

## The Project Gutenberg eBook of Little Pollie

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"I say, Pollie, how many have yer sold?" Page 8.

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## *Little Pollie*

*Or*

## *A Bunch of Violets*

BY

GERTRUDE P. DYER

AUTHOR OF  
"ARMOUR CLAD," "HOW HETTIE CAUGHT THE SUNBEAMS," ETC.

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# LITTLE POLLIE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### POLLIE STARTS IN BUSINESS.

"A penny a bunch; only a penny, sweet violets," cried a soft little voice, just outside the Bank of England, one morning in early spring; "only a penny a bunch!"

But the throng of busy clerks hurrying on to their various places of business heard not that childish voice amidst the confused din of omnibus and cabs, and so she stood, timidly uttering her cry—"Sweet violets!"—unheeded by the passers-by.

She was a fragile little creature of about ten years old, small for her age, with shy yet trustful eyes, and soft, brown, curly hair; and as she stood there, clad in a black frock and a straw hat, well worn, it is true, but free from tatters, with a piece of crape neatly fastened around it, had any one amidst that busy multitude paused to look at the little flower-seller, they would have wondered why so young a child was trusted alone in that noisy, bustling place.

"I say, Pollie, how many have yer sold, eh?" exclaimed another girl, coming up to her—quite a different type of girlhood, a regular London arab, one who from her very cradle (if ever she possessed such a luxury) had battled through life heedless of all rubs and bruises, ready to hold her own against the entire world, and yet with much of hidden goodness beneath the rugged surface.

"Only two bunches," replied little Pollie, somewhat sadly.

"Only two!" repeated the other. "My eye! yer won't make a fortin, that's sartin!"

"The people don't seem to see me, not even hear me," said the child.

"'Cos why, you don't shout loud enuff," explained the bigger girl. "If yer wants to get on in the world, yer must make a noise somehow. Make the folks hear; never minds if yer deafens 'em, they'll pay 'tention to yer then. See how I does it."

At that moment four smart youths came strolling leisurely along arm-in-arm, trying to appear as though merely out on pleasure, though they knew full well they must be in their office and at their desks before the clock struck ten.

These were just the customers for Sally Grimes, and away she rushed full upon them, her thin ragged shawl flying in the wind, and her rough hair, from which the net had fallen, following the example of the shawl; and as she reached the somewhat startled youths, who almost stumbled over her, she held her only remaining posy right in their faces, screaming out in a harsh grating voice, rendered harsh by her street training—

"Now, then, gents, this last bunch—only a penny!"

Polly looked on in utter amazement. It is true she did not understand Sally's logic, but she saw plainly that the sweet violets were sold, for presently back came the girl, crying out—

"That's the way to do it. I've sold all mine; now let's see what you've got left. Why, ten more bunches! Come, give us two or three, I'll get rid of 'em for yer; I'll bring yer back the money. Look sharp, I see some folks a-comin'."

And without further parley she snatched up several of the dainty little bunches tied up so neatly by Pollie's mother, and rushed off in pursuit of purchasers.

She was certainly very fortunate, for in spite of a stern-looking policeman who was watching her movements, she sold them, speedily returning with the money to little Pollie, who by this time was getting almost bewildered with the noise around. 11

"There, my gal," said the kind girl, "there's the money for yer; look, six pennies. My! ain't yer rich. Now I'm off to Covent Garding to the old 'ooman—mother, I means, yer know. There St. Poll's a-strikin' ten; good-bye."

So saying, the friendly Sally Grimes darted off amidst the crowd, leaving the child to manage for herself, and very lonely she felt after her good-natured ally was gone.

It was Pollie Turner's first attempt at selling flowers, and this her first day.

No wonder the poor child felt shy and sad, for she could remember the time when "father" used to come home at eventide to the small but cosy cottage in that green lane, far, far away in the pleasant country; and she used to stand at the gate to watch for his coming, sometimes running half-way up the lane to meet him, and he would perch her on his shoulder, where she felt, oh! so safe, and bring her home to mother. Or she would climb his knee as he sat by the fire, and watch dear mother get the nice supper; but father was dead now. She had seen the pretty daisies growing above his grassy grave in that distant churchyard; and the mother, who had come up to London hoping to do better, was so ill and weak, scarcely able to do the needlework with which to gain food for them both. 12

And Mrs. Flanagan had proposed the plan of Pollie starting in business. So this is how it had all come about.

Pollie stood silently thinking over these events of the happy times gone by, when some one touched her arm softly, and then she looked up into the sweet face of a lady, whose kind eyes were bent half-sadly, half-pityingly upon her.

"Are you selling these violets, my child?" she asked; and her voice was so sweet.

"Yes, ma'am." 13

"Then will you let me have three bunches?"

Pollie with a smile put them into her hand, and the lady, after thanking her, placed the money for them in the child's basket, and went towards a carriage that was drawn up near the Royal Exchange.

The child, lost in admiration at such a nice lady, followed her with her eyes, never thinking to look at the money she had given for the flowers, until glancing into the basket to see how many bunches were still left, she beheld a shilling shining amidst the dingy coppers. Eager to return the money to its rightful owner, little Pollie darted amongst the people who thronged the pavement, ran across the road at the risk of being run over, and reached the lady just as she was stepping into her carriage.

"Please, ma'am, please," she faltered quite out of breath, and at the same time pulling her violently by the dress.

"Let go, you little vagabond!" exclaimed the indignant footman, taking Pollie by the arm to pull her away. 14

Fortunately the lady turned on hearing her servant speak thus, and saw the child struggling in his grip.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Please, ma'am, this," cried Pollie, holding up the shilling.

"That is for the violets you sold to me."

"Oh no, ma'am, it is all wrong," exclaimed the child excitedly; "those flowers are but three-pence—a penny a bunch; that's all. Here is your money, ma'am!"

The lady gazed earnestly into the little girl's flushed face, as she asked—

"Why did you not keep that shilling?"

"Because it was not mine," was the answer.

"I should not have known but that the money was correct. You did not say the price of your flowers, my child."

"God knew the price," said Pollie reverentially, "and He would have been angry with me for cheating you, ma'am."

15

"Who taught you of God?" asked the lady softly, as she bent down to the little one.

"Mother!" was the reply.

"And is your mother dead?" she questioned, perceiving for the first time the child's poor mourning.

"No, ma'am, but father is, and mother is so ill and weak," and the shy brown eyes filled with tears.

"Poor child, poor little child," murmured the lady compassionately. "What is your name?" she asked after a pause, "and where do you live?"

Pollie gave the desired information.

"Well then, Pollie," said her new friend kindly, "here is the money for the violets; and take this shilling: it will buy something for your mother, perhaps. I shall come and see you one day."

So saying she patted Pollie's thin cheeks with a soft loving touch; then stepping into the carriage was driven away, leaving Pollie in a state of wonderful happiness at so much kindness from so nice a lady.

16

"Oh dear!" she thought, "I am rich now. I must make haste home to mother, and I've two bunches of violets still left. Mother shall have one and Mrs. Flanagan the other."

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## CHAPTER II.

17

### WHO HAD THE VIOLETS!

Pollie tied up the money securely in the corner of her clean pocket-handkerchief, and with a light heart proceeded towards "home," which was situated in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane.

It was a long way for so young a child to traverse alone; but the children of the poor early learn to be self-reliant. Therefore she heeded not the dangers of the London streets, but threaded her way along; and if at times she felt afraid of a crossing, or some hurried foot-passenger hustled her roughly, a sweet text, taught by her dearly-loved mother, came to her mind, bringing a feeling of safety along with it.

18

This was little Pollie's comfort—"Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." And so she pursued her onward way, in her child's faith, trusting in Him to safely guide.

As she was turning up Drury Court she met Lizzie Stevens, a young woman who lived opposite to them, and who earned a scanty living by working for cheap tailors. Often had the child looked from the window, and across the Court watched the poor girl bending her pale face over her work, never pausing to rest, but for ever stitch, stitch. However, the young seamstress had seen her little neighbour watching her, and once or twice had nodded to her, and so a sort of acquaintance had sprung up between them; indeed, on several occasions they had met, and the child's prattle had cheered the lonely work-girl.

"Where have you been, Pollie?" she asked as they went up Drury Court together, the poor girl staggering under the weight of a huge bundle—the child kindly keeping pace with her, though longing to run home with her budget of good news to mother.

19

"I've been selling violets. Mrs. Flanagan got them for me, and I've sold them all but two bunches—see!"

And she lifted up a cloth which she had placed over the sweet flowers to prevent them fading too quickly.

"Oh, how sweet they are!" exclaimed Lizzie Stevens, and she stopped, and putting her heavy bundle down on a door-step, bent her pale face over the flowers to inhale their perfume.

When she raised her face it was whiter than before, and on the violets something was glistening. Pollie at first thought it was a dew-drop, but when she looked up into her neighbour's eyes she saw they were full of tears—*one* was resting on the flowers!

20

"Why are you crying?" asked the child softly; "are you ill?"

"Oh no, Pollie," she sobbed forth; "but those sweet flowers recall the time when I was a little girl like you, and gathered them in the lanes near my happy home—before mother died."

"Is your mother dead, then? Oh dear, I am so sorry," said the child with earnest pity.

"Yes, I am all alone in the world; no one to love or care for me," she exclaimed passionately. "Ah, I wish I was dead too."

"Don't say so," said Pollie soothingly; "God cares for you, and loves you dearly."

"I sometimes think even He forgets me," moaned the poor girl, "when I see rich folks having all things they desire, and such as me almost starving, working night and day for a mere crust."

"I once said so to mother," remarked the child, "but she opened our Bible, and bade me read a verse she pointed out. Shall I tell you what it was?"

"Yes," was the reply.

21

Pollie folded her hands, and repeated—

"Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

And then she turned to another to comfort me, and this is it—

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

When the child ceased speaking, she looked up into the face of her listener, whose head was bent in reverence to God.

"O Pollie!" she said at last, as again taking up her heavy load she proceeded slowly onwards, "I wish I had a good mother."

"Come over to us sometimes," said the child, eagerly.

22

"Will your mother let me?" was the question.

"Yes, I am sure she will; she is so good," was the reply.

And then the two friends went on up Drury Lane, not speaking much; but as they were parting Lizzie stooped down, and kissing the child lovingly, said softly—

"Good-bye, and thank you, little Pollie."

