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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LONDON BABY: THE STORY OF KING ROY ***

L.T. Meade

"A London Baby"

"The Story of King Roy"

Prologue.

I first saw King Roy on a lovely summer's evening near Hyde Park. It was a Sunday evening, and I recollect there was a light pleasant breeze, which just tempered the heat, and once in a playful moment caught King Roy's small velvet cap and tossed it off his curly head. Then ensued a race, a scuffle, and a laugh, in which I, although a stranger to his Majesty, joined. This induced me to consider him more attentively, and thus to study well one of the bonniest baby faces it has ever been my lot to behold. For—yes, it is true—King Roy was only a king in right of his babyhood, being no higher up in this world's social scale than a carpenter's son.

A brawny, large, and handsome man was the father, on whose shoulder the little fellow was riding, while a demure, pale-faced sister of about ten, walked by the side of the two. Father and little sister might have been met with anywhere, any day, but the baby once in a lifetime.

He was a rounded and curved creature—not an angle anywhere about him; his chin was a dimple, his lips rose-buds, his eyes sapphires; his little head was a mass of tangled golden curls; sunshine seemed to kiss him all over—hair, eyes, lips, even to the small pink toes—for he had pulled off his shoes and stockings, which were held tightly in two fat hands. He was full of heart-sunshine too, for his gay voice babbled continually, saying words, to our deaf ears meaningless, but which, doubtless, the angels understood very well.

"Ah boo!" was his remark to me, and he pointed with his small finger. Following the direction of the tiny finger, I saw a fly sailing slowly through space. Between King Roy and that fly there was doubtless some untold sympathy. As though attracted by his admiration it came nearer. Yes, he must have been giving it some message, for he babbled more sweetly than before. The fly sailed away; it looked important with big tidings, as it went higher into the blue, and the little group of three turning Hyde Park Corner disappeared from my sight.

I never saw King Roy again, but afterwards I heard a story about him—a story which so moved me that it may some others; so I tell it here.

Chapter One.

John Henry Warden was a carpenter by trade; he was a well-to-do workman, employed constantly in a profitable and moneymaking business. God had also endowed him with excellent mental and physical powers. Sickness was unknown to this man, and as to the many heart-aches which come into the daily measure of most other lives, they were strangers to his nature. He did not understand moping; he had no sympathy with gloom. He considered himself a successful man, he was also ambitious; he meant, if he lived, to leave this world in a much higher position than when he had entered it. He was very much respected by his neighbours, for he was a strictly honourable, upright, and honest man. But though respected he was not loved. It was his misfortune that never yet in all his life had he either awakened or given love. And yet he was not without those closest ties which knit hearts to hearts. He had been a husband; he was now a widower and a father. He had married a young and beautiful girl, a sensitive creature who needed love as the plants need sunshine. She lived with him for a little over ten years, all the time, year after year, fading slowly but surely. Then she died; no one said she died of a broken heart—Warden least of all suspected it. He regretted her loss, for he considered a mother the right person to bring up her children, and he felt it a pity that she should have left all the good things of this life, which by-and-by he might have provided for her. He had even expressed this regret to her as she lay on her death-bed, and her answer had surprised him.

"But there'll be love up in heaven. I'm so *hungry* for love."

The wife and mother died, and Warden did not fret. It would have been very sinful to fret, for although he scarcely considered himself religious, yet he had a respect for God's dispensations. Yes, he was outwardly a model character: he worked early and late; he saved money; he was never in debt; he defrauded no man; his evenings were spent either in attending lectures of working men like himself or studying the subjects he loved at home; he never drank; he never swore; he was looked up to, and brought forward as an example to follow for many a poor drunken wretch. But yet in God's sight that poor drunkard, struggling, though struggling feebly, to repent, was far nearer, far dearer than this Pharisee, who had never yet known love, human or divine.

