.

'Why, bless me!' exclaimed Mrs. Blossom, 'there's Dr. Christie. Stop him, Meg, stop him!'

Meg needed no urging, but rushed blindly across the street. There was all at once a strange confusion about her, a trampling of horses' feet, and a rattling of wheels, with a sudden terror and pain in herself; and then she knew no more. All was as nothing to her—baby and Robin alone in the attic, and Mrs. Blossom and Posy—all

were gone out of her mind and memory. She had thrown herself before the horses' heads, and they had trampled her down under their feet.

When little Meg came to herself again it was broad daylight, and she was lying in a room so bright and cheerful that she could neither imagine where she was nor how she came there. There was a good fire crackling noisily in the low grate, with a brass guard before it, and over the chimney-piece was a pretty picture of angels flying upwards with a child in their arms. All round the walls there hung other pictures of birds and flowers, coloured gaily, and glittering in gilded frames. Another little bed like the one she lay in stood in the opposite corner, but there was nobody in it, and the place was very quiet. She lay quite still, with a dreamy thought that she was somehow in heaven, until she heard a pleasant voice speaking in the next room, the door of which was open, so that the words came readily to her ears.

'I only wish we knew where the poor little thing comes from,' said the voice.

'I'm vexed I don't,' answered Mrs. Blossom. 'I've asked her more than once, and she's always

said it's down a street off Rosemary Lane, and along another street, and up a court. But there's a girl called Kitty living in the back attic, as takes care of the children when Meg's away. She's sure to be taking care o' them now.'

In an instant memory came back to little Meg. She recollected bending over Robin and the baby to kiss them before she came away, and locking the door safely upon them. Oh! what had become of Robbie in the night? She raised herself up in bed, and uttered a very bitter cry, which brought to her quickly Mrs. Blossom and a strange lady.

'I want Robbie,' she cried. 'I must get up and go to him directly. It's my Robbie that's ill, and baby's dead. I'm not ill, but Robbie's ill, if he isn't dead, like baby, afore now. Please to let me get up.'

'Tell me all about it,' said Mrs. Blossom, sitting down on the bed and taking Meg into her arms. 'We're in Dr. Christie's house, and he'll go and see Robbie in a minute, he says.'

'Baby died yesterday morning,' answered Meg, with tearless eyes, for her trouble was too great for tears; 'and then Robbie was took ill, and I put

them both in bed, and kissed them, and locked the door, and came away for a doctor, and there's been nobody to take care of 'em all night, only God.'

Meg's eyes burned no longer, but filled with tears as she thought of God, and she laid her head upon Mrs. Blossom's shoulder, and wept aloud.

'God has taken care of them,' said Mrs. Christie, but she could say no more.

'Where is it you live, deary?' asked Mrs. Blossom.

'It's at Angel Court,' answered Meg. 'But there mustn't nobody go without me. Please to let me get up. I'm not ill.'

'You're very much bruised and hurt, my poor child,' said Mrs. Christie.

'I must go,' pleaded Meg urgently, 'I must get up. I promised mother I'd never let anybody go into our room, and they mustn't go without me. They're my children, please. If your little children were ill, you'd go to 'em, wouldn't you? Let me get up this minute.'

It was impossible to withstand little Meg's earnestness. Mrs. Blossom dressed her tenderly, though Meg could not quite keep back the groan

which rose to her quivering lips when her bruised arm was moved. A cab was called, and then Mrs. Blossom and Meg, with Dr. Christie, got into it, and drove away quickly to Angel Court.

Chapter XII

THE END OF LITTLE MEG'S TROUBLE

IT was early in the evening after Meg had gone in search of a doctor, that Kitty came home, more sober than she had been for several nights, and very much ashamed of her last outbreak. She sat down on the top of the stairs, listening for little Meg to read aloud, but she heard only the sobs and moanings of Robin, who called incessantly for Meg, without getting any answer. Kitty waited for some time, hearkening for her voice, but after a while she knocked gently at the door. There was no reply, but after knocking again and again she heard Robin call out in a frightened tone.

‘What’s that?’ he cried.

‘It’s me, your own Kitty,’ she said. ‘Where’s little Meg?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Robin. ‘She’s gone away,

and there's nobody but me and baby ; and baby's asleep, and so cold.'

'What are you crying for, Robbie?' asked Kitty.

'I'm crying for everything,' said Robin.

'Don't you be frightened, Robbie,' she said soothingly ; 'Kitty 'll stay outside the door, and sing pretty songs to you, till Meg comes home.'

She waited a long time, till the clocks struck twelve, and still Meg did not come. From time to time Kitty spoke some reassuring words to Robin, or sang him some little songs she remembered from her own childhood ; but his cries grew more and more distressing, and at length Kitty resolved to break her promise, and unlock Meg's door once again to move the children into her own attic.

She lit a candle, and entered the dark room. The fire was gone out, and Robin sat up on the pillow, his face wet with tears and his black eyes large with terror. The baby, which lay beside him, seemed very still, with its wasted puny hands crossed upon its breast ; so quiet and still that Kitty looked more closely, and held the light nearer to its slumbering face. What could ail it? What had brought that awful smile upon

its tiny face? Kitty touched it fearfully with the tip of her finger; and then she stood dumb and motionless before the terrible little corpse.

She partly knew, and partly guessed, what had done this thing. She recollected, but vaguely enough, that one of her companions, who had grown weary of the little creature's pitiful cry, had promised to quiet it for her, and how speedily it had fallen off into a profound, unbroken slumber. And there it lay, in the same slumber perhaps. She touched it again; but no, the sleep it slept now was even deeper than that—a sleep so sound that its eyelids would never open again to this world's light, nor its sealed lips ever utter a word of this world's speech. Kitty could scarcely believe it; but she could not bear to stay in that mute, gentle, uncomplaining presence; and she lifted up Robin to carry him into her own room. Oh that God had but called her away when she was an innocent baby like that!

Robin's feverishness was almost gone; and now, wrapped in Kitty's gown and rocked to sleep on her lap, he lay contented and restful, while she sat thinking in the dark, for the candle soon burned itself out, until the solemn grey light of the morning dawned slowly in the east.

She had made up her mind now what she would do. There was only one more sin lying before her. She had grown up bad, and broken her mother's heart, and now she had brought this great overwhelming sorrow upon poor little Meg. There was but one end to a sinful life like hers, and the sooner it came the better. She would wait till Meg came home and give up Robin to her, for she would not hurry on to that last crime before Meg was there to take care of him. Then she saw herself stealing along the streets, down to an old pier she knew of, where boats had ceased to ply, and where no policeman would be near to hinder her, or anyone about to rescue her; and then she would fling herself, worthless and wretched as she was, into the rapid river, which had borne so many worthless wretches like her upon its strong current into the land of darkness and death, of which she did not dare to think. That was what she would do, saying nothing to anyone; and if she could ask anything of God, it would be that her mother might never find out what had become of her.

So Kitty sat with her dark thoughts long after Angel Court had awakened to its ordinary life, its groans, and curses, and sobs; until the sun

looked in cheerily upon her and Robin, as it did upon Meg in Mrs. Christie's nursery. She did not care to put him down, for he looked very pretty, and happy, and peaceful in his soft sleep, and whenever she moved he stirred a little, and pouted his lips as if to reproach her. Besides, it was the last time she would hold a child in her arms; and though they ached somewhat, they folded round him fondly. At last she heard a man's step upon the ladder mounting to the attics, and Meg's voice speaking faintly. Could it be that her father was come home at last? Oh! what would their eyes see when they opened that door? Kitty held her breath to listen for the first sound of anguish and amazement; but it was poor little Meg's voice which reached her before any other.

'Robbie! oh, Robbie!' she cried, in a tone of piercing terror; 'what has become of my little Robbie?'

'He's safe, he's here, Meg,' answered Kitty, starting to her feet, and rushing with him to Meg's attic.

It was no rough, weather-beaten seaman, who was just placing Meg on a chair, as if he had carried her upstairs; but some strange, well-clad

gentleman, and behind him stood an elderly woman, who turned sharply round as she heard Kitty's voice.

'Posy!' cried Mrs. Blossom.

No one but her own mother could have known again the bright, merry, rosy girl, whom the neighbours called Posy, in the thin, withered, pallid woman who stood motionless in the middle of the room. Even Meg forgot for a moment her fears for Robin. Dr. Christie had only time to catch him from her failing arms, before she fell down senseless upon the floor at her mother's feet.

'Let me do everything for her,' exclaimed Mrs. Blossom, pushing away Dr. Christie; 'she's my Posy, I tell you. You wouldn't know her again, but I know her. I'll do everything for her; she's my girl, my little one; she's the apple of my eye.'

But it was a very long time before Mrs. Blossom, with Dr. Christie's help, could bring Posy to life again; and then they lifted her into her poor bed, and Dr. Christie left her mother alone with her, and went back to Meg. Robin was ailing very little, he said: but the baby? Yes, the baby must have died even if little Meg

had fetched him at once. Nothing could have saved it, and it had suffered no pain, he added tenderly.

'I think I must take you two away from this place,' said Dr. Christie.

'Oh, no, no,' answered Meg earnestly; 'I must stay till father comes, and I expect him to-day or to-morrow. Please, sir, leave me and Robbie here till he comes.'

'Then you must have somebody to take care of you,' said Dr. Christie.

'No, please, sir,' answered Meg, in a low and cautious voice, 'mother gave me a secret to keep that I can't tell to nobody, and I promised her I'd never let nobody come into my room till father comes home. I couldn't help you, and Mrs. Blossom, and Kitty coming in this time; but nobody mustn't come in again.'

'My little girl,' said Dr. Christie kindly, 'I dare say your mother never thought of her secret becoming a great trouble to you. Could you not tell it to me?'

'No,' replied Meg, 'it's a very great secret; and please, when baby's buried like mother, me and Robbie must go on living here alone till father comes.'

'Poor child!' said Dr. Christie, rubbing his eyes; 'did you know baby was quite dead?'

'Yes,' she answered, 'but I didn't ask God to let baby live, because mother said she'd like to take her with her. But I did ask Him to make Robin well, and bring back Posy; and now there's nothing for Him to do but let father come home. I knew it was all true; it's in the Bible, and if I'm not one of God's own children, it says, "Them that ask Him." So I asked Him.'

Meg's voice sank, and her head dropped; for now that she was at home again, and Robin was found to be all right, her spirit failed her. Dr. Christie went out upon the landing, and held a consultation with Mrs. Blossom, in which they agreed that for the present, until Meg was well enough to take care of herself, she should be nursed in Kitty's attic, with her own door kept locked, and the key left in her possession. So Dr. Christie carried Meg into the back attic, and laid her upon Kitty's mattress. Kitty was cowering down on the hearth, with her face buried on her knees, and did not look up once through all the noise of Meg's removal; though when her mother told her what they were doing

she made a gesture of assent to it. Dr. Christie went away; and Mrs. Blossom, who wanted to buy many things which were sorely needed in the poor attic, put her arm fondly round Kitty's neck.

'Posy,' she said, 'you wouldn't think to go and leave little Meg alone if I went out to buy some things, and took Robin with me?'

'No, I'll stop,' said Kitty, but without lifting her head. When they were alone together, Meg raised herself as well as she could on the arm that was not hurt, and looked wistfully at Kitty's bowed-down head and crouching form.

'Are you really Posy?' she asked.

'I used to be Posy,' answered Kitty, in a mournful voice.

'Didn't I tell you God would let your mother find you?' said Meg; 'it's all come true, every bit of it.'

'But God hasn't let baby live,' muttered Kitty.

'I never asked Him for that,' she said falteringly; 'I didn't know as baby was near going to die, and maybe it's a better thing for her to go to mother and God. Angel Court ain't a nice place to live in, and she might have growed up bad.'

But if people do grow up bad,' added Meg, in a very tender tone, 'God can make 'em good again if they'd only ask Him.'

As little Meg spoke, and during the silence which followed, strange memories began to stir in the poor girl's heart, recalled there by some mysterious and Divine power. Words and scenes, forgotten since childhood, came back with wonderful freshness and force. She thought of a poor, guilty, outcast woman, reviled and despised by all save One, who had compassion even for her, forgave all her sins, stilled the clamour of her accusers, and said, 'Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace.' She remembered the time when the records of His infinite love had been repeated by her innocent young lips and pondered in her maiden heart. Like some echo from the distant past she seemed to hear the words, 'By Thine agony and bloody sweat ; by Thy cross and passion ; by Thy precious death and burial, good Lord deliver us. O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.'

'Oh ! Meg ! Meg !' cried Kitty, almost crawling to the corner where she lay, and falling down beside her on the floor, with her poor pale face

still hidden from sight, 'ask God for me to be made good again.'

Little Meg stretched out her unbruised arm, and laid her hand upon Kitty's bended head.

'You must ask Him for yourself,' she said, after thinking for a minute or two: 'I don't know as it 'ud do for me to ask God, if you didn't as well.'

'What shall I say, Meg?' asked Kitty.

'If I was you,' said Meg, 'and had grow'd up wicked, and run away from mother, I'd say, "Pray God, make me a good girl again, and let me be a comfort to mother till she dies; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."''

There was a dead silence in the back attic, except for the near noise and distant din which came from the court below, and the great labyrinth of streets around. Little Meg's eyes shone lovingly and pityingly upon Kitty, who looked up for an instant, and caught their light. Then she dropped her head down upon the mattress, and gave way to a storm of tears and sobs.

'O God,' she cried, 'do have mercy upon me, and make me good again, if it's possible. Help

me to be a good girl to mother. God forgive me, for Jesus Christ's sake !'

She sobbed out this prayer over and over again, until her voice fell into a low whisper which even Meg could not hear ; and so she lay upon the floor beside the mattress until her mother came back. Mrs. Blossom's face was pale, but radiant with gladness, and Posy looked at it for the first time fully. Then she gave a great cry of mingled joy and sorrow, and running to her threw her arms round her neck, and laid her face upon her shoulder.

'God 'll hear me and have mercy upon me,' she cried. 'I'm going to be your Posy again, mother !'

Chapter XIII

LITTLE MEG'S FATHER

THE baby was buried the next morning, after Meg had looked upon it for the last time lying very peacefully and smilingly in its little coffin, and had shed some tears that were full of sorrow yet had no bitterness upon its dead face. Mrs. Blossom took Robin to follow it to the grave, leaving Kitty in charge of little Meg. The front attic door was locked, and the key was under Meg's pillow, not to be used again until she was well enough to turn it herself in the lock. The bag containing the small key of the box, with the unopened letter which had come for her mother, hung always round her neck, and her hand often clasped it tightly as she slept.

Meg was lying very still, with her face turned from the light, following in her thoughts the little coffin that was being carried in turns by Mrs.

Blossom and another woman whom she knew, through the noisy streets, when Kitty heard the tread of a man's foot coming up the ladder. It could be no one else but Dr. Christie, she thought; but why then did he stop at the front attic door, and rattle the latch in trying to open it? Kitty looked out and saw a seafaring man, in worn and shabby sailor's clothing, as if he had just come off a long voyage. His face was brown and weather-beaten; and his eyes, black and bright, were set deep in his head, and looked as if they were used to take long, keen surveys over the glittering sea. He turned sharply round as Kitty opened her door.

'Young woman,' he said, 'do you know aught of my wife, Peggy Fleming, and her children, who used to live here? Peggy wrote me word she'd moved into the front attic.'

'It's father,' called little Meg from her mattress on the floor; 'I'm here, father! Robin and me's left; but mother's dead, and baby. Oh! father, father! You've come home at last!'

Meg's father brushed past Kitty into the room where Meg sat up in bed, her face quivering, and her poor bruised arms stretched out to welcome

him. He sat down on the mattress and took her in his own strong arms, while for a minute or two Meg lay still in them, almost like one dead.

'Oh!' she said at last, with a sigh as if her heart had well-nigh broken, 'I've took care of Robin and the money, and they're safe. Only baby's dead. But don't you mind much, father; it wasn't a nice place for baby to grow up in.'

'Tell me all about it,' said Robert Fleming, looking at Kitty, but still holding his little daughter in his arms; and Kitty told him all she knew of her lonely life and troubles up in the solitary attic, which no one had been allowed to enter; and from time to time Meg's father groaned aloud, and kissed Meg's pale and wrinkled forehead fondly. But he asked how it was she never let any of the neighbours, Kitty herself, for instance, stay with her, and help her sometimes.

'I promised mother,' whispered Meg in his ear, 'never to let nobody come in, for fear they'd find out the box under the bed, and get into it somehow. We was afraid for the money, you know, but it's all safe for your mate, father; and

here's the key, and a letter as came for mother after she was dead.'

'But this letter's from me to Peggy,' said her father, turning it over and over; 'leastways it was wrote by the chaplain at the hospital, to tell her what she must do. The money in the box was mine, Meg, no mate's; and I sent her word to take some of it for herself and the children.'

'Mother thought it belonged to a mate of yours,' said Meg, 'and we was the more afeared of it being stole.'

'It's my fault,' replied Robert Fleming. 'I told that to mother for fear she'd waste it if she knew it were mine. But if I'd only known——'

He could not finish his sentence, but stroked Meg's hair with his large hand, and she felt some hot tears fall from his eyes upon her forehead.

'Don't cry, father,' she said, lifting her small feeble hand to his face. 'God took care of us, and baby too, though she's dead. There's nothink now that He hasn't done. He's done everythink I asked Him.'

'Did you ask Him to make me a good father?' said Fleming.

'Why, you're always good to us, father,' answered Meg, in a tone of loving surprise. 'You never beat us much when you get drunk. But Robin and me always say, "Pray God, bless father." I don't quite know what bless means, but it's something good.'