"Would you like a bunch of violets?" she asked. "I can divide the other between mother and Mrs Flanagan."

The poor seamstress was unable to speak from emotion, but held out her hand with trembling eagerness for the flowers.

How glad was the child in being able to give a pleasure to her lonely neighbour. She felt more joy in seeing Lizzie Stevens' glad smile than even in the magnificent sum of money wrapped in her handkerchief; for she experienced "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" and after seeing her friend disappear through the dingy doorway which led to the garret called her "home," she turned with a light heart into the entry which led to her own place, eager to see mother and tell her all; but in doing so almost fell over a little cripple boy who sat crouched on the door-steps.

23

"O Jimmy! did I hurt you?" she asked in alarm.

"No. Everybody knocks me about; I've used to it," was his answer.

"Poor Jimmy!" said the little girl. "Where's your mother?"

"Down there, drunk again," he replied, pointing his thin finger in the direction of what in other houses would be the kitchen, but which was his "home," if it could be dignified by so sacred a name.

Pollie looked sorrowfully on the poor boy, whose thin, wizened face, with large, hungry eyes, was placed on a shrunk and distorted body. His mother was the pest of the court, always drunk, and in her drunken fury beating her wretched offspring. Half-starved and half-clothed, he passed his time on the door-step, gazing vacantly at the passers-by, uncared for, unloved amidst the many.

24

"Poor Jimmy!" repeated the little girl. "Would you like some of my sweet violets?"

The boy, unused to even a breath of kindness, gazed some few seconds at her with his eager eyes.

"You be Pollie Turner, bain't yer, what lives upstairs with yer mother?" he asked at last.

"Yes," she replied, and repeated her question, as she took some of the flowers from her last bunch. "Would you like these?"

He held out his claw-like hand—so dirty that Pollie almost shrank from touching it as she gave him the violets. He took them without a word of thanks, but as she was moving away he called out—

"I say, did yer make these?"

"No, Jimmy," she replied, as she came back to him; "God made them."

"God!" he repeated, "Who's He; Him's mighty clever to fix up these little bits of things, bain't He?"

25

The little girl was for a moment shocked, then she felt a tender pity for the poor boy.

"O Jimmy, don't you know who God is?" she gently asked.

He shook his head; so she went on—

"God is our Father in heaven," and she pointed upwards. "He made these sweet flowers, and us also, and He sent His dear Son to die for us, so that all our sins should be taken away. And when Jesus (that is the name of God's dear Son) was here on earth, He gave sight to the blind, healed the sick, and was for ever doing good; but now He is in heaven, and still He loves us, oh, so dearly, and wishes us all to come to Him."

"Does He want me?" asked the outcast doubtfully; "He don't know me."

"Oh yes, He knows you, Jimmy, and loves you too; once Jesus blessed little children like you and me, and said, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'"

26

"The kingdom of heaven!" repeated poor benighted Jimmy musingly—it was the first time he had ever heard those blessed words—"where be that, Polly?"

"It is where God lives, and where we shall go when we die if we believe in the Saviour and love and pray to God."

"How do you pray?" he asked, fixing his keen eyes upon her, as though hungering for the bread of life.

But before she could reply, a loud, harsh voice was heard uttering frightful oaths, and a lumbering tread came stumbling up the cellar stairs. The poor boy knew full well who was coming, and with a terrified look started up and hobbled off, supported by his clumsy crutches, round the corner of the house, whilst Pollie, who went in terror of the drunken woman, ran hastily up the dirty staircase, which served for all the inmates of the crowded house.

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## CHAPTER III.

### HOW POLLY SPENT HER MONEY.

27

The first two or three flights of stairs were thickly strewn with mud and dust from the feet of the different lodgers; but when Pollie reached the last landing she felt it was home indeed. The stairs were as clean and white as hands could scrub them—no dirt was to be seen here,—and outside her mother's door was a little mat on which to rub the shoes before entering. It was quite a relief to reach this part of the house.

There were only two rooms at the top part of the tenement—one inhabited by good Mrs Flanagan, the other by Pollie and her mother; and though the apartments were small, and the narrow windows overlooked the chimney-pots and tiles, yet they felt it such an advantage to be up here, removed, as it were, from the noisy people who lived in the same dwelling; each room, in fact, was let out to separate families, some of them very rough and boisterous.

28

Pollie tapped at her mother's door, and then peeped merrily in. There sat that good and gentle woman, busily working close by the narrow window, so as to get as much light as possible for her delicate needlework.

The tea-things were already on the table, which was spread with a clean white cloth, and the kettle sang a cheery welcome to little Pollie; for though it was only three o'clock, it was tea-time for them, since dinner was an almost unknown luxury to this poor mother and child.

"Here I am, mother dear!" she cried, putting in her bright face, which was as sunshine to the lonely widow's heart.

"O Pollie, I am so glad you have come home; I was getting so anxious and afraid, and the time seemed so long without you, my child."

29

Then the little girl ran in and threw her arms around her mother's neck.

"Only look here!" she cried delightedly, when after a loving kiss she proceeded to display her riches; "see, mother," she said, arranging the money all in a row on the table, the bright shilling flanked on either side by five brown pennies; "are we not rich now? sixpence must be paid to kind Mrs. Flanagan for the sweet violets she got for me, and then we shall have one shilling and fourpence left, and I shall buy lots of things for you, mother darling," she concluded, clapping her

hands in glee.

The widow smiled cheerfully as she folded up her work, and prepared to get their simple meal of tea and bread, listening the while as the child related the events of the morning.

"And now, mother," she pursued, "I must divide these dear sweet violets between you and Mrs. Flanagan." 30

"Then here are two little cups which will be just the thing for them," said the happy mother, whose pale face grew brighter as she gazed on the delighted child.

With the greatest care Pollie divided the flowers equally, and when putting theirs in the window, so that they might still see some of the blue sky, as she expressed it, she looked across the Court towards Lizzie Stevens' home. Yes, there she was, Pollie could see, busy plying her needle, and there were the violets also, in a broken jam jar close by her as she sat at work; and raising her pale face towards them, as though they were old friends returned to her, she caught sight of little Pollie arranging *her* bouquet in the window; so with a bright smile (unwonted visitor to those wan lips) kissed her hand in token of recognition, and then pointed to the flowers. Pollie quite understood this little pantomime, and nodded her curly head a great many times to her opposite neighbour in proof of her so doing. 31

"Come to tea, my child," said the mother, who had cut some slices of bread for the frugal repast, but which she had no appetite to eat.

"Wait a bit, mammie dear, I must do some shopping first," exclaimed Pollie; "I shall not be long." And away she ran, gaily laughing at her mother's look of surprise.

Down the stairs she went, then out into the Court; and just round the corner in Drury Lane was a greengrocer's shop, in the window of which hung a label "New-laid Eggs."

I fear that label told a fiction, but Pollie believed in it, and thought the eggs were laid by the identical hens she saw earning a scanty living by pecking in the gutters and among the cabs and carts; so with a feeling of being very womanly, and tightly grasping the precious shilling in her hand, she took courage to approach the shopkeeper, who stood with arms akimbo in the doorway, flanked on one side by potatoes in bins, and on the other by cabbages and turnips in huge baskets. 32

"Please, ma'am," said Pollie, "will you let me have a new-laid egg for mother?"

The woman took an egg from a basket and gave it to her.

"If you please, is it quite fresh? because mother is so poorly, and I want it to do her good."

The shopkeeper looked at the earnest little face, and somehow felt she could not tell an untruth to the child, the brown eyes were raised so trustingly.

"Well, my little gal, I can't say as it be quite fresh, but it's as good as any you'll get about here."

"Then I'd better not have it," said the child, giving it back to the woman again; "only I did so want to get her something nice for her tea,—she can't eat much." And the lips quivered with suppressed sorrow at the disappointment. 33

"Why don't you get her a bit of meat instead?" asked the woman; "that'll do her good, I warrant!"

"Will this buy some?" questioned the child with brightened eyes, and opening her hand she showed the shilling. "To be sure it will. Here, give it to me; I'll go and get you one pound of nice pieces at my brother's next door, if you'll just mind the shop till I come back; you can be trusted, I see," replied the mistress of the place, whose woman's heart was touched by the little girl's distress.

Pollie stood where she was left, guarding the baskets with watchful eyes. Fortunately no mischievous people were about, so the vegetables were safe, though it was with no small relief she saw their owner return with such nice pieces of meat wrapped up in clean paper.

"There," said the greengrocer's wife (whose name was Mrs. Smith, by the way), "these are good and fresh; my brother let me choose them, and have them cheap too, only fourpence a pound!" 34

"Oh, thank you, thank you, ma'am!" cried Pollie, holding up her face to kiss the kind woman, who, totally unused to such affectionate gratitude in the poor little waifs about Drury Lane, bent down and returned the caress with a feeling of unwonted tenderness tugging at her heart.

"And now, please, I should like a bunch of water-cresses for Mrs. Flanagan," said the child. "I know she is very fond of them with her tea."

"What are you going to buy for yourself?" asked the shopkeeper, as, after handing Pollie the freshest bunch in the basket, she stood watching her tiny customer.

The little girl hesitated; at length she said—

"Well, if I don't get something, mother will want me to eat this meat, and I mean her to have it all; so I'll buy two little pies in Russell Court,—one for me, and one for poor little crippled Jimmy." 35

"You're a good gal," exclaimed the woman. "Here, put these taters in your basket; maybe your

mother would like 'em with the meat, they boil nice and mealy."

Pollie was so grateful to Mrs. Smith for the kind thought, and held out her money to pay for this luxury; but to her surprise she told her to put it back into her pocket—the "taters" were a gift for her mother, and patting her cheek, bade her run home quickly, and always "be a good gal."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### MRS FLANAGAN.

As Pollie reached her mother's door at last, after all this amount of shopping had been accomplished, she heard a well-known voice inside, and knew that Mrs. Flanagan had returned from work, and was now having her usual little chat with Mrs. Turner.

Good Mrs. Flanagan, who had been so kind to the widow and her child from the first moment they came to lodge in the room opposite to hers—good old woman, with a heart as noble and true as the finest lady's in the land—a gentlewoman in every sense, though not of the form or manner in which we are accustomed to associate that word. Years ago she had been a servant in a farmhouse, where she was valued and esteemed by all as a sincere though humble friend; but Mike Flanagan won her heart, and she joined her fate to his, leaving the sweet, fresh country in which she had always lived, and cheerfully giving up all the old familiar ties of home and kindred for his dear sake.

Mike had constant work in London, with good wages too, as a carpenter, so though at first London and London ways sadly puzzled her, yet she soon became used to the change, and they were so happy—he in his clean, tidy wife, she in her honest, sober husband.

But one day, through the carelessness of a drunken fellow-workman, some heavy timber fell upon poor Mike, crushing him beneath its weight, and when next Martha Flanagan looked on her husband's face, she knew he was past all suffering, and that she was destitute, and her sweet baby Nora fatherless.

But time soothed her anguish; she must be up and doing, and for many years she struggled on, working to keep a home for herself and child; and proud she was of her darling, her beautiful Nora, who grew up a sweet flower of loveliness from a rugged parent stem, with all the beauty of her father's nation and something of the sweetness of English grace.

Well might the poor mother be proud of her only treasure. What delight it was to see this rare beauty brightening the lowly home! But the mother's idol was of clay; in worshipping the creature with such fond idolatry, she almost forgot the merciful Creator.

One sad night, on returning home from Covent Garden, where she was constantly employed by a fruiterer and florist, she found the place empty, no one to greet her now. Nora was gone, lost in that turbid stream which flows through our city.

Oftentimes, as the lonely mother wended her way at night through the streets on her return from work, would she look with a shudder into the faces of those poor wretches who flaunted by fearing yet hoping to see her lost child. But the name of Nora never passed her lips. No one who knew Mrs. Flanagan imagined of this canker at her heart; that page of her life was folded down, and closed to prying eyes; it was only when alone with God that on bended knees she prayed Him to bring the poor wanderer home.

"Ah, my bird!" she cried, as Pollie came joyfully dancing into the room. "Here you are, then; I thought from what your mother said that such a lot of money had turned you a bit crazed."

Pollie did not reply, but pursed up her lips with a look of supreme importance as she placed her basket on the table, and proceeded to take out its contents.

"There, mother dearie," she exclaimed with delight as she displayed the meat; "that's for you. You must eat every tiny bit of it, so let us try some directly. See, dear Mrs Flanagan, I bought these water-cresses for you. Shall I fetch your tea-pot? For let us all have tea together to-day, like on Sundays; this is such a happy day."

And she ran across the landing without waiting for a reply, to bring the little brown tea-pot, which on the Sabbath always found a place on Mrs. Turner's table; for that day was hailed as a peaceful festival by these two lonely widows, who kept God's day in sincerity and truth.

When the busy child came back, she set to work to carefully wash the cresses, arranging them afterwards in a pretty plate of her own, and then, placing them and the violets she had saved in front of the kind old woman, lifted up her bright face for a kiss.

But Mrs Flanagan was unable even to say "Thank you, my bird."



Her face was buried in her blue checked apron. She muttered something about her eyes being weak, and when after a little while she looked up, and lovingly kissed the child, Pollie feared they must be very bad indeed, they were so red, just as though she had been crying.

41

"Ah, my little one," she said in a husky voice "may God ever keep you pure and simple in heart; yea, even as a little child!"

By this time the meat was fried, the tea made, and everything in readiness for this wonderful banquet—at least so Pollie deemed it. How happy they were! Mrs Flanagan had recovered her usual spirits, and indulged in many a hearty laugh at the child's plans of what she should now do for mother, and the widow looked on with her quiet smile, happy in her child's happiness, glad because she was listening to her merry prattle; and though the meal was but scanty, no dainty dishes to tempt the appetite, yet the wisest man has said,—

"Better a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

42

## CHAPTER V.

### THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Well, the days passed on, and little Pollie pursued her work of selling violets; for those sweet flowers are a long time in season, bearing bravely the March winds and April showers, as though desirous of gladdening the earth as long as possible. All honour, then, to these hardy little blossoms.

So day after day found Pollie in the same spot where we first saw her, until at last the little brown-eyed girl became well known to the passers-by. Kind old gentlemen, fathers, or it may be grandfathers some of them, thought of their own more fortunate children, whose lives were so much easier, and so thinking, stopped and bought of the shy little maiden, speaking kindly to her the while; girls on their way to the city workrooms gladly spent a hard-earned penny for violets, and worked more cheerfully afterwards, gladdened by the mere remembrance of Pollie's grateful thanks. A sturdy policeman, too, whose beat was at that place, and where he seemed to hold stern sway over all the omnibus and cab drivers, took her, as it were, under his lordly care (perhaps he had a little girl of his own), and would shield her many times from the jostling crowd, or take her safely over the crossings. Indeed, he was so kind, that one day, when she was going home, she summoned up courage enough to overcome her shyness, and offer him some of the violets she had not sold. To her great delight he accepted them, saying kindly,—

43

"Thank you, my little woman."

And all through that day he kept them in his pocket, sometimes, however, taking them out to smell their fragrance, and then, somehow, the remembrance of Pollie's wee face as she looked when timidly offering the flowers, carried him back to the days of "auld lang syne," those happy days when he and his little sister (long since dead) had rambled through the green lanes of his native village, searching for sweet violets, and this memory cheered the poor tired policeman, made him forget the ceaseless din around and the never-ending wilderness of bricks. Even the London sparrows looked less dingy, and the sunbeams falling across the dusty pavement recalled to his mind how fresh the green was where he used to play when a boy, and how the shadows seemed to chase the sunshine over the uplands on such an April day as this. Yes, Pollie's violets were not useless, they were speaking with their mute voices—— speaking of the past with its brightest memories to this poor man.

44

Not that Sally Grimes had deserted her little friend, far from that, for somehow she "took to her," as she herself expressed it, and was always hovering about the child in case she needed protection. But Sally's movements were inclined to be erratic; she dashed in and out among all sorts of vehicles in search of customers so recklessly, any one less experienced would have trembled for her safety; but she knew no fear, and dared the dangers of the streets most bravely.

45

Sometimes Lizzie Stevens would walk with Pollie as far as the Bank, then leaving the child to sell her flowers, would proceed to the East End with her own work; but on her return, the little girl was always ready to join her, and they would all three go home together. A great friendship existed between the hitherto lonely seamstress and Pollie's mother, whose kind heart was touched by the account the child gave of their friendless young neighbour; so she sought her out, and finding how good she was, and how bravely she struggled to earn her daily bread honestly, gradually won her confidence; so that now Lizzie felt she was not *quite* alone in this wide world. There was a kind motherly love in which she could rest, and life was made brighter for her; even the days were less dreary than before, for as Mrs. Turner's room was nicer than hers, she invited her to bring her work over, and they stitched hour after hour at their ceaseless work, yet still they did not feel their loneliness so much, and were a comfort and help to one another.

46

All this was a happiness to Pollie, as she felt her mother would not be sad during her absence (as

she very often was), for the child's "business" had become more extensive, her ally, Sally, having persuaded her to sell flowers in the evening also; and as her mother and Mrs. Flanagan had offered no objection to this plan, Pollie was only too glad to earn more; indeed the little girl's gains, small though they were, helped to get many simple comforts for the humble home.

One evening about six o'clock she came home, swinging her empty basket in her hand and singing softly a merry song from sheer gladness thinking also of the dear face upstairs that would brighten up to welcome her, as it ever did, when, as she entered the doorway, she stumbled over poor little Jimmy, crouching as usual just inside the entrance.

"There ain't nobody at home, Pollie," he said; "yer mother has gone to help Lizzie Stevens carry to the shop a real heap of work."

"I daresay Mrs. Flanagan is in her room," said the child.

"No, she ain't neither," replied Jimmy, "for I see'd her go out to the market; I know, 'cos she took her great basket with her."

"Oh then!" exclaimed Pollie, laughing, "I must just let myself in, and wait for mother; I know where she puts our key. Good-night, Jimmy dear."

And she was going up the stairs when she felt the little cripple boy gently pull her frock to detain her.

"I say, Pollie," he said hesitatingly, "I be so lonesome here, will yer mind biding with me and telling me about the kingdom of heaven, and that good man what took such as you and me in his arms—like you told me t'other day?"

"Oh yes, Jimmy, that I will," cried the little girl; "here, let us sit on this lowest stair; I don't think many people will be passing up now, and then I shall see mother when she comes in."

The poor ragged outcast crept near to his tiny friend as she requested, and then sat looking up into her bright face, whilst in simple words such as a child would use she told him that sweet story of old—of our Saviour, a babe in the manger of Bethlehem—His loving tenderness to us—of His death upon the Cross for our redemption—of His glorious resurrection and ascension to heaven, whither He has gone to prepare a place for those who love and believe Him.

"And does He want me in that beautiful land?" asked the awe-struck boy, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, Jimmy, even you," was the reply.

"But I be so dirty and ugly," he said.

"God made you, dear, and He makes nothing ugly," replied the little girl soothingly.

"And you say we shall never hunger or thirst in heaven, and never feel pain any more. O Pollie, I wish I was there; nobody wants me here."

His little friend took his claw-like hand tenderly in hers and stroked it gently. She knew what a wretched life was his, and could not wonder at what he said—"nobody wants me here"—but her heart was full of sympathy for his loneliness.

"Shall I teach you a prayer to say to Jesus, Jimmy?" she asked after a pause of some length, during which her companion had been silently gazing up at the only piece of sky that was visible in that narrow court, as though trying to imagine where heaven really was, the child having pointed upwards whilst speaking of the home beyond the grave.

"What is prayer?" he asked.

Pollie could not explain it correctly, but she did her best to make it easy to his benighted mind. She gave him *her* idea of what prayer is.

"It is speaking to God," she said with reverence.

"And will He listen to the likes of me?" was the question.

"Oh yes, if you pray to Him with your whole heart," was her reply.

The boy paused awhile, as though musing upon what she had said.

"Pollie," he presently entreated in hushed tones, "please teach me to pray."

And then at the foot of the stairs knelt those two children—children of the same heavenly Father, lambs of the dear Saviour's fold—alike and yet so unlike; and the poor outcast cripple, following the actions of the little girl, meekly folded his hands as she clasped hers, and with eyes raised heavenward to where a few stars were now softly shining, he repeated after her—

"Consider and hear me, O Lord my God! lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; for Jesus' sake!"