'Ah!' said Fleming, with a deep sigh, 'He has blessed me. When I was ill He showed me what a poor sinner I was, and how Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, "of whom I am chief." Sure I can say that if anybody can. But it says in the Bible, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." Yes, little Meg, He died to save me. I felt it. I believed it. I came to see that I'd nobody to fly to but Jesus if I wanted to be aught else but a poor, wicked, lost rascal, as got drunk, and was no better than a brute. And so I turned it over and over in my mind, lying abed; and now, please God, I'm a bit more like being a Christian than I was. I reckon that's what bless means, little Meg.'

As he spoke the door opened, and Mrs. Blossom came in with Robin. It was twelve months since Robin had seen his father, and now he was shy, and hung back a little behind Mrs. Blossom; but Meg called to him in a joyful voice.

'Come here, little Robbie,' she said ; 'it's father, as we've watched for so long.—He's a little bit afeared at first, father, but you'll love him ever so when he knows you.'

It was not long before Robin knew his father sufficiently to accept of a seat on his knee, when Meg was put back into bed at Mrs. Blossom's entreaties. Fleming nursed his boy in silence for some time, while now and then a tear glistened in his deep eyes as he thought over the history of little Meg's sorrows.

'I'm thinking,' said Mrs. Blossom cheerfully, 'as this isn't the sort o' place for a widow man and his children to stop in. I'm just frightened to death o' going up and down the court. I suppose you're not thinking o' settling here, Mr. Fleming?'

'No, no,' said Fleming, shaking his head : 'a decent man couldn't stop here, let alone a Christian.'

'Well, then, come home to us till you can turn yourself round,' continued Mrs. Blossom heartily ; 'me and Mr. George have talked it over, and he says, "When little Meg's father do come, let 'em all come here : Posy, and the little 'uns, and all. You'll have Posy and the little 'uns in your room,

and I'll have him in mine. We'll give him some sort o' a shakedown, and sailors don't use to lie soft." So if you've no objections to raise, it's settled; and if you have, please to raise 'em at once.'

Robert Fleming had no objections to raise, but he accepted the cordial invitation thankfully, for he was in haste to get out of the miserable life of Angel Court. He brought the hidden box into the back attic, and opened it before little Meg, taking out of it the packet of forty pounds, and a number of pawn-tickets, which he looked at very sorrowfully. After securing these he locked up the attic again, and carrying Meg in his arms, he led the way down the stairs, and through the court, followed closely by Mrs. Blossom, Posy, and Robin. The sound of brawling and quarrelling was loud as usual, and the children crawling about the pavement were dirty and squalid as ever; they gathered about Meg and her father, forming themselves into a dirty and ragged procession to accompany them down to the street. Little Meg looked up to the high window of the attic, where she had watched so often and so long for her father's coming; and then she looked round, with eyes full of pity, upon the wretched

group about her ; and closing her eyelids, her lips moving a little, but without any words which even her father could hear, she said in her heart, 'Pray God, bless everybody, and make them good.'

Chapter XIV

LITTLE MEG'S FAREWELL

ABOUT a month after Robert Fleming's return Dr. Christie paid a visit to Mrs. Blossom's little house. He had been there before, but this was a special visit; and it was evident some important plan had to be decided upon. Dr. Christie came to hear what Mrs. Blossom had to say about it.

'Well, sir,' said Mrs. Blossom, 'a woman of my years, as always lived in one village all her life till I came to London, it do seem a great move to go across the sea. But as you all think as it 'ud be a good thing for Posy, and as Mr. Fleming do wish little Meg and Robin to go along with us, which are like my own children, and as he's to be in the same ship, I'm not the woman to say No. I'm a good hand at washing and ironing, and sewing, and keeping a little shop, or anything else as turns up; and there's ten

years' good work in me yet; by which time little Meg 'll be a stout, grown-up young woman; to say nothing of Posy, who's old enough to get her own living now. I can't say as I like the sea, quite the contrary; but I can put up with it; and Mr. Fleming 'll be there to see as the ship goes all right, and doesn't lose hisself. So I'll be ready by the time the ship's ready.'

They were all ready in time as Mrs. Blossom had promised, for there were not many preparations to be made. Little Meg's red frock was taken out of pawn, with all the other things, and Mrs. Blossom went down to her native village to visit it for the last time; but Posy shrank from being seen there by the neighbours again. She, and Meg, and Robin went once more for a farewell look at Temple Gardens. It was the first time she had been in the streets since she had gone back to her mother, and she seemed ashamed and alarmed at every eye that met hers. When they stood looking at the river, with its swift, cruel current, Posy shivered and trembled until she was obliged to turn away and sit down on a bench. She was glad, she said, to get home again, and she would go out no more till the day came when Mr. George

drove them all down to the docks, with the few boxes which contained their worldly goods.

Dr. Christie and his wife were down at the ship to see them off, and they kissed Meg tenderly as they bade her farewell. When the last minute was nearly come, Mr. George took little Meg's small hand in his large one, and laid the other upon her head.

'Little woman, tell us that verse again,' he said, 'that verse as you've always gone and believed in, and acted on.'

'That as mother and me heard preached from the streets?' asked Meg.

Mr. George nodded silently.

'It's quite true,' said little Meg, in a tone of perfect confidence, 'because it's in the Bible, and Jesus said it. Besides, God did everythink I asked Him. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"'

THE END

ALONE IN LONDON

ALONE IN LONDON



Chapter I

NOT ALONE

IT had been a close and sultry day—one of the hottest of the dog-days—even out in the open country, where the dusky green leaves had never stirred upon their stems since the sunrise, and where the birds had found themselves too languid for any songs beyond a faint chirp now and then. All day long the sun had shone down steadily upon the streets of London, with a fierce glare and glowing heat, until the bare-footed children had felt the dusty pavement burn under their tread almost as painfully as the icy pavement had frozen their naked feet in the winter. In the parks, and in every open space, especially about the cool splash of the fountains at Charing Cross, the people, who had escaped

from the crowded and unventilated back streets, basked in the sunshine, or sought every corner where a shadow could be found. But in the alleys and slums the air was heavy with heat and dust, and thick vapours floated up and down, charged with sickening smells from the refuse of fish and vegetables decaying in the gutters. Overhead the small, straight strip of sky was almost white, and the light, as it fell, seemed to quiver with the burden of its own burning heat.

Out of one of the smaller thoroughfares lying between Holborn and the Strand, there opens a narrow alley, not more than six or seven feet across, with high buildings on each side. For the most part the ground floors consist of small shops; for the alley is not a blind one, but leads from the thoroughfare to another street, and forms, indeed, a short cut to it, pretty often used. These shops are not of any size or importance—a greengrocer's, with a somewhat scanty choice of vegetables and fruit, a broker's, displaying queer odds and ends of household goods, two or three others, and at the end farthest from the chief thoroughfare, but nearest to the quiet and respectable street beyond, a very modest-looking

little shop window, containing a few newspapers, some rather yellow packets of stationery, and two or three books of ballads. Above the door was painted, in very small, dingy letters, the words, 'James Oliver, Newsagent.'

The shop was even smaller, in proportion, than its window. After two customers had entered—if such an event could ever come to pass—it would have been almost impossible to find room for a third. Along the end ran a little counter, with a falling flap by which admission could be gained to the living-room lying behind the shop. This evening the flap was down—a certain sign that James Oliver, the newsagent, had some guest within, for otherwise there would have been no occasion to lessen the scanty size of the counter. The room beyond was dark, very dark indeed for the time of day; for, though the evening was coming on, and the sun was hastening to go down at last, it had not yet ceased to shine brilliantly upon the great city. But inside James Oliver's house the gas was already lighted in a little steady flame, which never flickered in the still, hot air, though both door and window were wide open. For there was a window, though it was easy to

overlook it, opening into a passage four feet wide, which led darkly up into a still closer and hotter court, lying in the very core of the maze of streets. As the houses were four stories high, it is easy to understand that very little sunlight could penetrate to Oliver's room behind his shop, and that even at noonday it was twilight there. This room was of a better size altogether than a stranger might have supposed, having two or three queer little nooks and recesses borrowed from the space belonging to the adjoining house; for the buildings were old, and had probably been one large dwelling in former times. It was plainly the only apartment the owner had; and all its arrangements were those of a man living alone, for there was something almost desolate about the look of the scanty furniture, though it was clean and whole. There had been a fire, but it had died out, and the coals were black in the grate, while the kettle still sat upon the top bar with a melancholy expression of neglect about it.

James Oliver himself had placed his chair near to the open door, where he could keep his eye upon the shop—a needless precaution, as at this hour no customers ever turned into it. He was

an old man, and seemed very old and infirm by the dim light. He was thin and spare, with that peculiar spareness which results from habit of always eating less than one can. His teeth, which had never had too much to do, had gone some years ago, and his cheeks fell in rather deeply. A fine network of wrinkles puckered about the corners of his eyes and mouth. He stooped a good deal, and moved about with the slowness and deliberation of age. Yet his face was very pleasant—a cheery, gentle, placid face, lighted up with a smile now and then, but with sufficient rareness to make it the more welcome and the more noticed when it came.

Old Oliver had a visitor this hot evening, a neat, small, dapper woman, with a little likeness to himself, who had been putting his room to rights, and looking to the repairs needed by his linen. She was just replacing her needle, cotton, and buttons in an old-fashioned housewife, which she always carried in her pocket, and was then going to put on her black silk bonnet and coloured shawl, before bidding him good-bye.

‘Eh, Charlotte,’ said Oliver, after drawing a long and toilsome breath, ‘what would I give to

be a-top of the Wrekin, seeing the sun set this evening! Many and many's the summer afternoon we've spent there when we were young, and all of us alive. Dost remember how many a mile of country we could see all round us, and how fresh the air blew across the thousands of green fields? Why, I saw Snowdon once, more than sixty miles off, when my eyes were young and it was a clear sunset. I always think of the top of the Wrekin when I read of Moses going up Mount Pisgah and seeing all the land about him, north and south, east and west. Eh, lass! there's a change in us all now!

'Ah! it's like another world!' said the old woman, shaking her head slowly. 'All the folks I used to sew for at Aston, and Uppington, and Overlehill, they'd mostly be gone or dead by now. It wouldn't seem like the same place at all. And now there's none but you and me left, brother James. Well, well! it's lonesome, growing old.'

'Yes, lonesome, yet not exactly lonesome,' replied old Oliver, in a dreamy voice. 'I'm growing dark a little, and just a trifle deaf, and I don't feel quite myself like I used to do; but I've got something I didn't use to have. Some-

times of an evening, before I've lit the gas, I've a sort of a feeling as if I could almost see the Lord Jesus, and hear Him talking to me. He looks to me something like our eldest brother, him that died when we were little. Charlotte, thee remembers him? A white, quiet, patient face, with a smile like the sun shining behind clouds. Well, whether it's only a dream or no I cannot tell, but there's a face looks at me, or seems to look at me, out of the dusk; and I think to myself, maybe the Lord Jesus says, "Old Oliver's lonesome down there in the dark, and his eyes growing dim. I'll make Myself half-plain to him." Then He comes and sits here with me for a little while.'

'Oh, that's all fancy as comes with you living quite alone,' said Charlotte sharply.

'Perhaps so! perhaps so!' answered the old man, with a meek sigh; 'but I should be very lonesome without that.'

They did not speak again until Charlotte had given a final shake to the bed in the corner, upon which her bonnet and shawl had been lying. She put them on neatly and primly; and when she was ready to go she spoke again in a constrained and mysterious manner.

‘Heard nothing of Susan, I suppose?’ she said.

‘Not a word,’ answered old Oliver sadly. ‘It’s the only trouble I’ve got. That were the last passion I ever went into, and I was hot and hasty, I know.’

‘So you always used to be at times,’ said his sister.

‘Ah! but that passion was the worst of all,’ he went on, speaking slowly. ‘I told her if she married young Raleigh, she should never darken my doors again—never again. And she took me at my word, though she might have known it was nothing but father’s hot temper. Darken my doors! Why, the brightest sunshine I could have ’ud be to see her come smiling into my shop, like she used to do at home.’

‘Well, I think Susan ought to have humbled herself,’ said Charlotte. ‘It’s going on for six years now, and she’s had time enough to see her folly. Do you know where she is?’

‘I know nothing about her,’ he answered, shaking his head sorrowfully. ‘Young Raleigh was wild, very wild, and that was my objection to him; but I didn’t mean Susan to take me at my word. I shouldn’t speak so hasty and hot now.’

‘And to think I’d helped to bring her up so genteel, and with such pretty manners!’ cried the old woman indignantly. ‘She might have done so much better with her cleverness too. Such a milliner as she might have turned out! Well, good-bye, brother James, and don’t go having any more of those visions; they’re not wholesome for you.’

‘I should be very lonesome without them,’ answered Oliver. ‘Good-bye, Charlotte, good-bye, and God bless you. Come again as soon as you can.’

He went with her to the door, and stayed to watch her along the quiet alley, till she turned into the street. Then, with a last nod to the back of her bonnet, as she passed out of his sight, he returned slowly into his dark shop, put up the flap of the counter, and retreated to the darker room within. Hot as it was, he fancied it was growing a little chilly with the coming of the night, and he drew on his old coat, and threw a handkerchief over his white head, and then sat down in the dusk, looking out into his shop and the alley beyond it. He must have fallen into a doze after a while, being overcome with the heat, and lulled by the

constant hum of the streets, which reached his dull ear in a softened murmur; for at length he started up almost in a fright, and found that complete darkness had fallen upon him suddenly, as it seemed to him. A church clock was striking nine, and his shop was not closed yet. He went out hurriedly to put the shutters up.

Chapter II

WAIFS AND STRAYS

IN the shop it was not yet so dark but that old Oliver could see his way out with the shutters, which during the day occupied a place behind the door. He lifted the flap of the counter, and was about to go on with his usual business, when a small voice, trembling a little, and speaking from the floor at his very feet, caused him to pause suddenly.

‘Please, there’s a little girl here,’ said the voice.

Oliver stooped down to bring his eyes nearer to the ground, until he could make out the indistinct outline of the figure of a child, seated on his shop floor, and closely hugging a dog in her arms. Her face looked small to him; it was pale, as if she had been crying quietly, and though he could not see them, a large tear stood on each of her cheeks.

‘What little girl are you?’ he asked, almost timidly.

‘Rey called me Dolly,’ answered the child.

‘Haven’t you any other name?’ inquired old Oliver.

‘Nosing else but Poppet,’ she said; ‘rey call me Dolly sometimes, and Poppet sometimes. Ris is my little dog, Beppo.’

She introduced the dog by pushing its nose into his hand, and Beppo complacently wagged his tail and licked the old man’s withered fingers.

‘What brings you here in my shop, my little woman?’ asked Oliver.

‘Mammy brought me,’ she said, with a stifled sob; ‘she told me run in rere, Dolly, and stay till mammy comes back, and be a good girl always. Am I a good girl?’

‘Yes, yes,’ he answered soothingly; ‘you’re a very good little girl, I’m sure; and mother ’ll come back soon, very soon. Let us go to the door, and look for her.’

He took her little hand in his own; such a little hand it felt, that he could not help tightening his fingers fondly over it; and then they stood for a few minutes on the door-sill, while old Oliver looked anxiously up and down

the alley. At the greengrocer's next door there flared a bright jet of gas, and the light shone well into the deepening darkness. But there was no woman in sight, and the only person about was a ragged boy, barefoot and bareheaded, with no clothing but a torn pair of trousers, very jagged about the ankles, and a jacket through which his thin shoulders displayed themselves. He was lolling in the lowest window-sill of the house opposite, and watched Oliver and the little girl looking about them with sundry signs of interest and amusement.

'She ain't nowhere in sight,' he called across to them after a while, 'nor won't be, neither, I'll bet you. You're looking out for the little un's mother, ain't you, old master?'

'Yes,' answered Oliver; 'do you know anything about her, my boy?'

'Nothink,' he said, with a laugh; 'only she looked as if she were up to some move, and as I'd nothink particular on hand, I just followed her. She was somethink like my mother, as is dead, not fat or rosy, you know, with a bit of a bruise about her eye, as if somebody had been fighting with her. I thought there'd be a lark when she left the little 'un in your shop, so I just

stopped to see. She bolted as if the bobbies were after her.'

'How long ago?' asked Oliver anxiously.

'The clocks had just gone eight,' he answered; 'I've been watching for you ever since.'

'Why! that's a full hour ago,' said the old man, looking wistfully down the alley; 'it's time she was come back again for her little girl.'

But there was no symptom of anybody coming to claim the little girl, who stood very quietly at his side, one hand holding the dog fast by his ear, and the other still lying in Oliver's grasp. The boy hopped on one foot across the narrow alley, and looked up with bright, eager eyes into the old man's face.

'I say,' he said earnestly, 'don't you go to give her up to the p'lice. They'd take her to the house, and that's worse than the gaol. Bless yer! they'd never take up a little thing like that to gaol for a wagrant. You just give her to me, and I'll take care of her. It 'ud be easy enough to find victuals for such a pretty little thing as her. You give her up to me, I say.'

'What's your name?' asked Oliver, clasping the little hand tighter, 'and where do you come from?'

‘From nowhere particular,’ answered the boy; ‘and my name’s Antony; Tony, for short. I used to have another name; mother told it me afore she died, but it’s gone clean out o’ my head. Tony I am, anyhow, and you can call me by it, if you choose.’

‘How old are you, Tony?’ inquired Oliver, still lingering on the threshold, and looking up and down with his dim eyes.

‘Bless yer! I don’t know,’ replied Tony; ‘I weren’t much bigger nor her when mother died, and I’ve found myself ever since. I never had any father.’

‘Found yourself!’ repeated the old man.

‘Ah, it’s not bad in the summer,’ said Tony, more earnestly than before; ‘and I could find for the little ’un easy enough. I sleep anywhere, in Covent Garden sometimes, and the parks—anywhere as the p’lice ’ill let me alone. You won’t go to give her up to them p’lice, will you now, and she so pretty?’

He spoke in a beseeching tone, and old Oliver looked down upon him through his spectacles, with a closer survey than he had given to him before. The boy’s face was pale and meagre, with an unboyish sharpness about it, though he

did not seem more than nine or ten years old. His glittering eyes were filled with tears, and his colourless lips quivered. He wiped away the tears roughly upon the ragged sleeve of his jacket.

‘I never were such a baby before,’ said Tony, ‘only she is such a nice little thing, and such a tiny little ’un. You’ll keep her, master, won’t you? or give her up to me?’

‘Ay, ay! I’ll take care of her,’ answered Oliver very briskly, ‘till her mother comes back for her. She’ll come pretty soon, I know. But she wants her supper now, doesn’t she?’

He stooped down to bring his face nearer to the child’s, and she raised her hand to it, and stroked his cheek with her warm, soft fingers.

‘Beppo wants his supper too,’ she said, in a clear, shrill little voice, which penetrated easily through old Oliver’s deafened hearing.

‘And Beppo shall have some supper as well as the little woman,’ he answered. ‘I’ll put the shutters up now, and leave the door ajar, and the gas lit for mother to see when she comes back; and if mother shouldn’t come back to-night, the little woman will sleep in my bed, won’t she?’

‘Dolly’s to be a good girl till mammy comes

back,' said the child plaintively, and holding harder by Beppo's ear.

'Let me put the shutters up, master,' cried Tony eagerly; 'I won't charge you nothink, and I'll just look round in the morning to see how you're getting along. She is such a very little thing.'

The shutters were put up briskly, and then Tony took a long, farewell gaze of the old man and the little child, but he could not offer to touch either of them. He glanced at his hands, and Oliver did the same; but they both shook their heads.

'I'll have a wash in the morning afore I come,' he said, nodding resolutely; 'good-bye, guv'ner; good-bye, little 'un.'

Old Oliver went in, leaving his door ajar, and his gas lit, as he had said. He fed the hungry child with bread and butter, and used up his half-pennyworth of milk, which he bought for himself every evening. Then he lifted her on to his knee, with Beppo in her arms, and sat for a long while waiting. The little head nodded, and Dolly sat up, unsteadily striving hard to keep awake; but at last she let Beppo drop to the floor, while she herself fell upon the old

man's breast, and lay there without moving. It chimed eleven o'clock at last, and Oliver knew it was of no use to watch any longer.

He managed to undress his little charge with gentle, though trembling hands, and then he laid her down on his bed, putting his only pillow against the wall to make a soft nest for the tender and sleepy child. She roused herself for a minute, and stared about her, gazing steadily, with large, tearful eyes, into his face. Then as he sat down on the bedstead beside her, to comfort her as well as he could, she lifted herself up, and knelt down, with her folded hands laid against his shoulder.

'Dolly vevy seepy,' she lisped, 'but must say her prayers always.'

'What are your prayers, my dear?' he asked.

'On'y God bless ganpa, and father, and mammy, and poor Beppo, and make me a good girl,' murmured the drowsy voice, as Dolly closed her eyes again and fell off into a deep sleep the next moment.

Chapter III

A LITTLE PEACEMAKER

IT was a very strange event which had befallen old Oliver. He went back to his own chair, where he smoked his Broseley pipe every night, and sank down in it, rubbing his legs softly; for it was a long time since he had nursed any child, and even Dolly's small weight was a burden to him. Her tiny clothes were scattered up and down, and there was no one beside himself to gather them together and fold them straight. In shaking out her frock a letter fell from it, and Oliver picked it up, wondering whoever it could be for. It was directed to himself, 'Mr. James Oliver, Newsagent,' and he broke the seal with eager expectation. The contents were these, written in a handwriting which he knew at first sight to be his daughter's:—

‘DEAR FATHER,—I am very very sorry I ever did anything to make you angry with me. This is your poor Susan’s little girl, as is come to be a little peacemaker betwixt you and me. I’m certain sure you’ll never turn her away from your door. I’m going down to Portsmouth for three days, because he listed five months ago, and his regiment’s ordered out to India, and he sails on Friday. So I thought I wouldn’t take my little girl to be in the way, and I said I’ll leave her with father till I come back, and her pretty little ways will soften him towards me, and we’ll live all together in peace and plenty till his regiment comes home again, poor fellow. For he’s very good to me when he’s not in liquor, which is seldom for a man. Please do forgive me for pity’s sake, and for Christ’s sake, if I’m worthy to use His name, and do take care of my little girl till I come home to you both on Friday.—From your now dutiful daughter,

‘POOR SUSAN.’

The tears rolled fast down old Oliver’s cheeks as he read this letter through twice, speaking the words half aloud to himself. Why! this was

his own little grandchild, then—his very own! And no doubt Susan had christened her Dorothy, after her own mother, his dear wife, who had died so many years ago. Dolly was the short for Dorothy, and in early times he had often called his wife by that name. He had turned his gas off and lighted a candle, and now he took it up and went to the bedside to look at his new treasure. The tiny face lying upon his pillow was rosy with sleep, and the fair curly hair was tossed about in pretty disorder. His spectacles grew very dim indeed, and he was obliged to polish them carefully on his cotton handkerchief before he could see his granddaughter plainly enough. Then he touched her dimpled cheek tremblingly with the end of his finger, and sobbed out, 'Bless her! bless her!' He returned to his chair, his head shaking a good deal before he could regain his composure; and it was not until he had kindled his pipe, and was smoking it, with his face turned towards the sleeping child, that he felt at all like himself again.

'Dear Lord!' he said, half aloud, between the whiffs of his pipe, 'dear Lord! how very good Thou art to me! Didst Thee not say, "I'll not

leave thee comfortless, I'll come to thee"? I know what that means, bless Thy Name; and the good Spirit has many a time brought me comfort, and cheered my heart. I know Thou didst not leave me alone before. No, no! that was far from Thee, Lord. Alone!—why, Thou'rt always here; and now there's the little lass as well. Lonesome!—they don't know Thee, Lord, and they don't know me. Thou'rt here, with the little lass and me. Yes, yes, yes.'

He murmured the word 'yes' in a tone of contentment over and over again, until, the pipe being finished, he prepared for sleep also. But no sleep came to the old man. He was too full of thought, and too fearful of the child waking in the night and wanting something. The air was close and hot, and now and then a peal of thunder broke overhead; but a profound peace and tranquillity, slightly troubled by his new joy, held possession of him. His grandchild was there, and his daughter was coming back to him in three days.

Oh, how he would welcome her! He would not let her speak one word of her wilfulness and disobedience, and the long, cruel neglect which

had left him in ignorance of where she lived, and what had become of her. It was partly his fault, for having been too hard upon her, and too hasty and hot-tempered. He had learnt better since then.

Chapter IV

OLD OLIVER'S MASTER

VERY early in the morning, before the tardy daylight could creep into the darkened room, old Oliver was up and busy. He had been in the habit of doing for himself, as he called it, ever since his daughter had forsaken him, and he was by nature fastidiously clean and neat. But now there would be additional duties for him during the next three days; for there would be Dolly to wash, and dress, and provide breakfast for. Every few minutes he stole a look at her lying still asleep; and as soon as he discovered symptoms of awaking, he hastily lifted Beppo on to the bed, that her opening eyes should be greeted by some familiar sight. She stretched out her wonderful little hands, and caught hold of the dog's rough head before venturing to lift her eyelids, while Oliver looked on in speechless delight. At length she ventured

to peep slyly at him, and then addressed herself to Beppo.

'What am I to call ris funny old man, Beppo?' she asked.

'I am your grandpa, my darling,' said Oliver, in his softest voice.

'Are you God-bless-ganpa?' inquired Dolly, sitting up on her pillow, and staring very hard with her blue eyes into his wrinkled face.

'Yes, I am,' he answered, looking at her anxiously.

'Dolly knows,' she said, counting upon her little fingers; 'rere's father, and mammy, and Beppo; and now rere's ganpa. Dolly 'll get up now.'

She flung her arms suddenly about his neck and kissed him, while old Oliver trembled with intense joy. It was quite a marvel to him how she helped him to dress her, laughing merrily at the strange mistakes he made in putting on her clothes the wrong side before; and when he assured her that her mother would come back very soon, she seemed satisfied to put up with any passing inconvenience. The shop, with its duties, and the necessity of getting in his daily stock of newspapers, entirely slipped his memory;

and he was only recalled to it by a very loud rapping at the door as he was pouring out Dolly's breakfast. To his great surprise he discovered that he had forgotten to take down his shutters, though it was past the hour when his best customers passed by.

The person knocking proved to be none other than Tony, who greeted the old man's appearance with a prolonged whistle, and a grave and reproachful stare.

'Come,' he said, in a tone of remonstrance, 'this 'll never do, you know. Business is business, and must be minded. You pretty nearly frightened me into fits; anybody could have knocked me down with a straw when I see the shutters up. How is she?'

'She's very well, thank you, my boy,' answered Oliver meekly.

'Mother not turned up, I guess?' said Tony.

'No; she comes on Friday,' he replied.

Tony winked, and put his tongue into his cheek; but he gave utterance to no remark until after the shutters were in their place. Then he surveyed himself as well as he could, with an air of satisfaction. His face and hands were clean, and his skin looked very white



'ARE YOU GOD-BLESS-GANPA?' INQUIRED DOLLY, SITTING UP
ON HER PILLOW.

through the holes in his tattered clothes; even his feet, except for an unavoidable under surface of dust, were unsoiled. His jacket and trousers appeared somewhat more torn than the evening before; but they bore every mark of having been washed also.

'Washed myself early in the morning, afore the bobbies were much about,' remarked Tony, 'in the fountains at Charing Cross; but I hadn't time to get my rags done, so I did 'em down under the bridge, when the tide were going down; but I could only give 'em a bit of a swill and a wring out. Anyhow, I'm a bit cleaner this morning than last night, master.'

'To be sure, to be sure,' answered Oliver. 'Come in, my boy, and I'll give you a bit of breakfast with her and me.'

'You haven't got sich a thing as a daily paper, have you?' asked Tony, in a patronising tone.

'Not to-day's paper, I'm afraid,' he said.

'I'm afraid not,' continued Tony; 'overslept yourself, eh? Not as I can read myself; but there are folks going by as can, and might p'raps buy one here as well as anywhere else. Shall I run and get 'em for you, now I'm on my legs?'

Oliver looked questioningly at the boy, who

returned a frank, honest gaze, and said, 'Honour bright!' as he held out his hand for the money. There was some doubt in the old man's mind after Tony had disappeared as to whether he had not done a very foolish thing; but he soon forgot it when he returned to the breakfast-table; and long before he himself could have reached the place and returned, Tony was back again with his right number of papers.

Before many minutes Tony was sitting upon an old box at a little distance from the table, where Oliver sat with his grandchild. A basin of coffee and a large hunch of bread rested upon his knees, and Beppo was sniffing round him with a doubtful air. Dolly was shy in this strange company, and ate her breakfast with a sedate gravity which filled both her companions with astonishment and admiration. When the meal was finished, old Oliver took his daughter's letter from his waistcoat pocket and read it aloud to Tony, who listened with undivided interest.

'Then she's your own little 'un,' he said, with a sigh of disappointment. 'You'll never give her up to me, if you get tired of her,—nor to the p'lice neither,' he added, with a brightening face.

'No, no, no!' answered Oliver emphatically. 'Besides, her mother's coming on Friday. I wouldn't give her up for all the world, bless her!'

'And he's 'listed!' said Tony, in a tone of envy. 'They wouldn't take me yet awhile, if I offered to go. But who's that she speaks of?—"for Christ's sake, if I am worthy to use His name." Who is He?'

'Don't you know?' asked Oliver.

'No, never heard tell of Him before,' he answered. 'Is He any Friend o' yours?'¹

'Ay!' said Oliver; 'He's my only Friend, my best Friend. And He's my Master, besides.'

'And she thinks He'd be angry if you turned the little girl away?' pursued Tony.

'Yes, yes; He'd be very angry,' said old Oliver thoughtfully; 'it 'ud grieve Him to His heart. Why, He's always loved little children, and never had them turned away from Himself, whatever He was doing. If she hadn't been my own little girl, I daren't have turned her out of my doors. No, no, dear Lord, Thee knows as I'd have taken care of her, for Thy sake.'

¹ It may be necessary to assure some readers that this ignorance is not exaggerated. The City Mission Reports, and similar records, show that such cases are too frequent.

He spoke absently, in a low voice, as though talking to some person whom Tony could not see, and the boy was silent a minute or two, thinking busily.

‘How long have you worked for that master o’ yours?’ he asked at last.

‘Not very long,’ replied Oliver regretfully. ‘I used to fancy I was working for Him years and years ago; but, dear me! it was poor sort o’ work; and now I can’t do very much. Only He knows how old I am, and He doesn’t care so that I love Him, which I do, Tony.’

‘I should think so!’ said the boy, falling again into busy thought, from which he aroused himself by getting up from his box, and rubbing his fingers through his wet and tangled hair.

‘He takes to children and little ’uns?’ he said, in a questioning tone.

‘Ay, dearly!’ answered old Oliver.

‘I reckon He’d scarcely take me for a man yet,’ said Tony, at the same time drawing himself up to his full height; ‘though I don’t know as I should care to work for Him. I’d rather have a crossing, and be my own master. But if I get hard up, do you think He’d take to me, if you spoke a word for me?’

'Are you sure you don't know anything about Him?' asked Oliver.

'Not I; how should I?' answered Tony. 'Why, you don't s'pose as I know all the great folks in London, though I've seen sights and sights of 'em riding about in their carriages. I told you I weren't much bigger nor her there when mother died, and I've picked up my living up and down the streets anyhow, and other lads have helped me on, till I can help 'em on now. It don't cost much to keep a boy on the streets. There's nothink to pay for coals, or rent, or beds, or furniture, or anythink; only your victuals and a rag now and then. All I want's a broom and a crossing, and then shouldn't I get along just? But I don't know how to get 'em.'

'Perhaps the Lord Jesus would give them to you, if you'd ask Him,' said Oliver earnestly.

'Who's He?' inquired Tony, with an eager face.

'Him—Christ. It's His other name,' answered the old man.

'Ah! I see,' he said, nodding. 'Well, if I can't get 'em myself, I'll think about it. He'll want me to work for Him, you know. Where does He live?'

‘I’ll tell you all about Him, if you’ll come to see me,’ replied Oliver.

‘Well,’ said the boy, ‘I’ll just look in after Friday, and see if the little ’un’s mother’s come back. Good-bye,—good-bye, little miss.’

He could take Dolly’s hand into his own this morning, and he looked down curiously at it,—a small, rosy, dimpled hand, such as he had never seen before so closely. A lump rose in his throat, and his eyelids smarted with tears again. It was such a little thing, such a pretty little thing, he said to himself, covering it fondly with his other hand. There was no fear that Tony would forget to come back to old Oliver’s house.

‘Thank you for my breakfast,’ he said, with a choking voice; ‘only if I do come to see you, it’ll be to see her again—not for anythink as I can get.’

Chapter V

FORSAKEN AGAIN

THE next three days were a season of un-
mixed happiness to old Oliver. The little
child was so merry, yet withal so gentle and
sweet-tempered, that she kept him in a state of
unwearied delight, without any alloy of anxiety or
trouble. She trotted at his side with short,
running footsteps, when he went out early in the
morning to fetch his daily stock of newspapers.
She watched him set his room tidy, and make
believe to help him by dusting the legs and seats
of his two chairs. She stood with folded hands
and serious face, looking on as he was busy with
his cooking. When she was not thus engaged
she played contentedly with Beppo, prattling to
him in such a manner, that Oliver often forgot
what he was about while listening to her. She
played with him, too, frolicsome little games of
hide-and-seek, in which he grew as eager as her-

self; and sometimes she stole his spectacles, or handkerchief, or anything she could lay her mischievous fingers upon to hide away in some unthought-of spot; while her shrewd, cunning little face put on an expression of profound gravity as old Oliver sought everywhere for them.

As Friday evening drew near, the old man's gladness took a shade of anxiety. His daughter was coming home to him, and his heart was full of unutterable joy and gratitude; but he did not know exactly how they should go on in the future. He was averse to change; yet this little house, with its single room, to which he had moved when she forsook him, was too scanty in its accommodation. He had made up a rude sort of bed for himself under the counter in the shop, and was quite ready to give up his own to Susan and his little love, as he called Dolly; but would Susan let him have his own way in this, and many other things? He provided a sumptuous tea, and added a fresh salad to it from the greengrocer's next door; but though he and Dolly waited and watched till long after the child's bed-time, taking occasional snatches of bread and butter, still Susan did not arrive. At length a postman

entered the little shop with a noise which made Oliver's heart beat violently, and tossed a letter down upon the counter. He carried it to the door, where there was still light enough to read it, and saw that it was in Susan's handwriting.

'MY DEAR AND DEAREST FATHER,—My heart is almost broke, betwixt one thing and another. His regiment is to set sail immediate, and the colonel's lady has offered me very handsome wages to go out with her as lady's-maid, her own having disappointed her at the last moment; which I could do very well, knowing the dress-making. He said, "Do come, Susan, and I'll never get drunk again, so help me God; and if you don't, I shall go to the bad altogether; for I do love you, Susan." I said, "Oh, my child!" And the colonel's lady said, "She's safe with her grandfather; and if he's a good man, as you say he is, he'll take the best of care of her. I'll give you three pounds to send him from here, and we'll send more from Calcutta." So they overpersuaded me, and there isn't even time to come back to London, for we are going in a few hours. You'll take care of my little dear, I know, you and Aunt Charlotte. I've sent a

little box of clothes for her by the railway, and what more she wants Aunt Charlotte will see to, I'm sure, and do her mending, and see to her manners till I come home. Oh! if I could only hear you say, "Susan, my dear, I forgive you, and love you almost as much as ever," I'd go with a lighter heart, and be almost glad to leave Dolly to be a comfort to you. She will be a comfort to you, though she is so little, I'm sure. Tell her mammy says she must be a good girl always till mammy comes back. A hundred thousand kisses for my dear father and my little girl. We shall come home as soon as ever we can; but I don't rightly know where India is. I think it's my bounden duty to go with him, as things have turned out. Pray God take care of us all.—Your loving, sorrowful daughter,

‘SUSAN RALEIGH.’