He murmured the blessed words over two or three times after she had ceased to speak; then in silence they sat down upon the stair again, to wait for mother.

The daylight faded quite away, only the stars were shining. The court at this time of the evening was always very quiet, and the peace of God was resting on those little ones. By degrees a calm

had fallen upon the poor boy's soul. Never, never so happy before, he laid his weary head upon the little girl's lap with a feeling of perfect rest, murmuring to himself—

"For Jesus' sake."

And so Pollie's mother found them fast asleep, with the star-light shining on their upturned faces.

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### ON WATERLOO BRIDGE.

52

"I say, why don't yer come with me on Saturdays, Pollie?" asked Sally Grimes one Thursday evening as they wended their way homewards.

It was opera night, and the sale of their flowers had been very good, so that Sally, who had "cleared out," as she termed it, was elated with success. Even Pollie had only a small bunch left. Truth to tell, she always liked to keep a few buds to take home with her—just a few to brighten up their room, or those of their two dear friends.

She was tying up her blossoms, which had become unfastened, so that for the moment she did not reply to her companion's question, who asked again—

53

"Why don't yer come on Saturdays, eh? I allers does a good trade then."

"Mother likes to get ready for the Sabbath on that day. So we clean our room right out, so as to make it nice and tidy. Then I learn my hymns and texts for the Sunday-school, and then mother hears me say them over, so as to be sure I know them well; and oh, it's so happy!"

"Sunday-school!" repeated Sally; "is that where yer goes on Sundays? I see yer sometimes with books, eh? Lord do yer go there?"

"Yes; would you like to go with me?" Pollie suddenly asked, looking up at her friend with delight at the mere idea.

But Sally rubbed her nose thoughtfully with a corner of her apron, uncertain what to say on the subject.

"Don't they whop yer at school?" she asked, after deliberating.

To her astonishment, quiet little Pollie burst into such a merry laugh.

54

"No, indeed!" she exclaimed, when her mirth had subsided. "The teachers are far too kind for that. Oh, I know you would like it, so do come."

"Well, I'll see about it," was the rejoinder. "My gown ain't special, but I've got such a hat! I bought it in Clare Market, with red, blue, and yaller flowers in it—so smart!"

"Oh, never mind your clothes," said Pollie, somewhat doubtful as to the effect such a hat would have on the teachers and pupils; "come as you are, only clean and tidy—that is all they want."

For some time they walked on in silence, but their thoughts must have been on the same subject, for suddenly Sally asked—

"What do you do at Sunday-school?"

"We read the Bible, repeat our texts and hymns. Shall I say the one I am learning for next Sunday to you?"

"Well, I should like to hear it," was the reply. "Suppose we go and sit on Waterloo Bridge—it's nice and quiet there—I'll pay the toll."

57

Pollie, however, would not consent to her friend's extravagance on her behalf, so the two children paid each their halfpenny and passed on to the Bridge.

It was a lovely evening, and though April, yet it was not too cold, so they seated themselves in one of the recesses, and for a time were amused by watching the boats on the river, chatting merrily, as only children can.

"Now, then, tell me yer pretty hymn," said Sally, when at last they had exhausted their stock of fun, and putting her arm around her little friend's neck, they cuddled up lovingly together—the gentle little Pollie, and sturdy, rugged Sally. Then the child repeated to her listening companion—

"Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me  
abide," &c.

She went on unto the end, the bigger girl listening the while with almost breathless eagerness, and when it was finished they both remained silent. Evidently those beautiful verses had struck a chord hitherto mute in the heart of the poor untaught London waif.

"Oh, but that's fine!" she murmured at last in hushed tones. "Tell me something else, Pollie."

However, just at that moment the attention of the children was arrested by a young woman who came and sat down in the recess opposite them. They had both noticed her pass and repass several times, but as they were almost hidden by the stone coping of the bridge, she had not observed them.

With wild gestures she threw herself upon the stone seat, and imagining she was alone, burst into piteous moans, alternately clasping her hands tightly together, as though in pain, then hiding her pale but lovely face, which showed traces of agony; swaying backwards and forwards, but with ever the same ceaseless moaning cry.

"Oh, poor lady!" whispered Pollie to her friend.

"She ain't no lady, though she be so smart in a silk gown and rings on her fingers," replied her companion in the same low tone.

"What is she then?" asked the child.

Poor Sally Grimes! her education had hitherto been confined to the London streets, and that training had made her but too well acquainted with life in its worst phases; so she replied—

"She's only some poor creature— I say!" was her exclamation, as suddenly she started up, "what be yer going to do?"

The latter part of this sentence was addressed to the stranger, who had sprung upon the stone parapet, and was about to throw herself into the deep waters beneath.

"Let me die! let me die!" she cried, wildly struggling to free herself from sturdy Sally's strong grasp.

"No, I won't!" was the reply. "Here, Pollie, you hold hard too."

"Oh, in mercy, in pity, let me die!" sobbed the unhappy creature in her agony. "Oh, if you only knew how I want to be at rest for ever!" and again she struggled frantically to escape from the saving hands that held her.

"Now, if yer don't get down and sit quiet on this seat, I'll call that there peeler, and then he'll take yer to Bow Street," exclaimed the undaunted Sally. "Ain't yer 'shamed to talk like that? Now, come, I'll call him if yer don't do what I say."

Frightened by this threat, or perhaps seeing how fruitless were her feeble struggles against the strong grasp of her preserver, the unhappy girl—she was but a girl—shrank down submissively on to the seat, still trembling and moaning, whilst brave-hearted Sally stood over her to prevent any further attempt at self-destruction. Pollie looked on in bewildered surprise at this sad scene, not knowing what to make of it; but she still kept her hold on the woman's dress, as if her small strength could be of any service; but Sally had told her to "hold on," and so she obeyed.

The woman was now sobbing bitterly. It was more than the child could bear to see any one in tears, so laying her little hand tenderly upon the sorrow-bowed head, she said very gently—

"Please don't cry, ma'am; it makes Sally and me so sad."

At that soft touch and soothing voice the woman looked up, and then the two children saw that she was very beautiful even now,—mere wreck as she seemed to be of all that is pure and lovely.

"Child!" she cried, "do you know what you touch?—a wretch not fit to crawl the earth much less be touched by innocent hands like yours."

Pollie shrank back in terror at these words, and the tone in which they were uttered, but Sally was equal to any emergency.

"Come, come," she exclaimed, "don't yer talk like that, frightening this little gal in that way; you just quiet yourself, and then we'll see yer safe home."

"Home!" was the response. "I have none, only the streets or the river." "Stuff and nonsense!" cried practical Sally. "No home!" repeated little Pollie; "how sad!"

"Now what's to be done?" debated the elder girl, somewhat puzzled as to the course to be pursued; "here's night coming on, and we can't leave you here, yer know."

"Let us take her home to my mother," exclaimed the child; "mother will know what to do."

But Sally hesitated.

"Perhaps she might not like it," she observed.

"Oh, I am sure mother won't mind, she is so good and so kind."

All the time the children were discussing what was to be done, the unhappy creature sat there, never heeding what was said, but still sobbing and moaning, and apparently utterly exhausted.

"Well, then, there's nothing else to be done that I see, so come along, young woman;" and so saying, Sally Grimes grasped her firmly by the arm, thus forcing her to rise.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked, gazing wildly around.

"To Pollie's mother," was the reply.

But the woman hung back and strove to free herself.

"I will not go!" she cried; "let me stay here, leave me to myself."

However, there is much to be said in favour of strength of will. Sally Grimes, young as she was, possessed it in a wonderful degree; therefore, without wasting another word, she compelled the forlorn creature to go with her, little Pollie still keeping hold of the poor thing's dress.

64

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LOST ONE FOUND.

65

Mrs. Turner sat alone, busily sewing, but she heard her darling's well-known step come pattering up the stairs; so she put on the tea-kettle directly, for she knew the little one would be tired and hungry; and forthwith it began to sing cheerily, filling the room with its homely melody, as though it would say "Pollie is coming," "Pollie is coming;" and somehow the mother felt cheered. It may be the kettle's fancied greeting was but the echo of her own loving heart.

Time was too precious to be wasted, so the widow continued her work, and the light from the one candle being centred to the spot where she sat, the entry was consequently dark; but on looking up with a smile of greeting, expecting only to see Pollie, she was surprised to see her hesitate on the threshold, apparently clutching some one tightly by the dress: but directly she saw her mother, she seemed to feel she might let go her hold, her charge was safe; so running in, she threw her arms around her neck and whispered—

66

"O mother, darling, this poor lady has no home; let her stay here to-night."

The widow rose from her seat in some surprise, but before she could say a word, trusty Sally Grimes led in the woman, and then in a moment Mrs. Turner comprehended it all. She saw a poor lost girl, and she thought of her own innocent little one; then came into her heart those merciful words—

"Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

With womanly tenderness she took the poor shivering creature by the hand, seated her close to the fire, saying gently—

67

"God help you, my poor child, you are welcome here."

Then the flood-gates of the unhappy girl's heart were opened, and leaning her head on the widow's shoulder she sobbed aloud.

Meanwhile Pollie, assisted by her faithful friend, was busy getting the tea ready, thinking it would refresh their strange visitor; and whilst Sally cut some bread-and-butter the child arranged her violets in a cup, to make, as she said, "the table look pretty." But the stranger was unable to partake of the simple meal; she seemed utterly worn and weary, for, leaning her head upon the arm of the chair, she lapsed into an apathetic sleep, as though completely exhausted.

Whilst she thus slept, Sally Grimes (who had been invited to remain) told Mrs. Turner in a whisper all that had taken place that evening.

68

"May God bless you, my dear," said the widow fervently; "you are indeed a good girl."

"But Pollie helped me," exclaimed the warm-hearted girl.

The mother looked at her delicate little child, and smiled to think of those tiny hands doing their part in saving this woman.

Then she turned for counsel to Sally.

"I have but this one bed," she said hesitatingly, "and—and—I should not like her to sleep with Pollie; what shall I do?"

"Let us make her a nice bed on the floor," suggested the child.

"That's the thing!" assented Sally, and the widow agreeing to the plan, they soon had a comfortable bed ready for the stranger. The poor creature suffered them to remove her hat and dress, then they laid her down, and she rested, thankful for the shelter so cheerfully given,

humble though it was.