Chapter VI

THE GRASSHOPPER A BURDEN

IT was some time before the full meaning of Susan's letter penetrated to her father's brain; but when it did, he was not at first altogether pained by it. True, it was both a grief and disappointment to think that his daughter, instead of returning to him, was already on her way across the sea to a very distant land. But as this came slowly to his mind, there came also the thought that there would now be no one to divide with him the treasure committed to his charge. The little child would belong to him alone. They might go on still, living as they had done these last three days, and being all in all to one another. If he could have chosen, his will would certainly have been for Susan to return to them; but since he could not have his choice, he felt that there were some things which

would be all the happier for him because of her absence.

He put Dolly to bed, and then went out to shut up the shop for the night. As he carried in his feeble arms a single shutter at a time, he heard himself hailed by a boy's voice, which was lowered to a low and mysterious whisper, and which belonged to Tony, who took the shutter out of his hands.

'S'pose the mother turned up all right?' he said, pointing with his thumb through the half-open door.

'No,' answered Oliver. 'I've had another letter from her, and she's gone out to India with her husband, and left the little love to live alone with me.'

'But whatever 'll the Master say to that?' inquired Tony.

'What master?' asked old Oliver.

'Him—Lord Jesus Christ. What'll He say to her leaving you and the little 'un again?' said Tony, with an eager face.

'Oh! He says a woman ought to leave her father, and keep to her husband,' he answered somewhat sadly. 'It's all right, that is.'

‘I s’pose He’ll help you to take care of the little girl?’ said Tony.

‘Ay, will He; Him and me,’ replied old Oliver; ‘there’s no fear of that. You never read the Testament, of course, my boy?’

‘Can’t read, I told you,’ he answered. ‘But what’s that?’

‘A book all about Him, the Lord Jesus,’ said Oliver, ‘what He’s done, and what He’s willing to do for people. If you’ll come of an evening, I’ll read it aloud to you and my little love. She’ll listen as quiet and good as any angel.’

‘I’ll come to-morrow,’ answered Tony readily; and he lingered about the doorway until he heard the old man inside fasten the bolts and locks, and saw the light go out in the pane of glass over the door. Then he scampered noiselessly with his naked feet along the alley in the direction of Covent Garden, where he purposed to spend the night, if left undisturbed.

Old Oliver went back into his room, where the tea-table was still set out for his Susan’s welcome; but he had no heart to clear the things away. A chill came over his spirit as his eye fell upon the preparations he had made to give her such a cordial greeting, that she

would know at once he had forgiven her fully. He lit his pipe, and sat pondering sorrowfully over all the changes that had happened to him since those old, far-away days when he was a boy, in the pleasant, fresh, healthy homestead at the foot of the Wrekin. He felt all of a sudden how very old he was; a poor, infirm, hoary old man. His sight was growing dim even, and his hearing duller every day; he was sure of it. His limbs ached oftener, and he was earlier wearied in the evening; yet he could not sleep soundly at nights, as he had been used to do. But worst of all, his memory was not half as good as it had been. Sometimes, of late, he had caught himself reading a newspaper quite a fortnight old, and he had not found it out till he happened to see the date at the top. He could not recollect the names of people as he did once; for many of his customers to whom he supplied the monthly magazines were obliged to tell him their names and the book they wanted every time, before he could remember them. And now there was this young child cast upon him to be thought of, and cared and worked for. It was very thoughtless and reckless of Susan! Suppose he should forget or neglect

any of her tender wants! Suppose his dull ear should grow too deaf to catch the pretty words she said when she asked for something! Suppose he should not see when the tears were rolling down her cheeks, and nobody would comfort her! It might very easily be so. He was not the hale man he was when Susan was just such another little darling, and he could toss her up to the ceiling in his strong hands. It was as much as he could do to lift Dolly on to his feeble knee, and nurse her quietly, not even giving her a ride to market upon it; and how stiff he felt if she sat there long!

Old Oliver laid aside his pipe, and rested his worn face upon his hands, while the heavy tears came slowly and painfully to his eyes, and trickled down his withered cheeks. His joy had fled, and his unmingled gladness had faded quite away. He was a very poor, very old man; and the little child was very, very young. What would become of them both, alone in London?

He did not know whether it was a voice speaking within himself in his own heart, or words whispered very softly into his ear; but he heard a low, quiet, still, small voice, which

said, 'Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs I will carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.' And old Oliver answered, with a sob, 'Yes, Lord, yes!'

Chapter VII

THE PRINCE OF LIFE

I N the new life which had now fairly begun for Oliver, it was partly as he had foreseen ; he was apt to forget many things, and he had a fretting consciousness of this forgetfulness. When he was in the house playing with Dolly, or reading to her, the shop altogether slipped away from his memory, and he was only recalled to it by the loud knocking and shouting of some customer in it. On the other hand, when he was sitting behind the counter looking for news from India in the papers, news in which he was already profoundly concerned, though it was impossible that Susan could yet have reached it, he grew so absorbed, that he did not know how the time was passing by, and both he and his little granddaughter were hungry before he had thought of getting ready any meal. He tried all kinds of devices for strengthening his failing

memory ; but in vain. He even forgot that he did forget ; and when Dolly was laughing and frolicking about him he grew a child again, and felt himself the happiest man in London.

The person who took upon himself the heaviest weight of anxiety and responsibility about Dolly was Tony, who began to make it his daily custom to pass by the house at the hour when old Oliver ought to be going for his morning papers ; and if he found no symptom of life about the place, he did not leave off kicking and butting at the shop-door until the owner appeared. It was very much the same thing at night, when the time for shutting up came ; though it generally happened now that the boy was paying his friends an evening visit, and was therefore at hand to put up the shutters for Oliver. Tony could not keep away from the place. Though he felt a boy's contemptuous pity for the poor old man's declining faculties as regarded business, he had a very high veneration for his learning. Nothing pleased him better than to sit upon the old box near the door, his elbows on his knees, and his chin upon his hands, while Oliver read aloud, with Dolly upon his knee, her curly hair and small pretty features making a strange contrast

to his white head and withered, hollow face. Tony, who had never had anything to love except a stray cur or two, which he had always lost after a few days' friendship, felt as if he could have suffered himself to be put to death for either of these two; while Beppo came in for a large share of his unclaimed affections. The chief subject of their reading was the life of the Master, who was so intimately dear to the heart of old Oliver. Tony was very eager to learn all he could of this great Friend who did so much for the old man, and who might perhaps be persuaded some day or other to take a little notice of him, if he should fail to get a crossing for himself. Oliver, in his long, unbroken solitude of six years, had fallen into a notion, amounting to a firm belief, that his Lord was not dead and far off, as most of the world believed, but was a very present, living Friend, always ready to listen to the meanest of his words. He had a vague suspicion that his faith had got into a different course from that of most other people; and he bore meekly the rebukes of his sister Charlotte for the unwholesomeness of his visions. But none the less, when he was alone, he talked and prayed to, and spoke to Tony of this

Master as one who was always very near at hand.

'I s'pose He takes a bit o' notice o' the little 'un,' said Tony, 'when He comes in now and then of an evening?'

'Ay, does He!' answered Oliver earnestly. 'My boy, He loves every child as if it was His very own, and it is His own in one sense. Didn't I read you last night how He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not?" Why, He'd love all the young children in the world, if they weren't hindered from coming to Him.'

'I should very much like to see Him some day,' pursued Tony reflectively, 'and the rest of them,—Peter, and John, and them. I s'pose they are getting pretty old by now, aren't they?'

'They are dead.'

'All of 'em?' asked Tony.

'All of them,' he repeated.

'Dear, dear!' cried Tony, his eyes glistening. 'Whatever did the Master do when they all died? I'm very sorry for Him now. He's had a many troubles, hasn't He?'

'Yes, yes,' replied old Oliver, with a faltering voice. 'He was called a man of sorrows, and

acquainted with grief. Nobody ever bore so many troubles as Him.'

'How long ago is it since they all died?' asked Tony.

'I can't rightly say,' he answered. 'I heard once, but it is gone out of my head. I only know it was the same when I was a boy. It must have been a long, long time ago.'

'The same when you was a boy!' repeated Tony, in a tone of disappointment. 'It must ha' been a long while ago. I thought all along as the Master was alive now.'

'So He is, so He is!' exclaimed old Oliver eagerly. 'I'll read to you all about it. They put Him to death on the cross, and buried Him in a rocky grave; but He is the Prince of Life, and He came to life again three days after, and now He can die no more. His own words to John were, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." What else can it mean but that He is living now, and will never die again?'

Tony made no answer. He sat with his sharp, unboyish face gazing intently into the fire; for by this time autumn had set in, and the old man was chilly of an evening. A very

uncertain, dim idea was dawning upon him that this Master and Friend of old Oliver's was a Being very different from an ordinary man, however great and rich he might be. He had grown to love the thought of Him, and to listen attentively to the book which told the manner of life He led; but it was a chill to find out that he could not look into His face, and hear His voice, as he could Oliver's. His heart was heavy and very sad.

'I s'pose I can't see Him, then,' he murmured to himself, at last.

'Not exactly like other folks,' said Oliver. 'I think sometimes that perhaps there's a little darkness of the grave where He was buried about Him still. But He sees us, and hears us. He Himself says, "Behold, I am with you always." I don't know whatever I should do, even with my little love here, if I wasn't sure Jesus was with me as well.'

'I'll tell you what I'll do,' said Tony, after another pause. 'I'm going to ask Him to give me somethink, and then if He does, I shall know He hears me.—I should very much like to have a broom and a crossing, and get my living a bit more easy, if you please.'

He had turned his face away from Oliver, and looked across into the darkest corner of the room, where he could see nothing but shadow. The old man felt puzzled, and somewhat troubled, but he only sighed softly to himself; and opening the Testament, he read aloud in it till he was calmed again, and Tony was listening in rapt attention.

‘My boy,’ he said, as the hour came for Tony to go, ‘where are you sleeping now?’

‘Anywhere as I can get out o’ the wind,’ he answered. ‘It’s cold now, nights—wery cold, master. But I must get along a bit farder on. Lodgings is wery dear.’

‘I’ve been thinking,’ said Oliver, ‘that you’d find it better to have some sort of a shakedown under my counter. I’ve heard say that newspapers stitched together make a coverlid pretty near as warm as a blanket; and we could do no harm by trying them, Tony. Look here, and see how you’d like it.’

It looked very much like a long box, and was not much larger. Two or three beetles crawled sluggishly away as the light fell upon them, and dusty cobwebs festooned all the corners; but to Tony it seemed so magnificent an accom-

modation for sleeping, that he could scarcely believe he heard old Oliver aright. He looked up into his face with a sharp, incredulous gaze, ready to wink and thrust his tongue into his cheek, if there was the least sign of making game of him. But the old man was simply in earnest, and without a word Tony slipped down upon a heap of paper shavings strewed within, drew his ragged jacket up about his ears, and turned his face away, lest his tears should be seen. He felt, a minute or two after, that a piece of an old rug was laid over him, but he could say nothing; and old Oliver could not hear the sob which broke from his lips.

Chapter VIII

NO PIPE FOR OLD OLIVER

AS some weeks went by, and no crossing and broom had been given to Tony, he began to suspect that Oliver was imposing upon him. Now that he slept under the counter, he could often hear the old man talking aloud to his invisible Friend as he smoked his pipe ; and once or twice Tony crept noiselessly to the door and watched him, after he had finished smoking, kneel down and hide his face in his hands for some minutes together. But the boy could see nothing, and his wish had not been granted ; even though, as he grew more instructed, he followed Oliver's example, and, kneeling down behind the counter, whispered out a prayer for it. To be sure, his life was easier, especially the nights of it ; for he never now went hungry and starved to bed upon some cold, hard doorstep. But it was old Oliver who did that for

him, not old Oliver's Master. So far as he knew, the Lord Jesus had taken no notice whatever of him; and the feeling, at first angry, softened down into a kind of patient grief, which was quickly dying away into indifference.

Oliver had done himself no bad turn by offering a shelter to the solitary lad. Tony always woke early in the morning, and if it rained he would run for the papers, before turning out to 'find for himself' in the streets. He generally took care to be out of the way at meal-times; for it was as much as the old man could do to provide for himself and Dolly. Sometimes Tony saw him at the till, counting over his pence with rather a troubled face. Once, after receiving a silver fourpenny-piece, an extraordinary and undreamed-of event, Tony dropped it, almost with a feeling of guilt, through the slit in the counter which communicated with the till. But Oliver was so bewildered by its presence among the coppers, that he was compelled to confess what he had done, saying it would have cost him more than that for lodgings these cold nights.

'No, no, Tony,' said Oliver; 'you're very

useful, fetching my papers, and taking my little love out a-walking when the weather's fine. I ought to pay you something, instead of taking it of you.'

'Keep it for Dolly,' said Tony bashfully, and pushing the coin into her little hand.

'Sank 'oo,' answered Dolly, accepting it promptly; 'me'll give 'oo twenty kisses for it.'

It seemed ample payment to Tony, who went down on his knees to have the kisses pressed upon his face, which had never felt a kiss since his mother died. But Oliver was not satisfied with the bargain, though he drew Dolly to him fondly, and left the money in her hand.

'It 'ud buy you a broom, Tony,' he said.

'Oh, I've give up asking for a crossing,' he answered dejectedly; 'for He never heard, or if He heard, He never cared; so it were no use going on teasing either Him or me.'

'But this money 'ud buy the broom,' said Oliver; 'and if you looked about you, you'd find the crossing. You never got such a bit of money before, did you?'

'No, never,' replied Tony. 'A tall, thin gentleman, with a dark face and very sharp

eyes, gave it me for holding his horse, near Temple Bar. He says, "Mind you spend that well, my lad." I'd know him again anywhere.'

'You ought to have bought a broom,' said Oliver, looking down at Dolly's tightly-closed hand.

'Don't you go to take it of her,' cried Tony. 'Bless you! I'll get another some way. I never thought that were the way He'd give me a broom and a crossing. I thought it 'ud be sure to come direct.'

'Well,' said Oliver, after a little pause, 'I'll save the fourpence for you. It'll only be going without my pipe for a few nights, that's all. That's nothing, Tony.'

It did not seem much to Tony, who had no idea as yet of the pleasures of smoking; yet he roused up just before falling into his deep sleep at night to step softly to the door and look in upon Oliver. He was sitting in his arm-chair, with his pipe between his lips, but there was no tobacco in it; and he was holding more eager converse than ever with his unseen companion.

'Dear Lord!' he said, 'I'd do ten times more

than this for Thee. Thou hast said, "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me." Tony's one of Thy little ones. Dear Lord, do Thee give him a crossing, if it be Thy blessed will. Do Thee now, Lord.'

Tony could hear no more, and he stole back to bed, his mind full of new and vague hopes. He dreamed of the fourpenny-piece, and the gentleman who had given it, and of Dolly, who bought a wondrous broom with it, in his dream, which swept a beautiful crossing of itself. But old Oliver sat still a long time, talking half aloud; for his usual drowsiness did not come to him. It was nearly five months now since Dolly was left to him, and he felt his deafness and blindness growing upon him slowly. His infirmities were not yet so burdensome as to make him dependent upon others; but he felt himself gradually drawing near to such a state. Dolly's clothes were getting sadly in want of mending; there was scarcely a fastening left upon them, and neither he nor Tony could sew on a button or tape. It was a long time—a very long time—since his sister had been to see him; and, with the reluctance of old age to any active exertion,

he had put off from week to week the task of writing to her, to tell her of Susan's departure, and the charge he had in his little grandchild. He made up his mind that he would do it to-morrow.

Chapter IX

A NEW BROOM AND A CROSSING

THE morning was a fine soft, sunny December day, such as comes sometimes after a long season of rain and fog, and Tony proposed taking Dolly out for a walk through the streets, to which Oliver gladly consented, as it would give to him exactly the undisturbed leisure he needed for writing his letter to Charlotte. But Dolly was not in her usual spirits; on the contrary, she was grave and sober, and at length Tony, thinking she was tired, sat down on a doorstep, and took her upon his knee, to tell her his dream of the wonderful broom which swept beautifully all by itself. Dolly grew more and more pensive after hearing this, and sat silent for a long time, with her small head resting thoughtfully upon her hand, as she looked up and down the street.

‘Dolly ’ud like to buy a boom,’ she said, at last, ‘a great, big boom; and granpa ’ill smoke his

pipe again to-night. Dolly's growing a big girl ; and me must be a good girl till mammy comes back. Let us go and buy a big boom, Tony.'

For a few minutes Tony tried to shake her resolution, and persuade her to change her mind. He even tempted her with the sight of a doll in a shop-window ; but she remained steadfast, and he was not sorry to give in at last. Since the idea had entered his head that the money had been given to him for the purpose of buying a broom, he had rather regretted parting with it, and he felt some anxiety lest he should not be allowed a second chance. Dolly's lightheartedness had returned, and she trotted cheerfully by his side as they walked on in search of a shop where they could make their purchase. It was some time before they found one, and they had already left behind them the busier thoroughfares, and had reached a knot of quieter streets where there were more foot-passengers, for the fine morning had tempted many people out for pleasure as well as business. Tony was particular in his choice of a broom, but once bought, he carried it over his shoulder, and went on his way with Dolly in triumph.