She was still very beautiful. Her golden brown hair, released from its massive braids, fell in rippling waves around her; the long black lashes, now that the eyes were closed, lay like a silken fringe upon the pale and wasted cheeks. Yes, she was very beautiful; and as the good Samaritans stood looking at her (the children with wondering pity), the widow thought of the time when this lost girl was tenderly loved by parents, who perhaps were even now sorrowing for their erring child.

69

It was getting late, and as it was Pollie's bedtime the mother and child prepared to read their evening chapter. Sally, too, sat down by the fire to listen, wondering in her own mind what they were about. It was all so strange to this poor London waif, this cleanly, peaceful home, this simple worship.

The appointed chapter for this evening was the parable of the Good Shepherd, and the girl's attention was riveted by those words of Divine love and mercy.

70

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

Would *she* be gathered into that fold also? could there be room for *her*? Yes; the seed was sown on that hitherto rugged soil; it would take root and bring forth fruit for the Lord of the harvest.

Just as Sally had put on her time-worn shawl, and was bidding her kind friends "good-night" before going home, heavy steps were heard ascending the stairs, and soon the portly form of Mrs. Flanagan entered the room.

"Well, here I am again," she exclaimed, "and right-down tired, I can tell you; why don't cooks know what they want, and order things in the morning? Dear, dear! what a walk I've had, to be sure—all the way to Grosvenor Square, and with such a load too!"

71

"Hush, please," whispered Mrs. Turner, pointing to the sleeper.

"Who have you got there?" she asked in surprise.

In a few words, spoken in a subdued voice, the widow told the sad tale, and also of the two children's brave conduct.

"What be she like?" was the natural question; "is it right to have her here, think ye?" she added.

Then, as if to satisfy herself on the first point, she stole softly to where the poor wanderer lay sleeping. The light on the table was but dim, not sufficient to enable her to see distinctly, so that she was compelled to kneel down to scan the face of the sleeping girl.

At that moment a bright flame shot up from the flickering fire, and lighted the corner where the bed had been made for the stranger.

There was a quick convulsive gasp.

"My God! oh, can it be?" the old woman cried in a hushed voice. "No, no, I've been deceived too often. Quick! quick! a light!"

72

Mrs. Turner hurried with it to her side. She almost snatched it from her in her eagerness; she gazed long and earnestly upon those wasted features, her breath coming thick and fast, almost as though her very heart was bursting. In silence she gave the light back into the hands of her wondering friend, then laying her head down on the pillow beside the fallen girl, and folding her arms around her, she sobbed out—

"My darling, my Nora! you've come back at last to your poor old mother! Nothing but death shall part us now!"

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## CHAPTER VIII.

73

### SALLY'S FIRST SUNDAY AT CHURCH.

A feeling of Sabbath peace stole over little Pollie as she issued forth from her humble home on her way to Sunday-school. All was still, so quiet; the very court, usually noisy, seemed hushed. None of its uproarious inhabitants were about, only poor crippled Jimmy was sitting on the doorstep warming himself in the feeble sunlight that flickered down from among the crowded chimneys.

The little girl paused to speak a few kind words to him.

"I wish you could come with me," she said; "it is so nice."

"What! be school nice?" repeated the boy, who seemed to have the same horror of learning as the more enlightened Sally Grimes.

"Yes," she replied; "indeed it is. They are all so kind to us there, and teach us such beautiful verses and texts about God and our Saviour."

"Be that Him you told me on?" he asked. "I ain't forgot what you told me afore—'Consider, and hear me, O Lord my God! lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.'"

"Oh, you are a good boy!" exclaimed the child encouragingly. "Now I will tell you my text for to-day, and when I come back you shall hear what my teacher says about 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.'"

"'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,'" repeated the crippled boy with reverence. "I'll not forget it, Pollie," he added, as the little girl prepared to start again, fearing to be late for school.

As she turned into Drury Lane, to her great surprise there stood Sally Grimes, looking strangely shy, but tidily and, above all, neatly dressed. The well-worn cotton gown was perfectly clean; indeed, for the last two days Sally had been wearing a jacket over a petticoat whilst the dress was being washed and dried. Her hair, usually rough, was now smoothly brushed behind her ears, and her face and hands were as clean as soap-and-water could make them. Evidently she had given up the idea of the gaudy hat, for a neat bonnet covered her head. Altogether she looked quite neat and respectable.

"Good morning," cried Pollie, joyously glad to see her kind friend. "Where are you going?"

Sally hesitated

"May I come with you?" she stammered bashfully.

For the moment little Pollie could not reply; she felt too happy to speak.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she said at last, and taking her friend's hand in hers, she proceeded onwards, the happiest little girl in the world.

What a contrast they were!—the sturdy, self-reliant London arab, willing, ay, and able, to battle through the world unaided; the timid, fragile Pollie, strong only in her efforts after good, firm only in her love of truth.

You may imagine with what delight and pride she introduced Sally to her kind teacher; what happiness it was to have her sitting by her side, to see her rapt attention as the text was explained in simple words suitable to the comprehension of the listening children; and when was read the parable of the Good Shepherd, which had been the lesson on that memorable evening when Sally first felt the eager longing to be gathered into the Saviour's fold, Pollie instinctively grasped her friend's hand, as once again the blessed message was repeated.

Happy indeed are they who gather His children in, shielding His little ones from future harm, feeding His lambs with the bread of life.

For Sally Grimes this was all so new: the quiet Sabbath school, those happy children; a light was dawning upon her hitherto clouded mind as she heard of Jesus, who came on earth as a little child, endured a life of poverty and sorrow, then died a cruel death to save us from eternal misery. Never before had she heard the glad tidings of great joy, and her heart was filled with unexpressed thankfulness and peace.

When class was over, the little scholars went their way to church, happy Pollie with her friend's hand still clasped in hers; and the bells rang out their peaceful chime, "It is the Sabbath! it is the Sabbath!" Even the usual noisy bustle of the Strand was hushed in deference to God's holy day. The busy world was calmed to celebrate the day of rest; the peace of God seemed resting upon the earth.

How beautiful the church appeared to Sally, who had never until this day entered a house of prayer (dear old St. Clement's Danes, hallowed to us by many memories), and when the organ pealed forth, and the voices sang "I will arise," she thought, "This must be God's house, and those the angels singing."

There was some one else in the church that Sabbath-day who also thought it must be heaven of which little Pollie had spoken, and that was poor crippled Jimmy.

Mrs. Turner on coming downstairs to go to church had found the neglected boy as usual lonely and desolate. His drunken mother had gone in a pleasure-van with a party of friends like herself to Hampton Court, leaving her child to amuse himself as he could; and kindly Mrs. Turner had carried him up to her own room, washed and dressed him in one of Pollie's clean frocks, given him some wholesome bread-and-butter, then brought him with her to church.

He sat so still and quiet by the widow's side, his eyes intently fixed upon the clergyman, listening eagerly to every word that was spoken, every hymn that was sung, realising in his untutored mind a foretaste of that heaven of which his earliest friend had told, where hunger was unknown, and where sorrow and sighing should flee away.

Once only, when the rector gave forth his text, "Consider the lilies of the field," the boy grasped the widow's hand, and whispered—

"Be they the flowers Pollie give me?"

Heaven and Pollie's violets filled his heart.

Many were the happy children who issued forth from St. Clement's on that Sabbath noon; some hand-in-hand with loving parents, wending their way to homes of plenty, where kindly faces would be waiting to greet them; but of the many, none were or could be happier than those three little ones who gathered round Mrs. Turner when service was over, and, walking side by side, went home to squalid Drury Lane. No well-filled table awaited *their* coming, only the plain and scanty fare the poor widow could offer to her child's young friends; but One hath said—

80

"Whosoever giveth a cup of water to one of these little ones in My name, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

And this was Sally's first Sunday at church.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### CRIPPLED JIMMY.

81

Many days and weeks had passed away, much as life does with us all. We heed not its passing, and forget in the turmoil of worldly cares to scatter seed for the great Husbandman, to reap when He cometh.

And little Pollie?

She had been busy as usual selling her flowers, and as usual scattering, in her simple way, the golden grain. Gently had she led Sally Grimes to seek for higher things, and every Sabbath they were now to be seen sitting side by side, learning of the life that is to come.

And at home? Affairs there had become much brighter, for Mrs. Turner's work had greatly increased, her quiet, unpretending manner having won for her many kind friends, who kept her fully employed—indeed so much that Lizzie Stevens had given up her hard labour of working for the slopshops, and now helped the widow in her lighter and more remunerative toil. It is true they had to work early and late to keep the house (such as it was) above them—the wolf from the door; but they were not so lonely as heretofore. The widow found comfort in the companionship of the hitherto friendless girl, and it was such a happiness for Lizzie to have one so motherly in whom to confide, and of whom she could ask counsel and advice.

82

Then when Pollie came in from her daily toil, cheering them both like a very sunbeam, how they would pause in their work to watch her as she merrily counted over her money, and brushed out her empty basket in readiness for the morrow, chatting gaily the while.

And then to see that active little figure so noiselessly busy getting the tea-dinner, which she always insisted on doing to save "mother" the trouble; indeed, I think the tea would have lost its flavour for that dear mother had Pollie's hands not prepared it.

83

Sometimes, during the hot July days, the child would persuade them to take a rest; and when it became too dark to see their work without the help of a candle, they would walk out of Drury Lane for a while, and go down one of the streets leading to the Thames, where the air felt purer and fresher, and sitting down would watch the boats on the river. Sally usually joined them, and these little rests from toil constituted their simple pleasures. How deliciously cool the breezes felt, so different to the heated atmosphere of their own neighbourhood! Both Mrs. Turner and Lizzie used to feel revived by the change. No wonder then that the two children should decide on living near the river when they grew rich, for with the hopefulness of youth they planned great things for the future.

84

So the summer passed by, and autumn came, and now, instead of roses or pinks, Pollie's basket was filled with chrysanthemums and dahlias. She often wondered what she should do when winter came and there were no sweet flowers to sell. It grieved her to think she should not then be able to help her dear mother, and as usual she opened her heart to that loving parent.

"Ah, my Pollie!" said the mother, as she smoothed back the curls from the anxious little face, "have you forgotten? 'The Lord will provide.'"