They were passing along chattering busily,



HE CARRIED IT OVER HIS SHOULDER, AND WENT ON HIS WAY
WITH DOLLY IN TRIUMPH.

when Tony's eyes fell upon a child about as old as Dolly, standing on the kerb-stone with a lady, who looked anxiously across to the other side of the broad and very dirty road, for the day before had been rainy. They were both finely dressed, and the little girl had on new boots of shining leather, which it was evident she was very much afraid of soiling. For a minute Tony only looked on at their perplexity, but then he went up to them, holding Dolly by the hand.

'If you'll take care of my little girl,' he said, 'I'll carry your little girl across the road. I'm wery clean for a street-boy, all but my feet, 'cos I've got this little girl to take care of; and I'll do it wery gentle.'

Both the lady and the child looked very searchingly into Tony's face. It was pale and meagre; but there was a pleasant smile upon it, and his eyes shone down upon the two children with a very loving light in them. The lady took Dolly's hand in hers, nodding permission for him to carry her little child over to the other side, and she waited for him to come back to his own charge. Then she took out her purse, and put twopence into his hand.

'Thank ye, my lady,' said Tony; 'but I didn't

do it for that. I'm only looking out for a crossing. Me and Dolly have bought this broom, and I'm looking out for a place to make a good crossing in.

'Why not make one here?' asked the lady.

It seemed a good place to try one in; there were four roads meeting, and a cab-stand close by. Plenty of people were passing to and fro, and the middle of the road was very muddy. Tony begged a wisp of straw from a cabman, to make a seat for Dolly in the sunshine under a blank bit of wall, while he set to work with a will, feeling rather pleased than not that the broom would not sweep of itself. A crossing was speedily made, and for two or three hours Tony kept it well swept. By that time it was twelve o'clock, and Dolly's dinner would be ready for her before they could reach home, if old Oliver had not forgotten it. It seemed a great pity to leave his new post so early. Most passers-by, certainly, had appeared not to see him at all; but he had already received fivepence halfpenny, chiefly in halfpence, from ladies who were out for their morning's walk; and Dolly was enjoying herself very much in the sunshine, receiving all the attention which he could spare

from his crossing. However, a begining was made. The broom and the crossing were his property ; and Tony's heart beat fast with pride and gladness as he carried the weary little Dolly all the way home again. He resolved to put by half of his morning's earnings towards replacing the fourpenny-piece she had given back to him ; or perhaps he would buy her a beautiful doll, dressed like a real lady.

Chapter X

HIGHLY RESPECTABLE

AS old Oliver was stooping over his desk on the counter, and bringing his dim eyes as close as he could to the letter he was writing, his shop-door was darkened by the unexpected entrance of his sister Charlotte herself. She was dressed with her usual extreme neatness, bordering upon gentility, and she carried upon her arm a small fancy reticule which contained some fresh eggs, and a few russet apples, brought up expressly from the country. Oliver welcomed her with more than ordinary pleasure, and led her at once into his room behind. Charlotte's quick eyes detected in an instant the traces of a child's dwelling there; and before Oliver could utter a word, she picked up a little frock, and was holding it out at arm's length, with an air of utter surprise and misgiving.

'Brother James!' she exclaimed, and her

questioning voice, with its tone of amazement, rang very clearly into his ears.

‘It’s my little Dolly’s,’ he answered, in haste; ‘poor Susan’s little girl, who’s gone out with her husband, young Raleigh, to India, because he’s ’listed, and left her little girl with me, her grandfather. She came on the very last day you were here.’

‘Well, to be sure!’ cried his sister, sinking down on a chair, but still keeping the torn little frock in her hand.

‘I’ve had two letters from poor Susan,’ he continued, in a tremulous voice, ‘and I’ll read them to you. The child’s such a precious treasure to me, Charlotte—such a little love, a hundred times better than any gold; and now you’re come to mend up her clothes a bit, and see what she wants for me, there’s nothing else that I desire. I was writing about her to you when you came in.’

‘I thought you’d gone and picked up a lost child out of the streets,’ said Charlotte, with a sigh of relief.

‘No, no; she’s my own,’ he answered. ‘You hearken while I read poor Susan’s letters, and then you’ll understand all about it. I couldn’t

give her up for a hundred gold guineas—not for a deal more than that.’

He knew Susan’s letters off by heart, and did not need his spectacles, nor a good light to read them by. Charlotte listened with emphatic nods, and many exclamations of astonishment.

‘That’s very pretty of Susan,’ she remarked, ‘saying as Aunt Charlotte ’ll do her sewing, and see to her manners. Ay, that I will! for who should know manners better than me, who used to work for the Staniers, and dine at the house-keeper’s table, with the butler and all the head servants? to be sure I’ll take care that she does not grow up ungenteel. Where is the dear child, brother James?’

‘She’s gone out for a walk this fine morning,’ he answered.

‘Not alone?’ cried Charlotte. ‘Who’s gone out with her? A child under five years old could never go out all alone in London: at least I should think not. She might get run over and killed a score of times.’

‘Oh! there’s a person with her I’ve every confidence in,’ replied Oliver.

‘What sort of person? man or woman, male or female?’ inquired Charlotte.

‘A boy,’ he answered, in some confusion.

‘A boy!’ repeated his sister, as if he had said a monster. ‘What boy?’

‘His name’s Tony,’ he replied.

‘But where does he come from? Is he respectable?’ she pursued, fixing him with her glittering eyes in a manner which did not tend to restore his composure.

‘I don’t know, sister,’ he said in a feeble tone.

‘Don’t know, brother James!’ she exclaimed.

‘Don’t you know where he lives?’

‘He lives here,’ stammered old Oliver; ‘at least he sleeps here under the counter; but he finds his own food about the streets.’

Charlotte’s consternation was past all powers of speech. Here was her brother, a respectable man, who had seen better days, and whose sister had been a dressmaker in good families, harbouring in his own house a common boy off the streets, who, no doubt, was a thief and pickpocket, with all sorts of low ways and bad language. At the same time there was poor Susan’s little girl dwelling under the same roof; the child whose pretty manners she was to attend to, living in constant companionship with a vulgar and vicious boy! What she might have said upon recovering

her speech, neither she nor Oliver ever knew; for at this crisis Tony himself appeared, carrying Dolly and his new broom in his arms, and looking very haggard and tattered himself, his bare feet black with mud, and his bare head in a hopeless condition of confusion and tangle.

‘We’ve bought a great big boom, ganpa,’ shouted Dolly, as she came through the shop, and before she perceived the presence of a stranger; ‘and Tony and Dolly made a great big crossing, and dot ever so much money——’

She was suddenly silent as soon as her eye fell upon the stranger; but Aunt Charlotte had heard enough. She rose with great dignity from her chair, and was about to address herself vehemently to Tony, when old Oliver interrupted her.

‘Charlotte,’ he said, ‘the boy’s a good boy, and he’s a help to me. I couldn’t send him away. He’s one of the Lord’s poor little ones as are scattered up and down in this great city, without father or mother, and I must do all I can for him. It isn’t much; it’s only a bed under the counter, and a crust now and then, and he more than pays for it. You mustn’t come betwixt me and Tony.’

Old Oliver spoke so emphatically, that his sister was impressed and silenced for a minute.

She took the little girl away from Tony, and glared at him with a sternness which made him feel very uncomfortable ; but her eyes softened a little, and her face grew less harsh.

‘You can’t read or write?’ she said, in a sharp voice.

‘No,’ he answered.

‘And you’ve not got any manners, or boots, or a cap on your head. You are ragged and ignorant, and not fit to live with this little girl,’ she continued, with energy. ‘If this little girl’s mother saw her going about with a boy in bare feet and a bare head, it ’ud break her heart, I know. So if you wish to stay here with my brother, Mr. Oliver, and this little girl, Miss Dorothy Raleigh, as I suppose her name is, you must get all these things. You must begin to learn to read and write, and talk properly. I shall come here again in a month’s time—I shall come every month now—and if you haven’t got some shoes for your feet, and a cap for your head, before I see you again, I shall just take the little girl away down into the country, where I live, and you’ll never see her again. Do you understand?’

‘Yes,’ answered Tony, nodding his head.

‘Then you may take yourself away now,’ said the sharp old woman. ‘I don’t want to be too hard upon you; but I’ve got this little girl to look after for her mother, and you must do as I say, or I shall carry her right off to be out of your way. Take your broom and go; and never you think of such a thing as taking this little girl to sweep a crossing again. I never heard of such a thing. There, go!’

Tony slunk away sadly, with a sudden downheartedness. He returned so joyous and triumphant, in spite of his weariness, that this unexpected and unpleasant greeting had been a very severe shock to him. With his broom dragging behind him, and with listless, slouching steps, he sauntered slowly back to his crossing; but he had no heart for it now.

Chapter XI

AMONG THIEVES

THE night fell early, for a thick fog came on in the afternoon. Tony cowered down upon his broom under the wall where Dolly had sat in the sunshine all the morning to watch him sweep his crossing. It was all over now. She was lost to him; for he should never dare go back to old Oliver's house, and face that terrible old woman again. There was nothing for him but to return to his old life and his old haunts; and a chill ran through him, body and spirit, as he thought of it. His heap of paper shavings under the counter, where the biting winds could not reach him, came to his mind, and the tears rushed to his eyes. But to-night, at least, there would be no need to sleep out of doors, for he had some money in the safest corner of his ragged pocket, tied up in it securely with a bit of string. He could afford to pay for a night's

lodging, and he knew very well where he could get one.

About nine o'clock Tony turned his weary feet towards a slum he knew of in Westminster, where there was a cellar open to everybody who could pay twopence for a night's shelter. His heart was very full and heavy with resentment against his enemy, and a great longing to see Dolly. He loitered about the door of the cellar, reluctant and almost afraid to venture in; for it was so long since he had been driven to any of these places that he felt nearly like a stranger among them. Besides, in former times he had been kicked, and beaten, and driven from the fire, and fought with by the bigger boys; and he had become unaccustomed to such treatment of late. How different this lodging-house was to the quiet peaceful home where Dolly knelt down every evening at her grandfather's knee, and prayed for him; for now she always put Tony's name into her childish prayers! He should never, never hear her again, nor see old Oliver seated in his armchair, smoking his long pipe, while he talked with that strange Friend and Master of his. Ah! he would never hear or know any more of that unseen Christ, who was so willing to be his

Master and Friend, for the Lord Jesus Christ could never come into such a wicked place as this, which was the only home he had. He had given him the crossing and the broom, and that was the end of it. He must take care of himself now, and keep out of gaol if he could, and if not, why then he had better make a business of thieving, and become as good a pickpocket as 'Clever Dog Tom,' who had once stolen a watch from a policeman himself.

Clever Dog Tom was the first to greet Tony when he slipped in at last, and he seemed inclined to make much of him ; but Tony was too troubled for receiving any consolation from Tom's friendly advances. He crept away into the darkest corner, and stretched himself on the thin straw which covered the damp and dirty floor, but he could not fall asleep. There was a good deal of quarrelling among the boys, and the men who wished to sleep swore long and loudly at them. Then there followed a fight, which grew so exciting at last that every person in the place, except Tony, gathered about the boys in a ring, encouraging and cheering them. It was long after midnight before silence and rest came, and then he fell into a broken slumber, dreaming of

Dolly and old Oliver, until he awoke and found his face wet with tears. He got up before any of his bedfellows were aroused, and made his way out into the fresh keen air of a December morning.

Day after day went by, and night after night. Tony was growing more indifferent again to the swearing and fighting of his old comrades. He began to listen with delight to the tales of Clever Dog Tom, who told him that hands like his would work well in his line, and his innocent-looking face would go a long way towards softening any judge and jury, or would bring him favour with the chaplain, and easy times in gaol. He kept his crossing still, and did tolerably well, earning enough to keep himself in food, and to pay for his night's shelter ; but he was beginning to hanker after something more. If he could not be good, and be on the same side as old Oliver and Dolly, he thought it would be better to be altogether on the other side, like Tom, who dressed well, and lived well, and was looked up to by other boys. It was a week after he had left old Oliver's house, and he was about to leave his crossing for the night, when a gentleman stopped him suddenly, and looked keenly into his face.

‘Hollo, my lad!’ he said, ‘you’re the boy I gave fourpence to a week ago for holding my horse. I told you to lay it out well. What did you do with it?’

‘Me and Dolly bought this broom,’ he answered, ‘and I’ve kept this crossing ever since.’

‘Well done!’ said the gentleman. ‘And who is Dolly?’

‘It’s a little girl as I was very fond of,’ replied Tony, with a deep sigh. It seemed so long ago that he spoke of his love for her as if it was a thing altogether passed away and dead, yet his heart still ached at the memory of it.

‘Well, here’s another fourpenny-bit for you,’ said his friend, ‘quite a new one. See how bright it is; no one has ever bought anything with it yet. Dolly will like to see it.’

Tony held it in the palm of his hand long after the gentleman was out of sight, gazing at it in the lamp-light. It was very beautiful and shining; and oh! how Dolly’s eyes would shine and sparkle if she could only see it! And she ought to see it. By right it belonged to her; for had he not given her his first fourpenny-piece freely, and had twenty kisses for it, and then had

she not given it him back to buy a broom with? she had never had a single farthing of all his earnings. How he would like to show her this beautiful piece of silver, and feel her soft little arms round his neck, when he said it was to be her very own! He felt that he dare not pass the night in the cellar with such a treasure about him, for Tom, who was so clever, would be sure to find out that his pocket was worth the picking, and Tony had not found that there was much honour among thieves. What was he to do? Where was he to go?

Chapter XII

TONY'S WELCOME

ALMOST without knowing where his feet were carrying him, Tony sauntered through the streets until he found himself at the turn into the alley within a few yards of Oliver's home, and his beloved Dolly. At any rate he could pass down it, and, if the shop-door was not shut, he would wrap his beautiful silver coin in a rag, and throw it into the inside; they would be sure to guess who had done it, and what it was for. It was dark down the alley, only one lamp and the greengrocer's gas lighting it up, and Tony stole along quietly in the shadow. It was nearly time for Dolly to be going to bed, he thought, and old Oliver was sure to be with her in the inner room; but just as he came into the revealing glare of the greengrocer's stall,

his ears rang and his heart throbbed violently at the sound of a shrill little scream of gladness, and the next moment he felt himself caught by Dolly's arms, and dragged into the house by them.

'Tony's come home, Tony's come home, ganpa!' she shouted with all her might. 'Dolly's found Tony at last!'

Dolly's voice quivered, and broke down into quick, childish sobs, while she held Tony very fast, lest he should escape from her once again; and old Oliver came quickly from the room beyond, and laid his hand fondly upon the boy's shoulder.

'Why have you kept away from us so long, Tony?' he asked.

'Oh, master!' he cried, 'I've been a wicked boy, and a miserable boy. Do forgive me, and I'll never do so no more. I s'pose you'll never let me sleep under the counter again?'

'Come in, come in!' answered Oliver, pushing him gently before him into the house. 'We've been waiting and watching for you every night, me and my little love. You ought not to have served us so, my lad; but we're

too glad to be angry with you. Charlotte's sharp, and she's very much afraid of low ways and manners; but she isn't a hard woman, and she didn't know anything about you. When I told her as you'd been left no bigger than my little love here to take care of yourself, alone, in London,—mother dead, and no father,—she shed tears about you, she did. And she left you the biggest of her eggs to be kept for your supper, with her kind love; and we've put it by for you. You shall have it this very night. Dolly, my love, bring me the little saucepan.'

'I'm not so clean as I could wish,' said Tony mournfully; for he had neglected himself during the last week, and looked very much like what he had done when he had first seen old Oliver and his little granddaughter.

'Take a bowl full of water into the shop, then,' answered Oliver, 'and wash yourself, while I boil the egg. Dolly 'll find you a bit of soap and a towel; she's learning to be grandpa's little house-keeper, she is.'

When Tony returned to the kitchen he looked a different being; the gloom was gone as well as the grime. He felt as if he had come to himself

after a long and very miserable dream. Here was old Oliver again, looking at him with a kindly light in his dim eyes, and Dolly dancing about, with her pretty merry little ways; and Beppo wagging his tail in joyous welcome, as he sniffed round and round him. Even the egg was a token of forgiveness and friendliness. That terrible old woman was not his enemy, after all. He recollected what she had said he must do, and he resolved to do it for Dolly's sake, and old Oliver's. He would learn to read and write, and he would pinch himself hard to buy some better clothing, lest he should continue to be a disgrace to them; shoes he must have first of all, as those were what the sharp but friendly old woman had particularly mentioned. At any rate, he could never run away again from this home, where he was so loved and cared for.

Oliver told him how sadly Dolly had fretted after him, and watched for him at the door, hour after hour, to see him come home again. He said that in the same way, only with a far greater longing and love, his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, was waiting for Tony to go to Him. He could not half understand it, but a vague feeling of a love passing all understanding sank deeply

into his heart. He fell asleep that night under the counter with the tranquil peacefulness of one who has been tossed about in a great storm and tempest, and has been brought safely to the desired haven.

Chapter XIII

NEW BOOTS

IT was several weeks before Tony could scrape together enough money for his new boots, though he pinched and starved himself with heroic courage and endurance. He did not mean to buy them at a shop; for he knew a place in Whitechapel where boots quite good enough for him were to be had for two or three shillings. He was neither ambitious nor fastidious; old boots patched up would do very well to start with, if he could only manage to get them before Aunt Charlotte came up to town again. She had sent word she was coming the last Saturday in January; and early in the afternoon of that day, before the train could come in from Stratford, Tony started off to the place where he intended to make his purchase.

It was a small open space in one of the streets of Whitechapel, where there was an area of flags,

lying off the pavement. Several traders held possession of this square, sitting on low stools, or cross-legged on the ground, with their stock-in-trade around them. One dealer bought and sold all kinds of old and rusty pieces of iron ; another, a woman, ill clad and with red eyes, displayed before her a dingy assortment of ragged clothes, which were cheapened by other spare and red-eyed women who held almost naked children by the hand. It was cold, and a bitter, keen east wind was searching every corner of London streets. The salesman Tony had come to deal with had a tolerable selection of old boots, very few of them pairs, some with pretty good upper-leathers, but with no soles worth speaking of ; and others thickly cobbled and patched, but good enough to keep the feet dry, without presenting a very creditable appearance. For the first time in his life Tony found out the perplexity of having a choice to make. There were none which exactly fitted him ; but a good fit is a luxury for richer folks than Tony, and he was not troubled about it. His chief anxiety was to look well in the eyes of Dolly's aunt, who might possibly let him see her on her way back to the station, if she approved of him ; and who would not now be

obliged to carry Dolly off with her, to be out of the way of his naked feet.

He fixed upon a pair at last, urged and coaxed to them by the dealer. They were a good deal too large, and his feet slipped about in them uncomfortably; but the man assured him that was how everybody, even gentlefolks, bought them, to leave room for growing. There was an awkward, uneven patch under one of the soles, and the other heel was worn down at the side; but at least they covered his feet well. He shambled away in them slowly and toilsomely, hardly knowing how to lift one foot after another, yet full of pride in his new possessions. It was a long way home to old Oliver's alley, between Holborn and the Strand; but he was in no hurry to arrive there before they had finished and cleared away their tea; so he travelled painfully in that direction, stopping now and then to regale himself at the attractive windows of tripe and cow-heel shops. He watched the lamplighters kindling the lamps and the shopkeepers lighting up their gas; and then he heard the great solemn clock of St. Paul's strike six. Tea would be quite over now, and Tony turned down a narrow back street, which would prove a nearer way home than the thronged

thoroughfares, and set off to run as fast as he could in his awkward and unaccustomed boots.

It was not long before he came to a sudden and sharp fall off the kerb-stone, as he trod upon a bit of orange-peel and slipped upon it. He felt stunned for a few seconds, and sat still rubbing his forehead. These back streets were very quiet, for the buildings were mostly offices and warehouses, and most of them were already closed for the night. He lifted himself up at length, and set his foot upon the flags; but a shrill cry of pain broke from his lips, and rang loudly through the quiet street. He fell back upon the pavement, quivering and trembling, with a chilly moisture breaking out upon his skin. What hurt had been done to him? How was it that he could not bear to walk? He took off his new boots, and tried once more, but with no better success. He could not endure the agony of standing or moving.

Yet he must move; he must get up and walk. If he did not go home, they would think he had run away again, for fear of meeting Dolly's aunt. At that thought he set off to crawl homewards upon his hands and knees, with suppressed groans, as his feet trailed uselessly along the ground.

Yet he knew he could not advance very far in this manner. What if he should have to lie all night upon the hard paving-stones! for he could not remember ever having seen a policeman in these back streets; and there did not seem to be anybody else likely to pass that way. It was freezing fast, now the sun was gone down. And his hands scraped up the frosty mud as he dragged himself along. If he stayed out all night, he must die of cold and pain before morning.

But if that was true which old Oliver said so often, that the Lord Jesus Christ loved him, and that He was always with those whom He loved, then he was not alone and helpless even here, in the deserted street, with the ice and darkness of a winter's night about him. Oh! if he could but feel the hand of Christ touching him, or hear the lowest whisper of His voice, or catch the dimmest sight of His face! Perhaps it was He who was helping him to crawl towards the stir and light of a more frequented street, which he could see afar off, though the pain he felt made him giddy and sick. It became too much for him at last, however, and he drew himself into the shelter of a warehouse door, and crouched down in a corner, crying, with clasped

hands and sobbing voice, 'O Lord Jesus Christ! Lord Jesus Christ!'

After uttering this cry Tony lay there for some minutes, his eyes growing glazed and his ears dull, when a footstep came briskly up the street, and someone, whom he could not now see for the strange dimness of his sight, stopped opposite to him, and then stooped to touch him on the arm.

'Why,' said a voice he seemed to know, 'you're my young friend of the crossing,—my little fourpenny-bit, I call you. What brings you sitting here this cold night?'

'I've fell down and hurt myself,' answered Tony faintly.

'Where?' asked the stranger.

'My leg,' he answered.

The gentleman stooped down yet lower, and passed his hand gently along Tony's leg till he came to the place where his touch gave him the most acute pain.

'Broken!' he said to himself. 'My boy, where's your home?'

'I haven't got any right home,' answered Tony, more faintly than before. He felt a strange numbness creeping over him, and his

lips were too parched and his tongue too heavy for speaking. The gentleman took off his own great-coat and wrapped it well about him, placing him at the same time in a more comfortable position. Then he ran quickly to the nearest street, hailed the first cab, and drove back to where Tony was lying.

Chapter XIV

IN HOSPITAL

THE pain Tony was suffering kept him partially conscious of what was happening to him. He knew that he was carried gently into a large hall, and that two or three persons came to look at him, to whom his new friend spoke in eager and rapid tones.

‘I know you do not take in accidents,’ he said; ‘but what could I do with the little fellow? He told me he had no home, and that was all he could say. You have two or three cots empty; and I’ll double my subscription if it’s necessary, rather than take him away. Come, doctor, you’ll admit my patient?’

‘I don’t think I could send him away, Mr. Ross,’ answered another hearty voice. ‘We must get him into bed as soon as possible.’

Tony felt himself carried upstairs into a large room, where there were a number of small beds,

with a pale little face lying on every pillow. There was a vacant cot at the end, and he was laid upon it, after having his tattered clothes taken off him. His new boots were gone altogether, having been left behind on the steps of the warehouse. His hands and knees, bruised with crawling along the frosty stones, were gently bathed with a soft sponge and warm water. He was surrounded by kind faces, looking pitifully down upon him, and the gentleman who had brought him there spoke to him in a very pleasant and cheering voice.

‘My boy,’ he said, ‘you have broken your leg in your fall; but the doctor here, who is a great friend of mine, is going to mend it for you. It will give you a good deal of pain for a few minutes; but you’ll bear it like a man, I know.’

‘Yes,’ murmured Tony; ‘but will you let me go as soon as it’s done?’

‘You could not do that,’ answered Mr. Ross, smiling. ‘It will be some weeks before you will be well enough to go; but you will be very happy here, I promise you.’

‘Oh! but I must go!’ cried Tony, starting up, but falling back again with a groan. ‘There’s Dolly and Mr. Oliver,—they’ll think I’ve run

away again, and I were trying all I could to get back to 'em. She'll be watching for me, and she'll fret ever so. Oh! Dolly, Dolly!

He spoke in a tone of so much grief, that the smile quite passed away from the face of Mr. Ross, and he laid his hand upon his, and answered him very earnestly :

'If you will tell me where they live,' he said, 'I will go at once and let them know all about your accident; and they shall come to see you to-morrow, if you are well enough to see them.'

Tony gave him very minute and urgent directions where to find old Oliver's shop; and then he resigned himself, with the patience and fortitude of most of the little sufferers in that hospital, to the necessary pain he had to bear.

It was Sunday afternoon when old Oliver and Dolly entered the hall of the Children's Hospital and inquired for Tony. There was something about the old man's look of age and the little child's sweet face which found them favour, even in a place where everybody was received with kindness. A nurse, who met them slowly climbing the broad staircase, turned back with them, taking Dolly's hand in hers, and led them up to the room where they would find Tony.

There were many windows in it, and the sunshine, which never shone into their own home, was lighting it up gaily. The cots were all covered with white counterpanes, and most of the little patients, who had been asleep the night before, were now awake, and sitting up in bed, with little tables before them, which they could slide up and down as they wished along the sides of their cots. There was no sign of medicine, and nothing painful to see, except the wan faces of the children themselves. But Oliver and Dolly had no eyes but for Tony, and they hurried on to the corner where he was lying. His face was very white, and his eyelids were closed, and his lips drawn in as if he were still in pain. But at the very gentle and almost frightened touch of Dolly's fingers his eyes opened quickly, and then how his face changed! It looked as if all the sunshine in the room had centred upon it, and his voice shook with gladness.

'Dolly hasn't had to fret for Tony this time,' he said.

'But Dolly will fret till Tony gets well again,' she answered, clasping both her small hands round his.

‘No, no!’ said old Oliver; ‘Dolly’s going to be a very good girl, and help grandpa to mind shop till Tony comes home again.’

This promise of promotion partly satisfied Dolly, and she sat still upon Oliver’s knee beside Tony’s cot, where his eyes could rest with contentment and pleasure upon them both, though the nurse would not let them talk much. When they went away she took them through the girls’ wards in the storey below; for the girls were more sumptuously lodged than the boys. These rooms were very lofty, with windows reaching to the cornice of the ceiling, and with grand marble chimney-pieces about the fireplaces; for in former times, the nurse told them, this had been a gentleman’s mansion, where gay parties and assemblies had been held; but never had there been such a party and assembly as the one now in it.

Old Oliver walked down between the rows of cots, with his little love clinging shyly to his hand, smiling tenderly upon each poor little face turned to look at them. Some of the children smiled back to him, and nodded cheerfully to Dolly, lifting up their dolls for her to see, and calling to her to listen to the pretty tunes their

musical boxes were playing. But others lay quietly upon their pillows half asleep, with beautiful pictures hanging over their feeble heads—pictures of Christ carrying a lamb in His arms; and again, of Christ with a little child upon His knee; and again, of Christ holding the hand of the young girl who seemed dead, but whose ear heard His voice saying ‘Arise!’ and she came to life again in her father’s and mother’s house. The tears stood in old Oliver’s eyes, and his white head trembled a great deal before he had seen all, and given one of his tender glances to each child.

‘I wonder whatever the Lord ’ud have said,’ he exclaimed, ‘if there’d been such a place as this in His days! He’d have come here very often. He does come, I know, and walks to and fro here of nights when the little ones are asleep, or maybe awake through pain, and He blesses every one of them. Ah, bless the little children, and the good folks who keep a place like this. Bless them every one!’

He felt reluctant to go away; but his time was gone, and the nurse was needed elsewhere. She kissed Dolly before she went, putting a biscuit in her hand, and told Oliver the house

was open every Sunday afternoon for the friends of the children, if he chose to come again; and then they walked home with slow, short footsteps, and all the Sunday evening they talked together of the beautiful place they had seen, and how happy Tony would be in the Children's Hospital.

Chapter XV

TONY'S FUTURE PROSPECTS

OLD Oliver and Dolly made several visits to Tony while he was in the hospital. Every Sunday afternoon they went back to it, until its great door, and wide staircase, and sunny ward, became almost as familiar to them as their own dull little house. Tony recovered quickly, yet he was there some weeks before the doctor pronounced him strong enough to turn out again to rough it in the world. As he grew better he learned a number of things which were making him a wiser, as well as a stronger boy, before the time came for him to leave.

The day before he was to go out of hospital, his friend, Mr. Ross, who had been often to see him, called for the last time, and found him in the room where the little patients who were nearly well were at play together. Some of them were making believe to have a feast with

a small dinner-service of wooden plates and dishes, and a few bits of orange-peel, and biscuits; but Tony was sitting quietly and gravely on one side, looking on from a distance. He had never learned to play.

'Antony,' said Mr. Ross—he was the only person who ever called him Antony, and it seemed to make more of a man of him—'what are you thinking to do when you leave here to-morrow?'

'I s'pose I must go back to my crossing,' answered Tony, looking very grave.

'No, I think I can do better for you than that,' said his friend. 'I have a sister living out in the country, about fifty miles from London; and she wants a boy to help the gardener, and run on errands for the house. She has promised to provide you with a home, and clothing, and to send you to school for two years, till you are about twelve, for we think you must be about ten years old now; and after that you shall have settled wages.'

Tony listened with a quick throbbing of his heart and a contraction in his throat, which hindered him from speaking all at once when Mr. Ross had finished. What a grand thing it

would be for himself! But then there were old Oliver and Dolly to be remembered.

'It 'ud do first-rate for me,' he said at last, 'and I'd try my best to help in the garden; but I couldn't never leave Mr. Oliver and the little girl. She'd fret ever so; and he's gone so forgetful he'd lose his own head, if he could anyhow. Why! of a morning they sell him any papers as they've too many of. Sometimes it's all the "Star," and sometimes it's all the "Standard"; and them as buys one won't have the other. I don't know why, I'm sure. But you see when I go for 'em I say twenty-five this, and thirteen that, and I count 'em over pretty sharp, I can tell you; though I couldn't read at all afore I came here, but I could tell which was which easy enough. Then he'd never think to open his shop some mornings; and other mornings he'd open at four or five o'clock, just when he woke of hisself. No. I must stay and take care of 'em a bit; but thank you, sir, all the same.'

He had spoken so gravely and thoughtfully that his reasons went directly to the heart of Mr. Ross; but he asked him one more question, before he could let his good plan for the boy drop.

'What has he done for you, Antony? Is he any relation of yours?'

'No, no!' cried Tony, his eyes growing bright, 'I haven't got any relation in all the world; but he took me in out of love, and let me sleep comfortable under the counter, instead of in the streets. I love him, and Dolly, I do. I'll stay by 'em as long as ever I live, if I have to sweep a crossing till I'm an old man like him. Besides, I hear him speak a good word for me often and often to his Master; and I s'pose nobody else 'ud do that.'

'What master?' inquired Mr. Ross.

'Him,' answered Tony, pointing to a picture of the Saviour blessing young children; 'he's always talking to Him as if he could see Him, and he tells Him everythink. No, it 'ud be better for me to stay with him and Dolly, and keep hard by my crossing, than go away from 'em, and have clothes, and lodging, and schooling for nothink.'

'I think it would,' said Mr. Ross; 'so you must go on as you are, Antony, till I can find you something better than a crossing. You are looking very well, my boy; that's a nice, warm suit of clothes you have on, better than the rags you came in by a long way.'

It was a sailor's suit, sent to the hospital by some mother, whose boy had perhaps outgrown it; or, it may be, whose boy had been taken away from all her tender care for him. It was of good, rough, thick blue cloth, and fitted Tony well. He had grown a good deal during his illness, and his face had become whiter and more refined; his hair, too, was cut to a proper length, and parted down the side, no longer lying about his head in a tangled mass. He coloured up with pleasure as Mr. Ross looked approvingly at him.

'They've lent it me till I go out,' he said, with a tone slightly regretful in his voice. 'I only wish Dolly could have seen me in it, and her Aunt Charlotte. My own things were too ragged for me to wear 'em in a place like this.'

'They've given it to you, Antony,' replied Mr. Ross; 'those are the clothes you will go home in to-morrow.'

It seemed too much for Tony to believe, though a nurse, who was sitting by and sewing away busily, told him it was quite true. He was intensely happy all the rest of the day, often standing up, and almost straining his neck to get a satisfactory view of his own back, and stroking

the nap of his blue trousers with a fondling touch. They would all see him in it ; old Oliver, Dolly, and Aunt Charlotte. There would be no question now as to his fitness for taking Dolly out for a walk ; he would be dressed well enough to attend upon a princess. This made famous amends for the pair of old boots he had lost the night he broke his leg ; a loss he had often silently lamented over in his own mind. The nurse told him she was patching up his old clothes, and making him a cap, to wear when he was at work on his crossing, for the new ones were much too good for that ; and Tony felt as rich as if a large fortune had been left to him.

It was a very joyful thing to go home again. Dolly was a little shy at first of this new Tony, so different from the poor, ragged, wild-looking old Tony ; but a very short time was enough to make her familiar with his nice blue suit, and the anchor buttons upon it. He found his place under the counter all nicely papered to keep the draughts out ; and a little chaff mattress, made by Aunt Charlotte, laid down instead of the shavings upon the floor. It was even pleasanter to be here than in the hospital.

But Tony found it hard work to go back to

his crossing in the morning; and he could not make out what was the matter with himself, he felt so cross and idle. His old clothes seemed really such horrid rags that he could scarcely bear to feel them about him; and if any passer-by looked closely at him, he went red and hot all over. He was not so successful as he thought he had been before his accident, or as he thought he ought to be; for the roads were getting cleaner with the drier weather, and few persons considered it necessary to give him a copper for his almost needless labour. Worst of all,—Clever Dog Tom found him out, and would come often to see him; sometimes jeering him for his poor spirit in being content with such low work, and sometimes boasting of the fine things he could do, and displaying the fine clothes he could wear. It was truly very hard work for Tony, after his long holiday at the hospital, where he had had as much luxury and attention as a rich man's son.

But at home in the evening Tony felt all right again. Old Oliver set him to learn to read and write, and he was making rapid progress, more rapid than Dolly, who began at the same time, but who was apt to look upon it all as only

another kind of game, of which she grew more quickly tired than of hide-and-seek. There was no one to check her, or to make her understand it was real, serious work ; neither old Oliver nor Tony could find any fault with their darling. Now and then there came letters from her mother, full of anxious questions about her and loving messages to her, telling her to be a good girl till she came back, but never saying a word as to when there was any chance of her returning to England. In one of these letters she sent word that a little sister was come for her out in India, who was just like what Dolly herself had been when she was a baby ; but neither Oliver nor Tony could quite believe that. There never had been such a child as Dolly ; there never would be again.

Chapter XVI

A BUD FADING

A SECOND summer went by with its long, hot days, when the sun seemed to stand still in the sky, and to dart down its most sultry beams into the dustiest and closest streets. Out in the parks, and in the broad thoroughfares where the fresh breeze could sweep along early in the morning, and in the evening as soon as the air grew cooler, it was very pleasant weather ; and the people who could put on light summer dresses enjoyed it very much. But away among the thickly - built and crowded houses, where there were thousands of persons breathing over and over again the same hot and stagnant atmosphere, it seemed as if the most delicate and weakly among them must be suffocated by the breathless heat. Old Oliver suffered very greatly, but he said nothing about it ; indeed, he generally forgot the cause of his

languor and feebleness. He never knew now the day of the week, nor the month of the year. If anyone had told him in the dog-days of July that it was still April, he would only have answered gently that it was bright, warm weather for the time of the year.