Then the child was comforted, for she remembered that "There is no want to them that fear Him."

One October evening she turned up Russell Court, tired and anxious to get home, for it had been a dull, dark day in the City, and she had not succeeded in disposing of her flowers there. The old bankers and merchants seemed not disposed for purchasing bouquets that day. Even Sally's basket still remained filled, and she was always a more successful seller than timid little Pollie; so

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the elder girl had proposed trying westward for better luck. Better luck they certainly had, for their baskets became empty at last, but they walked many a mile during the day, and Pollie's tiny feet were very, very weary, as bidding her friend a loving "good-night" she turned her steps towards home, eagerly longing for its rest and shelter.

The gas was flaring in Drury Lane, so that Russell Court looked dark by comparison; but as she approached the house in which they lived, she was surprised to see a dense crowd gathered around the door. Men were there speaking in hoarse whispers, women talking with bated breath as though afraid to speak aloud, and the bewildered child could hardly fancy it was the same place, there was such a hushed commotion as it were; the crowd swaying to and fro, to give place to others who came to swell the excited throng.

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Little Pollie stood amidst the people who were hustling each other to get as near the door as possible. What was to be done? how was she to get into the house? and oh, how anxious her mother would be at her long absence! The poor child became frightened, almost to tears, totally unable to force her way through the mob, which was increasing every moment, when looking round for some friendly aid, she saw to her delight Mrs. Smith, the greengrocer's wife, standing close by, with a shawl thrown over her head, talking to a policeman, and pointing excitedly towards the house.

Pollie went up to her and ventured timidly to touch her arm.

"Please, Mrs. Smith," she began.

"Lor' bless me, child, what are you doing out so late, and in this crowd too?" was her exclamation.

"I can't get in," Pollie sobbed; "oh, what is the matter?"

"What! don't you know? Lor', it's awful," she replied; "here, policeman, do get this poor child through that there mob; I guess her mother is in a way about her."

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"All right, Mrs. S——," said the man, and to Pollie's astonishment he took her up in his arms, to carry her through the crowd, who made way for him to pass with his light burden.

Tallow candles were flaring in the narrow passage, people with pallid, haggard faces looked out from open room doors; yet with all this unwonted stir, there seemed to be a strange hushed awe upon them, as though they were calmed by the mysterious presence of a great calamity.

When the man put Pollie down she glanced from one to another in trembling alarm, still clinging to her protector's hand.

"Here she is at last," cried a voice; and turning to the speaker she recognised a woman who lived in the house, and whom she had often met on the stairs.

"Is it my mother?" asked the child, with undefined dread at her poor little heart.

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"No, no, come with me; he keeps calling for you."

Then, still holding the policeman's hand closely clasped in hers, she followed the woman down the dirty dark stairs which led to the cellar where Jimmy lived.

The door of the squalid room stood wide open; two tallow candles stuck in empty bottles flared on the broken mantel-shelf above the rusty fireless grate; a battered old chair and a rickety table constituted the entire furniture of the room (if such it could be called), for on a heap of dirty rags lay little Jimmy. By his side, holding him in her arms, knelt Mrs. Turner, whilst a gentleman, evidently the parish doctor, was bathing his head, from which the blood was flowing. Lizzie Stevens was there, steeping linen in a basin for the doctor, and another policeman, no one else. I forgot. Crouching in the farthest corner, and glaring in drunken stupor around her, was the poor dying child's wretched mother. A broken bottle tightly grasped in her hands, fragments of which lay about the dirt-encrusted floor, told the tale, alas! too plainly. In her drunken fury she had slain her child!

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Pollie felt safe directly she saw her own loved mother.

"O mother, what is it?" she whispered.

The dying boy heard her, softly as she had spoken.

"Little Pollie," he feebly murmured, and turned his dim eyes up to her.

"Dear Jimmy," she said, kneeling down beside him. He smiled as though at peace, and yet the life-blood was ebbing slowly away.

"Pollie," he said, "shall I go to the kingdom of heaven? Will Jesus put His hands on me, and bless me also?"

The little girl could not speak for sobbing, but she laid her soft cheek upon his clay-cold hand.

"You've been very good to me," he rambled on, "you told me of the Good Shepherd"— There was silence, broken only by the choking sobs of the listeners; even the policemen, used as they were to similar scenes, were deeply moved at the dying boy's love for his little friend. His eyes were closed, but his disengaged hand wandered feebly over the horse-rug that covered him, until at last he laid it on Pollie's bowed head. There it rested; his eyes unclosed, and he gazed wildly

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round, saying excitedly—

"Pollie, Pollie, it's so dark. Is it night coming on? Don't go, little Pollie. Let me say the prayer you taught me." He tried to fold his hands as *she* had always done. In vain—they fell upon the coverlet, weak and nerveless.

"Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death," he murmured falteringly. The voice ceased!

Crippled Jimmy had passed away safely into the fold of the Good Shepherd!

Ah! who would wish him back again? Misery exchanged for perfect bliss—sorrow and sighing for eternal joy. 93

They all gazed upon the sharp pinched features, now gradually settling into the calm repose of death. What in life was almost painful to look upon, with the touch of immortality became lovely; for the dead child's face bore the impress of an angel's smile, as though he had caught a glimpse of heaven's happiness whilst passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death.

Little Pollie clung to her mother, sobbing convulsively and hiding her face in her dress.

"Hush, my darling," soothed the widow; "poor Jimmy is now with God, free from all sorrow or pain. Think what his joy must be!"

They were startled by a harsh voice screeching out—

"That ain't my Jimmy! Let me get at him! I say, what be you folks doing here?"

It was the drunken creature, who, unnoticed by any of them, had approached the spot where the dead child lay. She darted forward, crying out, whilst she brandished the bottle— 94

"I'll wake him, never fear; like I've done many a time before, I warrant ye!"

Fortunately the policeman saw her in time to prevent her doing further mischief, or even touching the boy, for, laying his firm grasp upon her arm, he exclaimed authoritatively—

"Come, none of this, my good woman. I must take you to Bow Street, to answer the charge of killing that poor little chap."

Then ensued a scene too terrible to describe. The wretched woman was taken away from the place, shrieking and swearing, leaving her dead child to be tended by strangers, kinder far than she had ever been.

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## CHAPTER X.

### NORA.

A drizzling rain kept falling the day on which little Jimmy was to be laid in his narrow home. They had found beneath his ragged jacket a little packet, carefully tied with a piece of thread, and on opening it, something dried and shrivelled fell to the ground. It was the bunch of violets, now withered, Pollie's first gift to him—the only gift he had ever received, and which came fraught with such peace to him. With tender pity Mrs. Turner refolded the tiny packet, and placed the faded flowers again where they had been so carefully treasured.

His unhappy mother was in prison, which place she only quitted to be confined for life in a criminal lunatic asylum, driven mad by that fearful curse of England—drink! drink! so that there would have been no one to follow him to his last resting-place had not good Mrs. Turner offered to go. She could not bear to think of the poor child being laid to rest so friendlessly, and little Pollie pleaded to be taken. Then Lizzie Stevens begged to be allowed to accompany the widow in her pious task, and just as the humble parish funeral was leaving the house, which had been but a miserable home for the dead child, Sally Grimes came up, and, taking Lizzie's hand silently, joined the three mourners. A large black cloak covered her patched but clean frock, and she wore an old black bonnet of her mother's, which had outlived many fashions. It was the only outward semblance of mourning she could get, but her heart sorrowed sincerely for the crippled boy whom she had seen for many years, desolate and uncared for, crouching in the dingy doorway—desolate until little Pollie found him there, and shed some brightness around his hitherto lonely life; and another thing, he was a sort of link between her and Pollie. 96

The London streets looked dismal and dirty on this autumn afternoon with the pitiless rain and murky sky; but when the little party reached the quiet suburban cemetery, the clouds had somewhat dispersed, though the late flowers which yet remained to gladden the earth drooped with the heavy moisture; and when the last words were spoken, and all that remained of Crippled Jimmy had been laid in his narrow bed, the four kindly mourners turned tearfully from the spot, leaving him alone in his poor humble grave. 97

At that moment a robin perched himself on a bush close by, and warbled forth such a hymn, so full of gladness, it seemed as though the bird sang the echo of those joyful words—

"I am the Resurrection and the Life."

And so they left little Jimmy. Nothing could harm him now. 'Twas but his frail mortality they mourned; his blest spirit, freed from earthly stains, was now with his Saviour and God.

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On their return home they found that Mrs. Flanagan had prepared a comfortable tea for them all in Mrs. Turner's room; and it looked so cosy and home-like, humble though it was, with Mrs. Flanagan's kindly face to greet them.

Poor Mrs. Flanagan—she was greatly changed; no longer the same cheerful person, but calm and subdued, as if she dwelt beneath some dark shadow that clouded her existence.

She did not now, when her day's work was ended, come into Mrs. Turner's room to have a friendly chat, or interest herself in Pollie's fortune-making, as she used to do. It is true, she still brought the flowers for the child, but her whole mind seemed too absorbed to dwell on these trivial matters which formerly possessed such an interest for her. Her entire thoughts were centred on Nora.

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No one, save good Mrs. Turner, had seen the poor girl since the evening Pollie had brought the lost one home. The poor mother hid, as it were, her recovered treasure, fearful that even the mere passing glance of scorn should for a moment rest on her blighted child. So up in that little room, away from prying eyes, lived the mother and daughter. Nora was not idle. Not for worlds would she have rested dependent on that dear forgiving mother's hard earnings for her daily food; therefore, whilst Mrs. Flanagan toiled in Covent Garden Market, her daughter's slender fingers diligently laboured at bookbinding, the trade she had pursued years ago, in the time when her heart was innocent and happy.

On the evening of which we write, when Sally Grimes and Lizzie Stevens had gone to their own homes after the peaceful hours spent with Mrs. Turner, the old woman sat for some time silent and sad, with elbows resting on the table, and her face buried in her hands.

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At length she looked up.

"My Nora's very sadly," she observed.

The widow paused in her needlework, and gazed at the troubled countenance of her old friend.

"She is not ill, is she?" was the question: "I saw her this morning, and then she seemed pretty much the same."

"No, not ill in body, at least not much," replied the poor mother; "but oh! Mrs. Turner, my Nora is not like my Nora of days gone by."

And the grey head bent low upon the table, and the worn wrinkled face was hidden, to hide the bitter tears which fell.

Her sympathising listener put down her work, and rising softly, laid her hand gently upon her neighbour's sorrow-bent head.

"Take heart, Mrs. Flanagan," she soothed; "it will all come right at last, in God's own time. Just think how once you feared you should never see your daughter again, and then"—

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"Oh, but she's not the same; no longer gay, or even cheerful, as she used to be," was sobbed forth; "sits for hours looking far-away like, as if she saw me not; yet once I was all to her. Ah, woe is me that I should be sorry she was not laid to rest years ago, when a sinless child, like little Jimmy was to-day!"

Whilst the unhappy mother was thus pouring out her heart sorrow, Pollie had crept up, and in loving pity had slidden her small hand into her aged friend's in token of sympathy with her grief. For some time Mrs. Flanagan was too absorbed with her great woe to heed that gentle caress, but when alluding to the dead boy she raised her head, and saw the little girl's tearful eyes lifted to hers.

"Please, don't cry, dear Mrs. Flanagan," she said timidly. "Nora will soon be like she once was; won't she, mother?"

"Bless you, my precious," cried the poor old woman, laying her hand lovingly on the child's curly head, "you're a real comfort to me."

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"O mother," murmured a soft voice, "have patience with me, dearest; I am still your own Nora; only—oh, so worn and sin-stained!"

They started in surprise. Unseen she had entered the room, and had overheard her poor mother mourning for her child.

Meekly she knelt at her parent's feet, with tearless eyes upraised, but clasping the hard rough hand that had so toiled for her in the years gone by, and was willing still to toil, could it but bring back some few gleams of former brightness to her child.

"I am not changed in heart to you, dear mother," she continued, "but when I sit and think, my sad thoughts fly back over the dreary desert of the past; and I know what I am, and what I might have been."

All trembling with emotion, the poor old woman held out her arms to clasp her penitent child; then laying her head upon her bosom, she smoothed the beautiful hair caressingly, as in the days when as an infant she nestled there.

"Yes, yes, dear mother," pursued the poor girl; "let me lay my weary head where I can hear the beating of your heart, whose every throb, I know, is full of love for me. I will pray to forget the sad, sad past, and be to you once more your Nora of the long ago. We were so happy then!"

"Yes, we were happy in those days," murmured the mother, to herself as it were; "though often hungry, and often cold; but the wide world was our garden, and we had to pluck what flowers we could from it. You, my poor child, passed by the blossoms, and gathered only weeds; but take heart, my darling, there are yet some bonnie buds to cull, and life after all will not be quite a barren wilderness to you and your poor old mother."

Then Mrs. Flanagan fairly broke down. But the icy barrier which had divided the mother and daughter was fallen, and they now knew what they were—all in all—to each other once again.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### CHRISTMAS EVE.

Christmas Eve! What memories revive at those two almost hallowed words!

We think upon the *first* Christmas Eve,—of the manger at Bethlehem, the Redeemer's humble cradle-bed; the star, guiding His first worshippers to His poor abode,—and we recall in imagination that glorious anthem sung by the heavenly host to those simple awe-struck shepherds whilst guarding their flocks by night! Yes; those words, "Christmas Eve," carry our thoughts, for a time at least, far from the cares of this transient world; and strangely cold must be the heart that does not echo the glad tidings, "On earth, peace, goodwill toward men."

But on the Christmas Eve of which we speak the holy stars were shining above a far different scene than those peaceful plains of Bethlehem—on London, that wilderness to the poor and sad, that golden city for the rich and gay, and in a district of which (Drury Lane) little star-light could be discerned through the murky air of its crowded streets.

Drury Lane was now at the height of its business: flaring gas-jets flamed at the open shop-fronts, whilst tradesmen and costermongers seemed to vie with each other as to which could shout the loudest to attract customers. There were butchers urging passers-by to purchase joints of animals hanging up in the shops, decked with rosettes and bows of coloured ribbon in honour of Christmas; greengrocers, gay with holly and mistletoe, interspersed with mottoes wishing every one the "Compliments of the season." Bakers, too, were doing a thriving trade in cakes of all sizes; whilst down the centre of the street, lining each side of the roadway, were vendors of all sorts of things, whose stalls were brightened either by oil-lamps or else the more humble candle stuck in a paper lantern.

I care not to speak of gin-palaces, filled by poor wretches buying poison for soul and body. Would to God our loved country could be free from its curse of drunkenness!

And yet the poor denizens of this pent-up neighbourhood appeared more cheerful and better-tempered than they usually seem to be. Jokes were bandied freely between tradesmen and customers, and kindly greetings exchanged in honour of Christmas. Occasionally, it is true, a shivering creature would be seen shuffling along through the busy crowd, glancing with furtive hungry eyes at the food exposed for sale, but unable to buy even a loaf of bread. The generality, however, had anticipated the coming festive season, and had saved the wherewith to keep Christmas.

It was a relief to turn from the noisy din of Drury Lane up Russell Court, and thence to the quiet of Mrs. Turner's room. Yes; there they were all to be seen, a happy family party, preparing, too, to keep Christmas.

At the one end of the table, close to the candle (they could only afford one), sat Mrs. Turner and Lizzie, busily stitching away, anxious to do as much work as they possibly could, as it was intended to celebrate the next day as an entire rest and holiday. On the floor was Sally Grimes stoning some raisins into a basin for the plum-pudding, and by her side, at Nora's feet, sat Pollie, helping her trusty friend in her important work.

Mrs. Flanagan was standing at the other end of the table, busily mixing the various ingredients requisite for this crowning dish of the unwonted feast, and there also was Mrs. Grimes (Sally's

mother) chopping up the seasoning for a goose, which Mrs. Flanagan's employers had given her as a Christmas gift, and on which they were all to dine.

Mrs. Smith had also contributed something to this festival in the shape of oranges and nuts, and had also given Pollie a few sprigs of holly with which to deck their room.

Seated on a low chair, her lap filled with holly leaves and bright berries, sat Nora, and her slender fingers were busy twining them into little garlands to brighten up their poor abode. Very pale and fragile looked the girl, almost too fragile to struggle with the world, but her sweet face was happier than when last we saw her kneeling at her mother's feet. It was as though the storm of life had buffeted her until almost crushed, and having vented its utmost fury, had passed away, leaving her at rest at last, but oh! so worn and weary with the strife.

Poor old Mrs. Flanagan! Every thought of her heart turned to Nora. When her daughter was sometimes gay with a touch of the light-heartedness of other days, the gaiety would find an echo with her, and she would strive to be merry for that dear one's sake. And if, as was more frequently the case, the girl was sad, the shadow rested on the mother also. She seemed now but to live in the reflection of her daughter's life.

Even now, whilst busy with the morrow's good cheer, she would ever and anon pause to glance at her child; and if the girl chanced to look up, and met the mother's eyes with a smile, what intense joy spread over that mother's careworn face, lighting it up with the sunshine of love.

Ah me! we can never fathom the depth of a mother's tenderness. Who in the whole world cares for us as she does? Pitiful to our faults, sorrowing with our griefs, rejoicing in our joys. Who so unselfish? who so true? Happy the child who can *truthfully* say, "Never has sin of mine furrowed thy brow, or silvered thy hair, my darling."

But to return to our story.

Pollie, seated as before mentioned at Nora's feet, was intently watching her (making very little progress, I fear, with stoning the raisins) as she daintily threaded some berries to form a word, and many a merry laugh was caused by the two children trying to guess what the word was to be.

P was the letter first fixed on to the slip of cardboard, and which she held up to them, smiling brightly.

"I know what it's to be!" cried Sally, who was becoming quite a scholar now; "it's plum-pudding."

But Nora shook her head, saying—

"No, that is not the word I am going to make. Can you guess, Pollie?"

"I don't think I can," was the reply. "Is it"——

"P stands for Pollie," cried out impetuous Sally, in her eagerness almost upsetting her basin of raisins upon the floor. "Perhaps it's that."

There was much merriment over Sally's guessing, and much amazement too on the part of Mrs. Grimes, who was utterly astonished at her "gal's larning;" but still Nora shook her head. No, that was not the word intended.

Many were the conjectures hazarded, till at last Pollie resolved to try no more, but wait until the entire word or phrase was finished, both children promising not to look until at a given signal from Nora they should know it was completed. Then they resumed their employment, waiting very patiently for the time. At last it came.

"Now," said Nora, and she held it up so that all could see, then she gave it into Pollie's hand.

The puzzle was solved.

"Peace on earth," read the child aloud.

There was a silence, each one occupied with thoughts those words suggested. Tears filled the eyes of the two widows, for they clearly understood what was in the girl's heart when tracing those letters. *Her* head was bowed; they could not see her face, but her hands were very trembling as she clasped them together as if in silent prayer.

Pollie broke the silence.

"Nora, dearie," she half whispered, "I wish we could get in the other beautiful words, 'Glory to God in the highest,' because it is He who gives us this sweet peace, and I should so like to thank Him."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### IN THE SPRING-TIME.

Christmas had come and gone, even the New Year was becoming old; for three months had slipped by, and March winds were preparing to usher in April showers.

The London shopkeepers were exhibiting their spring goods, hoping that the few gleams of sun which had contrived to make themselves seen were indeed heralds of the coming "season," which "season" was supposed to bring an increase of business with it, and, of course, as the homely adage says, "more grist to the mill."

But as yet the streets were wet and sloppy, the bleak winds whistled round the corners, and London looked very dull and cheerless, even at the West End, where it is always brighter than in the busy City. 114

Far away in the country, it is true, the birds were twittering, joyfully busy in making their nests, flying hither and thither in search of materials to form their tiny homes.

There were sheep, too, in the meadows, cropping the fresh young grass, whilst the lambs skipped merrily about their staid mothers, as though rejoicing in the warmer weather; for the winter had been very severe, and many a night had they huddled together beside a hedge to keep themselves warm when the snow was falling thickly around.