But about old times his memory was good enough; he could tell long stories of his boyhood, and describe the hills of his native place in such a manner as to set Tony full of longings after the country, with its corn-fields, and meadows, and hedgerows, which he had never seen. He remembered his Bible, too, and could repeat chapter after chapter describing his Master's life, as they sat together in the perpetual twilight of their room; for now that it was summer-time it did not seem right to keep the gas burning.

Tony's crossing had failed him altogether, for in dry weather nobody wanted it; but in this extremity Mr. Ross came to his aid, and procured him a place as errand-boy, where he was wanted from eight o'clock in the morning till seven at night; so that he could still open old Oliver's shop, and fetch him his right papers before he went out, and put the shutters up

when he came back. To become an errand-boy was a good step forwards, and Tony was more than content. He never ran about bareheaded and barefooted now as he had done twelve months before; and he had made such good progress in reading and writing that he could already make out the directions upon the parcels he had to deliver, after they had been once read over to him. He did not object to the dry weather and clean streets as he had done when his living depended upon his crossing; on the contrary, he enjoyed the sunshine, and the crowds of gaily-dressed people, for he could hold up his head amongst them, and no longer went prowling about in the gutters searching after bits of orange-peel. He kicked them into the gutters instead, mindful of that accident which had befallen him, but which turned out so full of good for him.

But, if there had been any eye to see it, a very slow, and very sad change was creeping over Dolly; so slowly, indeed, that perhaps none but her mother's eye could have seen it at first. On the first of every month, which old Oliver knew by the magazines coming in, he marked how much his little love had grown

by placing her against the side-post of the door, and making a thick pencil line where her curly head reached to. He looked at this record often, smiling at the rate his little woman was growing taller ; but it was really no wonder that his dim eyes, loving as they were, never saw how the rosy colour was dying away out of her cheeks, as gradually as the red glow fades away in the west after the sun has set, nor how the light grew fainter and fainter in her blue eyes, until they looked at him very heavily from under her drooping eyelids. The house was too dark for any sight to see very clearly ; the full, strong, healthy light of the sun could not find its way into it, and day after day Dolly became more like one of those plants growing in shady places, which live and shoot up, but only put out pale and sickly leaves and feeble buds. One by one, and by little and little, with degrees as small as her own tiny footsteps, she lost all her merry ways, dropping them, here one and there another, upon the path she was silently treading ; as little children let fall the flowers they have gathered in the meadows, along their road homewards. Yet all the time old Oliver was loving and cherishing her as the dearest of all

treasures, second only to the Master whom he loved so fully ; but he never discovered that there was any change in her. Dolly fell into very quiet ways, and would sit still for hours together, her arm around Beppo, and her sweet, patient little face, which was growing thin and hollow, turned towards the flickering light of the fire, while Oliver potted toilsomely about his house, forgetting many things, but always ready with a smile and a fond word for his granddaughter.

Just as Oliver was too old to feel any anxiety about Dolly, so Tony was too young, and knew too little of sickness and death. Moreover, when he came home in the evening, full of the business of the day, with a number of stories to tell of what had happened to him, and what he had seen, Dolly was always more lively, and had a feverish colour on her face, and a brilliant light in her eyes. He seemed to bring life and strength with him, and she liked him to nurse her on his knee, which did not grow tired and stiff like her grandfather's. How should Tony detect anything amiss with her? She never complained of feeling any pain, and he was glad for her to be very quiet and still while he was busy with his lessons.



HE DREW HIS LITTLE LOVE BETWEEN HIS KNEES, AND PUT ON HIS
SPECTACLES TO GAZE INTO HER FACE.

But when the summer was ended, and after the damp warm fogs of November were over, and a keen, black frost set in sharply before Christmas—a frost which had none of the beauty of white rime and clear blue skies, but which hung over the city like a pall, and penetrated to every fireside with an icy breath; when only the strong and the healthy, who were well clothed and well fed, could meet it bravely, while the delicate, and sickly, and poverty-stricken shrank before it, and were chilled through and through, then Dolly drooped and failed altogether. Even old Oliver's dull ears began to hear a little cough, which seemed to echo from some grave not very far away; and when he drew his little love between his knees, and put on his spectacles to gaze into her face, the dearest face in all the world to him, even his eyes saw something of its wanness, and the hollow lines which had come upon it since the summer had passed away. The old man felt troubled about her, yet he scarcely knew what to do. He bought sweetmeats to soothe her cough, and thought sometimes that he must ask somebody or other about a doctor for her; but his treacherous memory always let the thought slip out of his

mind. He intended to take counsel with his sister when she came to see him ; but Aunt Charlotte was herself very ill with an attack of rheumatism, and could not get up to old Oliver's house.

Chapter XVII

A VERY DARK SHADOW

THE Christmas week passed by, and the new year came in, cold and bleak, but Tony was well secured against the weather, and liked the frosty air, which made it pleasant to run as fast as he could from place to place as he delivered his parcels. When Boxing Day came, which was half-holiday for him, he returned to the house at midday, carrying with him three mince - pies, which he had felt himself rich enough to buy in honour of the holiday. He had for a long time been reckoning upon shutting up shop for the whole afternoon, and upon going out for a long stroll through the streets with old Oliver and Dolly; and now that the hour was positively come he felt very light-hearted and full of spirits, defying the wind which wrestled with him at every turn. Dolly must be wrapped up well, he said to himself, and old Oliver must put

on his drab great-coat, with mother-o'-pearl buttons, which he had brought up from the country forty years ago, and which was still good for keeping out the cold. He ran down the alley, and passed through the shop whistling cheerily, and, disdainingly to lift the flap of the counter, he took a running vault over it, and landed at once inside the open kitchen-door.

But there was old Oliver sitting close to the fire, with Dolly on his knee, and her little head lying upon his breast, while the tears trickled slowly down his furrowed cheeks on to her pretty curls. Beppo was standing between his legs, licking Dolly's small hand, which hung languidly by her side. Her eyelids were closed, and her face was deadly white; but when Tony uttered a great cry of trouble, and fell on his knees before her, she opened her heavy eyes, and stretched out her cold thin hand to stroke his cheeks. 'Dolly's so very ill, Tony,' she murmured; 'poor Dolly's very ill indeed.'

'I don't know whatever is the matter with my little love,' said the old man, in a low and trembling voice; 'she fell down all of a sudden, and I thought she was dead, Tony; but she's

coming round again now. Isn't my little love better now ?'

'Yes, ganpa, yes ; Dolly's better,' she answered faintly.

'Let me hold her, master,' said Tony, his heart beating fast ; 'I can hold her stronger and more comfortable, maybe, than you. You're tired ever so, and you'd better get yourself a bit of dinner. Shall Tony nurse you now, Dolly ?'

The little girl raised her arms to him, and Tony took her gently into his own, sitting down upon the old box in the chimney-corner, and putting her to nestle comfortably against him. Dolly closed her eyes again, and by and by he knew that she had fallen into a light sleep, while old Oliver moved noiselessly to and fro, only now and then saying half aloud, in a tone of strange earnestness and entreaty, 'Lord ! dear Lord !'

After awhile the old man came and bent over them both, taking Dolly's arm softly between his withered fingers, and looking down at it with a shaking head.

'She's very thin, Tony ; look at this little arm,' he said, 'wasting away ! wasting away ! I've watched all my little ones waste away except

my poor Susan. Couldn't there anything be done to save her?'

'Ay!' answered Tony, in an energetic whisper, while he clasped Dolly a little tighter in his arms; 'ay! they could cure her easily at the hospital. Bless yer! there were little 'uns ten times worse than her as they sent home cured. Let us take her there as soon as ever she wakes up, and she'll be quite well directly, I promise you. The doctor knows me, and I'll speak to Mr. Ross for her. Do you get a bit of dinner, and hearten yourself up for it; and we'll set off as soon as she's awake.'

Old Oliver turned away comforted, and prepared his own and Tony's dinner, and put a mince-pie into the oven to be ready to tempt Dolly's appetite when she awoke. But she slept heavily all the afternoon till it was almost dark outside, and the lamps were being lit, when she awoke, restless and feverish.

'Would Dolly like to go to that nice place, where the little girls had the dolls and the music?' asked Tony, in a quavering voice which he could scarcely keep from sobs; 'the good place where Tony got well again, and they gave him his new clothes? Everybody 'ud be so wery kind to

poor little Dolly, and she'd come home again, quite cured and strong, like Tony was.'

'Yes, yes!' cried Dolly eagerly, raising herself up in his arms; 'it's a nice place, and the sun shines, and Dolly 'ud like to go. Only she'll be sure to come back to ganpa.'

It was some time yet before they were quite ready to start, though Dolly could not be coaxed to eat the hot mince-pie, or anything else. Old Oliver had to get himself into his drab overcoat, and the ailing child had to be protected in the best way they could against the searching wind. After they had put on all her own warmest clothing, Tony wrapped his own thick blue jacket about her, and lifting her very tenderly in his arms, they turned out into the streets, closely followed by Beppo.

It was now quite night, but the streets were well lighted from the shop windows, and throngs of people were hurrying hither and thither; for it was Boxing-night, and all the lower classes of the inhabitants were taking holiday. But old Oliver saw and heard nothing of the crowd. He walked on by Tony's side, with feeble and tottering steps, deaf and blind, but whispering all the while, with trembling lips, to One whom no

one else could see or hear. Once or twice Tony saw a solemn smile flit across his face, and he nodded his head and raised his hand, as one who gives his assent to what is said to him. So they passed on through the noisy streets till they reached quieter ones, where there were neither shops nor many passers-by, and there they found the home where they were going to leave their treasure for a time.

Chapter XVIII

NO ROOM FOR DOLLY

OLD Oliver rang the house-bell very quietly, for Dolly seemed to be asleep again, and lay quite still in Tony's arms, which were growing stiff, and benumbed by the cold. The door was opened by a porter, whose face was strange to them both, for he had only come in for the day while the usual one took holiday. Old Oliver presented himself in front, and pointed at his little grandchild as Tony held her in his arms, while he spoke to the porter in a voice which trembled greatly.

'We've brought you our little girl, who is very ill,' he said, 'but she'll soon get well in here, I know. I'd like to see the doctor, and tell him all about her.'

'We're quite full,' answered the porter, filling up the doorway.

'Full?' repeated old Oliver, in a tone of questioning.

'Ay! all our cots are full,' he replied, 'chockfull. There ain't no more room. We've turned two or three away this morning, when they came at the right time. This isn't the right time to bring any child here.'

'But my little love is very ill,' continued old Oliver; 'this is the right place, isn't it? The place where they nurse little children who are ill?'

'It's all right,' said the porter; 'it's the right place enough, only it's brimful, and running over, as you may say. We couldn't take in one more, if it was ever so. But you may come in and sit down in the hall for a minute or two, while I fetch one of the ladies.'

Old Oliver and Tony entered, and sat down upon a bench inside. There was the broad staircase, with its shallow steps, which Dolly's tiny feet had climbed so easily, and it led up to the warm, pleasant nurseries, where little children were already falling asleep, almost painlessly, in their cosy cots. Tony could not believe that there was not room for their darling, who had been so willing to come to the place she knew so well, yet a sob broke from his lips, which dis-

turbed Dolly in her sleep, for she moaned once or twice, and stirred uneasily in his arms. The old man leaned his hands upon the top of his stick, and rested his white head upon them, until they heard light footsteps, and the rustling of a dress, and they saw a lady coming downstairs to them.

‘I think there’s some mistake here, ma’am,’ said Oliver, his eye wandering absently about the large entrance-hall; ‘this is the Hospital for Sick Children, I think, and I’ve brought my little grandchild here, who is very ill indeed, yet the man at the door says there’s no room for her. I think it must be a mistake.’

‘No,’ said the lady; ‘I am sorry to say it is no mistake. We are quite full; there is not room for even one more. Indeed, we have been obliged to send cases away before to-day. Who is your recommendation from?’

‘I didn’t know you’d want any recommendation,’ answered old Oliver, very mournfully; ‘she’s very ill, and you could cure her here, and take better care of her than Tony and me, and I thought that was enough. I never thought of getting any recommendation, and I don’t know where I could get one.’

'Mr. Ross 'ud give us one,' said Tony eagerly.

'Yet even then,' answered the lady, 'we could not take her in until some of the cots are empty.'

'You don't know me,' interrupted Tony eagerly; 'but Mr. Ross brought me here, a year ago now, and they cured me, and set me up stronger than ever. They was so wery kind to me, that I couldn't think of anythink else save bringing our little girl to 'em. I'm sure they'd take her in, if they only knew it was her. You jest say as it's Tony and Dolly, as everybody took such notice of, and they'll never turn her away, I'm sure.'

'I wish we could take her,' said the lady, with tears in her eyes; 'but it is impossible. We should be obliged to turn some other child out, and that could not be done to-night. You had better bring her again in the morning, and we'll see if there is anyone well enough to make room for her. Let me look at the poor child for a minute.'

She lifted up the collar of Tony's blue jacket, which covered Dolly's face, and looked down at it pitifully. It was quite white now, and was pinched and hollow, with large blue eyes shining

too brightly. She stretched out her arms to the lady, and made a great effort to smile.

‘Put Dolly into a pretty bed,’ she murmured, ‘where the sun shines, and she’ll soon get well and go home again to ganpa.’

‘What can I do?’ cried the lady, the tears now running down her face. ‘The place is quite full; we cannot take in one more, not one. Bring her here again in the morning, and we will see then if we can do anything for her.’

‘How many children have you got here?’ asked old Oliver.

‘We have only seventy-five cots,’ she answered, sobbing; ‘and in a winter like this they’re always full.’

‘Only seventy-five!’ repeated the old man, very sorrowfully. ‘Only seventy-five, and there are hundreds and hundreds of little children ill in London! They are ill in houses like mine, where the sun never shines. Is there no other place like this we could take our little love to?’

‘There are two or three other hospitals,’ she answered, ‘but they are a long way off, and none of them as large as ours. They are sure to be full just now. I think there are not more

than a hundred and fifty cots in all London for sick children.'

'Then there's no room for my Dolly?' he said.

The lady shook her head without speaking, for she had her handkerchief up to her face.

'Eh!' cried old Oliver in a wailing voice, 'I don't know whatever the dear Lord 'll say to that.'

He made a sign to Tony that they must be going home again; and the boy raised himself up with a strange weight and burden upon his heart. Old Oliver put his stick down, and took Dolly into his own arms, and laid her head down on his breast.

'Let me carry her a little way, Tony,' he said. 'She's as light as a feather, even to poor old grandpa. I'd like to carry my little love a bit of the way home.'

'I'll tell you what I can do,' said the lady, wrapping Dolly up and kissing her before she covered her pale face; 'if you will tell me where you live I will speak to the doctor as soon as he comes in—for he is out just now—and perhaps he will come to see her. He knows a great deal about children, and is fond of them.'

'Thank you, thank you kindly, ma'am,' answered old Oliver, feeling a little comforted. But when they stood outside, and the bleak wind blew about them, and he could see the soft glimmer of the light in the windows, within which other children were safely sheltered and carefully tended, his spirit sank again. He tottered now and then under his light burden; but he could not be persuaded to give up his little child to Tony again. These streets were quiet, with handsome houses on each side, and from one and another there came bursts of music and laughter as they passed by; yet Tony could catch most of the words which the old man was speaking.

'Dear Lord,' he said, 'there's only room for seventy-five of Thy little lambs that are pining and wasting away in every dark street and alley like mine. Whatever can Thy people be thinking about? They've got their own dear little children, who are ill sometimes, spite of all their care; and they can send for the doctor, and do all that's possible, never looking at the money it costs; but when they are well again they never think of the poor little ones who are sick and dying, with nobody to help them or care

for them as I care for this little one. Oh, Lord, Lord! let my little love live! Yet Thou knows what is best, and Thou'lt do what is best. Thou loves her more than I do; and see, Lord, she is very ill indeed.'

They reached home at last, after a weary and heartbroken journey, and carried Dolly in and laid her upon old Oliver's bed. She was wide awake now, and looked very peaceful, smiling quietly into both their faces as they bent over her. Tony gazed deep down into her eyes, and met a glance from them which sent a strange tremor through him. He crept silently away, and stole into his dark bed under the counter, where he stretched himself upon his face, and buried his mouth in the chaff pillow to choke his sobs. What was going to happen to Dolly? What could it be that made him afraid of looking again into her patient and tranquil little face?

Chapter XIX

THE GOLDEN CITY

TONY lay there in the dark, overwhelmed by his unusual terror and sorrow, until he heard the voice of old Oliver calling his name feebly. He hurried to him, and found him still beside the bed where Dolly was lying. He had taken off most of her clothes, and put her white nightgown over the rest, that she might sleep warmly in them all the night, for her little hands and feet felt very chilly to his touch. The fire had gone out while they were away, and the grate looked very black and cheerless. The room was in great disorder, just as they had left it, and the gas, which was burning high, cast a cruel glare upon it all. But Tony saw nothing except the dear face of Dolly, resting on one cheek upon the pillow, with her curly hair tossed about it in confusion, and her open eyes gathering a strange film. Beppo had made his way to her side, and

pushed his head under her lifeless little hand, which tried to pat it now and then. Old Oliver was sitting on the bedstead, his eyes fastened upon her, and his whole body trembled violently. Tony sank down upon his knees, and flung his arm over Dolly, as if to save her from the unseen power which threatened to take her away from them.

‘Don’t ky, ganpa,’ she said softly; ‘don’t ky more than a minute. Nor Tony. Are I going to die, ganpa?’

‘Yes, my little love,’ cried old Oliver, moaning as he said it.

‘Where are I going to?’ asked Dolly, very faintly.

‘You’re going to see my Lord and Master,’ he said; ‘Him as loves little children so, and carries them in His arms, and never lets them be sorrowful or ill or die again.’

‘Does He live in a bootiful place?’ she asked again.