The buds on the trees, especially the elms, were filling, so that after a few showers they would throw off their brown sheaths and put forth their delicate green leaves to court the breeze; and as to the hedges, they were already verdant. Yes, all creation was awaking, eager to proclaim His praise who hath said "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." 115

In the deep sheltered copse or hedgerows, primroses and violets were to be found nestling amidst green leaves and soft moss, filling the air with perfume. It always seems a pity to gather them where they bloom so sweetly and linger so long, yet gathered they were and sent up to London; some, indeed, were to be found in Sally Grimes' basket as she stood outside the Bank, as she was standing on the day we first saw her. She has certainly improved since then—no longer ragged or untidy, but her hair is neatly plaited beneath a decent bonnet, and her shawl is securely fastened, instead of flying in the wind as it used to do. She is still very successful in "business," although she does not now rush across the roads at peril of life or limb, nor does she thrust her flowers into the faces of the passers-by, frightening timid people by her roughness. No; all that is changed, and she has become a quiet, steady girl. 116

Truth to tell, she is beginning to dislike the life she leads—not the flowers; she loves them more than ever! and often looks after neat little servants she sometimes sees, wishing to become like one of them.

Patience, Sally! who knows what may be by and by?

But where is little Pollie, that she is not with her trusty friend?

Poor little Pollie lies sick and ill at home, so pale and thin one would scarcely recognise in that wan little face the Pollie of last spring-time!

A severe cold, followed by slow fever, has laid her low, and though all danger is over, she still continues so weak, too feeble to move; therefore her dear mother or Lizzie Stevens lifts her from her bed and lays her in an easy-chair which Mrs. Flanagan had borrowed, in which she reclines all the day long, very patient and uncomplaining though the poor little heart is often very sad as she watches her mother's busy fingers, and feels that she cannot help to lift the burden as she used to do; then like an angel's whisper comes the remembrance of that which cheered her the first day she started in business, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness;" and so the brown eyes close, shutting up the fast-gathering tears, and she trusts in her Heavenly Father with all the fervour of her pure childish heart, sure that the "Lord will provide." 117

Then during the evening Nora comes in, and takes the little sufferer upon her lap, and sings to her so beautifully that the child gazes up into the girl's lovely eyes, now so calm and hopeful, with the dreamy fancy that the angels must look like her. There is one song, an especial favourite with them both, called "Beautiful Blue Violets;" and very often, whilst listening to the sweet voice, Pollie falls asleep, soothed by the melody. 118

Indeed, there is no lack of kind friends who love the little girl. Mrs. Smith brings up all sorts of nice things to tempt the child's appetite—sweet oranges and baked apples—even her brother, the butcher at whose shop Pollie's first purchase of meat was made, sent a piece of mutton, "with his respects to Mrs. Turner, and it was just the right bit to make some broth for the little gal."

The good doctor (the same who was present when crippled Jimmy died), though far from being a rich man, would accept no fee for attending her, so that if kindness and love could have called back her lost health, Pollie would soon have been well; but she is very, very ill, and day by day grows weaker and weaker. Her poor mother watches each change in the little face so precious to her, and when she lifts her in her arms feels how light the burden is becoming; she dreads to think that God will take her only treasure from her; her lips tremble as she says, "Thy will be done." But the poor have no time for repining; every idle moment is money lost, and money must 119

be earned to buy food for the dear ones who look to them for bread; so Mrs. Turner was compelled to work on, though her heart was sick with sadness, and many a time gladly would she have laid it aside to take her suffering child in her arms, and soothe the languid pain as none but a mother can. The little girl seemed to guess the thought those anxious eyes revealed, and when she saw her dear mother looking wistfully upon her, she would say, striving to be gay, and hide from those loving eyes all trace of suffering—

"I'm so cosy in this nice chair, mother darling, and Nora is coming in soon, you know!"

And of the many who love little Pollie, who so true as Sally Grimes? Every morning before setting off for the City she comes, anxiously asking, "How's Pollie?" and on her return, her first care is to inquire for her little sick friend, bringing with her a few flowers, if she has any left in the basket, or some other trifle, precious, though, to the grateful recipient, whose white lips smile gratefully at the kind Sally for thus thinking of her.

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"Ay, but I'm lonesome without you, Pollie," says the girl, as she kisses the pale cheeks of the child; "and glad I'll be when you gets about again, the place don't seem the same without you; why, even that big peeler with the whiskers, who is a'most allers near the Bank, he says to-day 'How's the little gal?' that he did."

One evening Sally came, rushing in quite breathless with excitement, startling Mrs. Turner and waking up Pollie, who was dozing in Nora's arms.

"Good news, good news," she cried out; "luck's come at last, hurray! there's such a lovely lady coming to see you, Pollie."

"To see Pollie?" asked the widow in surprise; "who is she?"

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"I don't know," was the reply, "but she's coming; she told me so, and soon too."

"Who can it be?" they all questioned of each other, pausing in their work to look at the excited girl.

"I'll tell you all about it," exclaimed Sally, who felt herself to be of some importance as the bearer of such wonderful news; "only just let me get my breath a bit."

"Well," she continued, when sufficiently recovered to proceed with her story, but which, like all narrators of startling intelligence, she seemed to wish to spin out, so as to excite the curiosity of her hearers to the utmost; "well, I was standing at the top of Threadneedle Street, with my back to the Mansion House, looking to see if any customers were coming from Moorgate Street way, when some one touched me on my shoulder. I turned sharp round, as I thought maybe it was a gent wanting a bunch of flowers for his coat. But instead of a gent it was, oh, such a pretty lady! Not a young lady; p'raps as old as you, Mrs. Turner, p'raps older. She was dressed all in black, with, oh my! such crape, and jet beads; and though she smiled when she spoke, yet she seemed sad-like."

122

"Are you the little girl I saw here about a year ago?" says she.

"May be I am, marm," says I; "cos I'm pretty well allers here, leastway in the mornings."

She looked at me a bit, and then she says—

"I should not have thought to find you such a big girl in so short a time. Do you remember me? I bought some violets, and you told me your name, and where you lived; indeed I should have come to see you long ago as I promised, but was obliged to go abroad suddenly with my own little girl."

"And then I thought she was going to cry, she looked so sad," added Sally, "and she said"—

"But God took her home."

123

"Poor dear lady!" was the exclamation of Sally's attentive listeners.

"Even the rich have troubles also," said Mrs. Turner with a pitying sigh.

"Wait a bit, I 'aint told you all yet," cried the girl; "well, I just then thought of what Pollie told us about the lady who gave her a shilling the very first day she went with me selling violets. So I says—

"It warn't me, marm, you saw that day; it was little Pollie!"

"Yes, that was the name," says she; "and where is little Pollie?"

"With that I up and told her as how Pollie wasn't well, and so she says, 'I will come to see her directly I have finished my business in the City.' Oh, Lor'!" cried Sally, suddenly pausing in her story, "here she be, I'm sure, for there's some one coming up the stairs with Mrs. Flanagan, some one who don't wear big heavy boots too; can't you hear?"

124

Sally was right; for the kindly face of their neighbour appeared in the doorway, ushering in "the beautiful lady."

"And so this is little Pollie," the sweet voice said, as, after speaking cheerfully to the widow and the others who were in the room, she stood beside the sick child. "Well, Pollie, I have come to see you at last, and in return for the beautiful violets you gave me a year ago, I will, with our merciful

Father's blessing us, put some roses on your white cheeks."

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My story is told!

In a pretty lodge close to the gates of a magnificent park live Pollie and her dear long-suffering mother, but now as happy as it is possible for mortals to be. The widow continues her needlework, not as formerly, "to keep the wolf from the door," but merely for their beloved lady, or what is required for the house. Pollie, whose cheeks are now truly rosy, goes every day to school, and when at home helps her mother, so that in time she will become quite a useful girl to their kind and generous benefactress. 125

But who are those two neat young girls who are coming down the path towards the lodge, looking so bright and cheerful? Surely one is Lizzie Stevens, and the other Sally Grimes? Yes, indeed, and the housekeeper says she "never had two better servants, so willing and steady," than our two young friends. So Sally's ambition is realised; she is a servant, and a good one too, for trusty Sally never did anything by halves.

And Mrs. Flanagan?

If you will walk across the meadow by that narrow raised path, you will see a cosy cottage adjoining the dairy. There is Mrs. Flanagan, with sleeves tucked up above her elbows, busily making butter; it reminds her of the years long ago, when she used to do the dairy-work at the farm, and had never known a care. But she is happy even now, for outside the window is Nora, cheerful and contented, feeding the poultry, who gather round her, clucking noisily, while some white pigeons have flown down from the dove-cot, and one has alighted on her shoulder, and Nora's merry laugh is as music to the mother's ear. 126

There is some one scouring milk-pans in the yard, but whose features are almost hidden by a large black bonnet; who is it? The face turns towards us, and we see Sally Grimes' mother!

So we leave all our old friends, peaceful and happy, doing their duty faithfully to the noble lady, who, though surrounded by all the world holds dear—riches—yet had sympathy for the poor ones of the earth, and pity for their sorrows.

She had resided many years abroad, but on returning to England and re-forming her establishment, had chosen these honest hard-working friends of ours to serve her. She learned from others how they had striven to live, and how they had each endeavoured to do their Heavenly Master's work as He had appointed; patient under privations, and tender to others, doing as they would be done by. 127

And thus sunshine had come to brighten the hitherto dreary paths of their struggling lives, though even in their darkest hours our humble friends had never forgotten that

"Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face."

And how gratefully did they now lift up their hearts to Him who "careth for us!" And when Mrs. Flanagan and Mrs. Grimes met at Mrs. Turner's, as they very often did when their work was done, they would contrast their present happy lot with those sad days of the past.

"And yet," as Mrs. Turner once said, "had it not been for our troubles we should never have known each other, for it was those very sorrows that knit us together."

"Ay, ay," interrupted Mrs. Grimes, "for your Pollie somehow made my gal hate the streets, else she might a run there till now, and never a been the rale good scholar she be." 128

"Ah, Pollie be a comfort to you," observed the other old friend; "and how she do grow, to be sure! Well, well, bless her heart, she won't have to rough it, my dear—leastways I hope not,—nor be led to go wrong like my poor Nora; still she'll have her sorrows, like the rest on us."

Yes, that was true; she would have her share of the trials that fall to the lot of all, and so would trusty Sally; but happily they knew where to take their cares, and He who had led them to this peaceful home would be with them still. And thus we leave them—living their lives in peaceful content, grateful for the memories given, and trusting in Him always.

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And all this happiness had been brought about by—a simple Bunch of Violets!

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE POLLIE \*\*\*

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