‘It’s a more beautiful place than I can tell,’ answered old Oliver. ‘The Lord Jesus gives them light brighter than the sun; and the streets are all of gold, and there are many little children there, who always see the face of their Father.’

‘Dolly’s going rere,’ said the little child solemnly.

She smiled for a minute or two, holding Beppo’s ear between her failing fingers, and playing with it. Tony’s eyes were dim with tears, yet he could see her dear face clearly through them. What could he do? Was there no one to help?

‘Master, master!’ he cried. ‘If the Lord Jesus is here He can save her. Ask Him, master.’

But old Oliver paid no heed to him. For the child who was passing away from him he was all eye and ear, watching and listening as keenly as in his best and strongest days; but he was blind and deaf to everything else around him. Tony’s voice could not reach his brain.

‘Will ganpa come rere?’ whispered the failing and faltering voice of Dolly.

‘Very soon,’ he answered; a radiant smile coming to his face, which made her smile as her eyes caught the glory of it. ‘Very, very soon, my little love. You’ll be there to meet me when I come.’

‘Dolly ’ll watch for ganpa,’ she murmured, with long pauses between the words, which

seemed to drop one by one upon Tony's ear ; ' and Dolly 'll watch at the door for Tony to come home ; and she'll fret ever so if he never comes.'

Tony felt her stir restlessly under his arm, and stretch her tiny limbs upon the bed as if she were very tired, and the languid eyelids drooped slowly till they quite hid her blue eyes, and she sighed softly as children sigh when they fall asleep, weary of their play. Old Oliver laid his shaking hand tenderly upon her head.

' Dear Lord !' he said, ' take my little love to Thyself. I give her up to Thee.'

It seemed to Tony as if a thick mist of darkness fell all about him, and as if he were sinking down, down, very low into some horrible pit where he would never see the light of day again. But by and by he came to himself, and found old Oliver sobbing in short, heavy sobs, and swaying himself to and fro, while Beppo was licking Dolly's hand, and barking with a sharp, quiet bark, as he had been wont to do when he wanted her to play with him. The child's small features were quite still, but there was an awful smile upon them such as there had never been before, and Tony could not bear to look upon it. He crossed her tiny hands lightly over one another upon her breast, and then

he lifted Beppo away gently, and drew the bed-clothes about her, so as to hide her smiling face.

‘Master,’ he cried, ‘master, is she gone?’

Old Oliver only answered by a deep moan; and Tony put his arm about him, and raised him up.

‘Come to your own chair, master,’ he said.

He yielded to Tony like a child, and seated himself in the chair, where he had so often sat and watched Dolly while he smoked his pipe. The boy put his pipe between his fingers; but he only let it fall to the ground, where it broke into many pieces. Tony did not know what to do, nor where to go for any help.

‘Lord,’ he said, ‘if you really love the old master, do something for him; for I don’t know whatever to do, now little Dolly’s gone.’

He sat down on his old box, staring at Oliver and the motionless form on the bed, with a feeling of despair tugging at his heart. He could scarcely believe it was all true; for it was not very long since—only it seemed like long years—since he had leaped over the counter in his light-heartedness. But he had not sat there many minutes before he heard a distinct, rather loud knock at the shop-door, and he ran hastily to ask who was there.

‘Antony,’ said a voice he knew very well, ‘I have come with the doctor, to see what we can do for your little girl.’

In an instant Tony opened the door, and as Mr. Ross entered the boy flung his arms round him, and hid his face against him, sobbing bitterly.

‘Oh! you’ve come too late,’ he cried, ‘you’ve come too late! Dolly’s dead, and I’m afraid the master’s going away from me as well. They couldn’t take her in, and she died after we had brought her home.’

The doctor and Mr. Ross went on into the inner room, and Tony pointed silently to the bed where Dolly lay. Old Oliver roused himself at the sound of strange voices, and, leaning upon Tony’s shoulder, he staggered to the bedside, and drew the clothes away from her dear, smiling face.

‘I don’t murmur,’ he said. ‘My dear Lord can’t do anything unkind. He’ll come and speak to me presently, and comfort me; but just now I’m deaf and blind, even to Him. I’ve not forgot Him, and He hasn’t forgot me; but there’s a many things ought to be done, and I cannot think what.’

‘Leave it all to us,’ said Mr. Ross, leading him

back to his chair. 'But have you no neighbour you can go and stay with for to-night? You are an old man, and you must not lose your night's sleep.'

'No,' he answered, shaking his head; 'I'd rather stay here in my own place, if I'd a hundred other places to go to. I'm not afraid of my little love,—no, no! When everything is done as ought to be done, I'll lie in my own bed and watch her. It won't be lonesome, as long as she's here.'

In an hour's time all was settled for that night. A little resting-place had been made for the dead child in a corner of the room, where she lay covered with a coarse white sheet, which was the last one left of those which old Oliver's wife had spun in her girlhood. The old man had given his promise to go to bed when Mr. Ross and the doctor were gone; and he slept lightly, his face turned towards the place where his little love was sleeping. A faint light burnt all night in the room, and Tony, who could not fall asleep, sat in the chimney-corner, with Beppo upon his knees. There was an unutterable, quiet sorrow within him, mingled with a strange awe. That little child, who had played with him, and kissed him only a day since, was already gone into the

unseen world, which was so very near to him now, though it had seemed so very far away and so empty before. It must be very near, since she had gone to it so quickly ; and it was no longer empty, for Dolly was there ; and she had said she would watch at the door till he came home.

Chapter XX

A FRESH DAY DAWNS

OLD Oliver and Tony saw their darling buried in a little grave in a cemetery miles away from their own home, and then they returned, desolate and bereaved, to the deserted city, which seemed empty indeed to them. The house had never looked so very dark and dreary before. Yet from time to time old Oliver forgot that Dolly was gone altogether, and could never come back; for he would call her in his eager, quavering tones, or search for her in some of her hiding-places, where she had often played at hide-and-seek with him. When meal-times came round he would put out Dolly's plate and cup, which had been bought on purpose for her, with gay flowers painted upon them; and in the evening over his pipe, when he had been used to talk to his Lord, he now very often said nothing but repeat again and again Dolly's little

prayer, which he had himself taught her, 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.' It was quite plain to Tony that it would never do to leave him alone in his house and shop.

'I've give up my place as errand-boy,' he said to Mr. Ross, 'cause the old master grows worse and worse for forgetting, and I must mind shop for him now as well as I can. He's not off his head, as you may say; he's sharp enough sometimes; but there's no trusting to him being sharp always. He talks to Dolly as if she was here, and could hear him, till I can't hardly bear it. But I'm very fond of him—fonder of him than anythink else, 'cept my little Dolly; and I've made up my mind as his Master shall be my Master, and he's always ready to tell me all he knows about Him. I'm no ways afeared of not getting along.'

Tony found that they got along very well. Mr. Ross made a point of going in to visit them every week, and of seeing how the business prospered in the boy's hands; and he put as much as he could in his way. Sad and sorrowful as the days were, they passed over, one after another, bringing with them at least the habit of living without Dolly. Every Sunday after-

noon, however, old Oliver and Tony walked slowly through the streets, for the old man could only creep along with Tony's help, till they reached the Children's Hospital; but they never passed the door, nor entered in through it. Old Oliver would stand for a few minutes leaning heavily on Tony's shoulder, and trembling from head to foot, as his eyes wandered over all the front of the building; and then a low, wailing cry would break from his lips, 'Dear Lord, there was no room for my little love, but Thou hast found room for her!'

It was a reopening of Tony's sorrow when Aunt Charlotte came up from the country to find that the little child had gone away altogether, leaving only her tiny frocks and clothes, which were neatly folded up in a drawer, where old Oliver treasured up a keepsake or two of his wife's. She discovered, too, that old Oliver had forgotten to write to Susan,—indeed, his hand had become too trembling to hold a pen,—and she wrote herself; but her letter did not reach Calcutta before Susan and her husband had left it, being homeward bound.

It was as nearly two years as it could well be since the summer evening when Susan Raleigh

had sent her little girl into old Oliver's shop, bidding her be a good girl till she came home, and thinking it would be only three days before she saw her again. It was nearly two years, and an evening something like it, when the door was darkened by the entrance of a tall, fine-looking man, dressed as a soldier, but with one empty sleeve looped up across his chest. Tony was busy behind the counter wrapping up magazines, which he was going to take out the next morning, and the soldier looked very inquisitively at him.

'Hallo! my lad, who are you?' he asked, in a tone of surprise.

'I'm Antony Oliver,' he said; for of late he had taken to call himself by his old master's name.

'Antony Oliver!' repeated the stranger; 'I never heard of you before.'

'Well, I'm only Tony,' he answered; 'but I live with old Mr. Oliver now, and call him grandfather. He likes it, and it does me good. It's like somebody belonging to me.'

'Why! how long have you called him grandfather?' asked the soldier again.

'Ever since our little Dolly died,' said Tony, in a faltering voice.

‘Dolly dead!’ exclaimed the man, looking ready to fall down; for his face went very white, and he leaned upon the counter with his one hand. ‘Oh! my poor Susan!—my poor, dear girl!—how ever can I tell her this bad news!’

‘Who are you?’ cried Tony. ‘Are you Dolly’s father? Oh, she’s dead! She died last January, and we are more lonesome without her than you can think.’

‘Let me see poor Susan’s father,’ he said, after a minute or two, and with a very troubled face.

‘Ay, come in,’ said Tony, lifting up the flap of the counter, under which Dolly had so often played at hide-and-seek. ‘He’s more hisself again; but his memory’s bad yet. I know everything about her, though; because she was so fond of me, and me of her. Come in.’

Raleigh entered the room, and saw old Oliver sitting in his armchair, with a pipe in his hand, and a very tranquil look upon his wrinkled face. The gas-light shone upon the glittering epaulettes and sash of the soldier, and the old man fastened upon him a very keen, yet doubtful gaze of inquiry.

‘Don’t you know me, father?’ cried Raleigh,

almost unable to utter a word. 'It's your poor Susan's husband, and Dolly's father.'

'Dolly's father!' repeated old Oliver, rising from his chair, and resting his hand upon Raleigh's shoulder. 'Do you know that the dear Lord has taken her to be where He is in glory?'

'Yes, I know it,' he said, with a sob.

He put the old man back in his seat, and drew a chair close up to him. They sat thus together in sorrowful silence for some minutes, until old Oliver laid his hand upon the empty sleeve on Raleigh's breast.

'You've lost your arm,' he said pityingly.

'Ay!' answered Raleigh; 'our colonel was set upon by a tiger in a jungle, and I saved him; but the brute tore my arm, and crunched the bone between his teeth till it had to come off. It's spoiled me for a soldier.'

'Yes, yes, poor fellow,' answered old Oliver, 'but the Lord knew all about it.'

'That He did,' answered Raleigh; 'and He's taught me a bit more about Himself than I used to know. I'm not spoiled to be His soldier. But I don't know much about the service yet, and I shall want you to teach me, father. You'll

let me call you father, for poor Susan's sake, won't you?'

'To be sure—to be sure,' said old Oliver, keeping his hand still upon the empty sleeve on Raleigh's breast.

'Well, father, he continued, 'as I am not fit for a soldier, and as the colonel was hurt too, we're all come home together. Only Susan's gone straight on with her lady and our little girl, and sent me through London to see after you and Dolly.'

'Your little girl?' said Oliver questioningly.

'Yes, the one born in India. Her name's Mary, but we call her Polly. Susan said it made her think of our little Dolly at home. Dear! dear! I don't know how ever I shall let her know.'

Another fit of silence fell upon them, and Tony left them together, for it was time to put up the shop shutters. It seemed just like the night when he had followed Susan and the little girl, and loitered outside in the doorway opposite, to see what would happen after she had left her in the shop. He fancied he was a ragged, shoeless boy again, nobody loving him, or caring for him, and that he saw old Oliver and Dolly standing

on the step, looking out for the mother, who had gone away, never, never to see her darling again. Tony's heart was very full; and when he tried to whistle, he was obliged to give it up, lest he should break out into sobs and crying. When he went back into the house Raleigh was talking again.

'So Susan and me are to have one of the lodges of the colonel's park,' he said, 'and I'm to be a sort of bailiff to look after the other outdoor servants about the garden and premises. It's a house with three bedrooms, and a very pleasant sort of little parlour, as well as a kitchen and scullery place downstairs. You can see the Wrekin from the parlour window, and the moon over it; and it's not so far away but what we could get a spring-cart sometimes, and drive over to your old home under the Wrekin. As soon as ever the colonel's lady told Susan where it was, she cried out, "That's the very place for father!" You'd like to come and live with your own Susan again, in your own country, wouldn't you now?'

'Yes, yes; for a little while,' answered old Oliver, with a smile upon his face.

Tony felt a strange and very painful shrinking

at his heart. If the old man went away to live with his daughter in the country, his home would be lost to him, and he would have to go out into the great city again alone, with nobody to love. He could get his living now in a respectable manner, and there was no fear of his being driven to sleep in Covent Garden, or under the bridges. But he would be alone, and all the links which bound him to Dolly and old Oliver would be snapped asunder. He wondered if the Lord Jesus would let such a thing be.

‘But I couldn’t leave Tony,’ cried old Oliver suddenly, and putting on his spectacles to look for him.

‘Come here, Tony. He’s like my own son to me, bless him! He calls me grandfather, and kept my heart up when I should have sunk very low without him. My Master gave him to me the very same night He gave me my little love. No, no; Dolly loved Tony, and Susan must come here to see me, but I could never leave my boy.’

Old Oliver had put his arm round Tony, drawing him closer and closer to him as he spoke, until his withered cheek pressed fondly against his face. Since Dolly died neither of

them had felt such a thrill of happiness as now.

‘The colonel and his lady must be told about this,’ said Raleigh, after he had heard all that Tony had been and done for old Oliver; and when he was obliged to go away for the night, the soldier gave him such a cordial grasp of the hand, as set all his fingers tingling, and his heart throbbing with exultation.

Chapter XXI

POLLY

THE lodge stood in a very lovely place, upon a slope of ground, which rose still higher to where the colonel's grand house was situated. There was a porch before the door, built of rough logs of pines, covered with ivy and honeysuckle, and with seats in it, where you could sit and look out over a wide, rich plain, with little hills and dales in it, stretching far away towards the skyline, where some distant mountains lay, so like to clouds, that you could scarcely tell which were soft and misty vapours and which were solid and everlasting hills. The Severn ran through the beautiful plain with so many windings, sometimes lying in shadow under deep banks, and sometimes glistening and sparkling in the sunlight, that it looked more like many little pools scattered about the meadows than one long, continuous river. Not very far away, as Raleigh had said, stood

the Wrekin, purple in the evening haze, but by day so plain, that one could see the great rock on its summit, which in olden times served as an altar to the god of fire.

Susan was very busy, and had been very busy all day over two things—preparing the house for the reception of her father, whom she had not seen for so many years, and in teaching her little girl, who was now eighteen months old, to say ‘grandpa.’ The one work was quite finished; everything was ready for old Oliver, and now she was waiting and watching to see the colonel’s spring-cart arrive from the station with her husband, who was gone to meet old Oliver and Tony. For Tony was not on any account to be parted from the old man—so said the colonel and his lady—but was to be employed about the garden, and as general errand-boy for the house, and to live at the lodge with old Oliver. Susan’s eyes were red, for as she had been busy about her work, she had several times cried bitterly over her lost little girl; but she had resolved within herself not to shed a single tear after her father was come, lest she should spoil the gladness of his coming home to her. At last the cart came in sight, and stopped, and Raleigh

and Tony sprang out to help Oliver to get down, while Susan put down Polly in the porch, and ran to throw her arms round her dear old father's neck.

He was very quiet, poor old Oliver. He had not spoken a word since he left the station, but had gazed about him as they drove along the pleasant lane with almost a troubled look upon his tranquil face. When his dim eyes caught the first glimpse of the Wrekin he lifted his hat from his white and trembling head, as if to greet it like some great and dear friend, after so many years of absence. Now he stood still at the wicket, leaning upon Susan's arm, and looking round him again with a gentle yet sad smile. The air was so fresh, after the close streets of London, that to him it seemed even full of scents of numberless flowers; and the sun was shining everywhere, upon the blossoms in the garden, and the fine old elm-trees in the park, and the far-off hills. He grasped Tony's hand in his, and bade him look well about him.

'If only my little love had had a bit of sunshine!' he said, with a mournful and tender patience in his feeble voice.

But just then—scarcely had he finished

speaking—there came a shrill, merry little scream behind them, so like Dolly's that both old Oliver and Tony turned round quickly. It could not be the same, for this little child was even smaller than Dolly; but as she came pattering and tottering down the garden-walk towards them, they saw that she had the same fair curly hair, and blue eyes, and rosy cheeks that Dolly had had two years before. She ran and hid her face in her mother's gown; but Susan lifted her into her arms, and held her towards old Oliver.

'Say grandpa, and kiss him, Polly,' she said coaxingly.

The little child held back shyly for a minute, for old Oliver's head was shaking much more than usual now; but at length she put her two soft little hands to his face, and held it between them, while she kissed him.

'Ganpa!' she cried, crowing and chuckling with delight.

They went indoors to the pleasant parlour, where old Oliver's armchair was set ready for him by the side of the fire, for Susan had kindled a fire, saying that he would feel the fresh air blowing from the Wrekin; and Polly sat first on his knee, and then upon Tony's, who could not

keep his eyes from following all her movements. But still it was not their own Dolly, who had made the old house in the close alley in London so happy and so merry for them. She was gone home to the Father's house, and was watching for them there. Tony might be a long time before he joined her, but for old Oliver the parting would be but short. As he sat in the evening dusk, very peacefully and contentedly, while Susan sang Polly to sleep in the kitchen, Tony heard him say half aloud, as his custom was, 'Yet a little, and I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am ye may be also. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'

THE END