Warden's wife died, leaving to his care two children. Faith, the elder, nine years of age at the time, was a pale, silent child. She knew enough of her father's character to suppress all her real self before him. Roy, the younger, aged three months when his mother left him, showed from his earliest moments a disposition differing widely from either father or mother. By-and-by that sweet soul would develop the love of the one parent without her weakness, the strength of the other without his hardness. Warden, in reality loving no one, having never in all his existence experienced either the joy or the pain of true love, yet believed that he had this feeling for his boy. He was undoubtedly very proud of the little child; he was his son, he was beautiful. Warden, when he looked at him, dreamed dreams, in which he saw himself the founder of a house and a name. He would make his boy a gentleman; he worked ever harder and harder as this thought grew and gathered strength within him. As to Faith, she was useful in helping and training Roy. For her own individual existence he had no special thought. She was but a girl; she would grow up another weak, good, loving creature like her mother. She might or might not marry. It did not greatly matter. Of course he would do his duty by her—for whenever had John Warden, in his own opinion, neglected that? She should be educated; she should have her chance in life. But he had no high opinion of women, and, though he thought he loved his son, he did not even pretend to his own heart that he cared for little Faith.

It was to this man—this hard, hard man—who lived so uprightly in the eyes of his fellow men, but so far from his God, that the same God of love and pity and infinite compassion would yet reveal Himself. He must hear the voice of God; but, alas! for his hardness of heart, it must be in the whirlwind and the storm; not in the still small accents.

Chapter Two.

It was a Sunday morning—nearly a year after my first and last sight of King Roy. He was nearly two years old at the time, and his little sister Faith was laboriously and with infinite care dressing him to accompany her for a walk. Warden was out, and the two children had the pleasant and cheerful sitting-room to themselves. The moments of Warden's absence were the moments of Faith's sunshine. Her object now was to get out before he returned, and take Roy with her. She thought her father a very good and wonderful man; but it was quite impossible for her to feel absolutely at home with him. She had a keen perception of his real indifference to her; she was not surprised, for Faith thought very humbly of herself. But his absence took away a sense of restraint which she could not shake off, and now the glorious sunshine of this autumn morning seemed to beckon her out, to beckon and lure her into the fulness of its own beautiful life. No summer's day that ever came was too hot for little Faith; she would get into the full power of the sun herself, and Roy should have the shelter of the trees. Yes, it was Sunday morning; there was nothing whatever to keep them at home; they would go into Regent's Park, and sit under the trees, and be very, very happy. "'Tis *such* a lovely day, Roy," she said to her little brother. Roy, seated on the floor, was rebelling at his shoes and stockings being put on, and Faith had to use all her powers of imagination in describing the outside world, to induce him to submit to the process. At last, however, he was ready, and taking his hand, they went down together into the street. Roy was such a lovely child that people turned to look at him as he trotted along. Those who often saw him have told me that he had by no means perfect features, but the brightness and sweetness of the little face were simply indescribable. He babbled as much as of old; but his babbling was now intelligible to other creatures besides the flies. Faith looked nearly as happy as he did as they walked together. In process of time, as fast as the little legs would permit they arrived at Regent's Park, and Faith, choosing a sheltering tree, placed her little brother in a shady corner, and came close to his side. Roy picked bits of grass, which he flung into Faith's lap. Faith laughed and caressed him. They were both in a most blissful child-world, and thought of no darker days at hand.



"Please, I *should* like to kiss the baby," said a voice suddenly, quite close to Faith's ear.—Page 50.

[Frontispiece.]

"Please, I *should* like to kiss the baby," said a voice suddenly quite close to Faith's ear.

It was a thin, high-pitched voice, and raising her head at the sound, Faith saw a very white-faced, very ragged girl, a little older than herself, standing near.

"I'm so afraid as you mayn't be clean enough," she answered anxiously.

"Oh, but I'll run to mother, and she'll wash my lips. Just wait, and I'll be back in a jiffy."

The ragged girl flew across the grass, came to a woman who was seated with some other children round her, stayed away for a very short time, and quickly returned.

"Now, ain't I h'all right?" she said, showing a pair of pretty rosy lips enough, in the midst of an otherwise black and dirty little face. "You'll kiss me now, pretty, dear little boy?" she said.

"I tiss 'oo once," replied King Roy solemnly, and allowing his little rose-bud mouth to meet hers.

"Oh, but ain't he a real duck?" said the girl. "We 'ad a little 'un somethink like him wid us once. Yes, he wor *werry* like him."

"Ain't he with you now?" asked Faith.

"No, no; you mustn't speak o' it to mother, but he died; he tuk the 'fecti'n, and he died."

"Wor it fever?" asked Faith.

"Yes, perhaps that wor the name. There's a many kinds o' 'fecti'n, and folks dies from they h'all. I don't see the use o' naming 'em. They're h'all certain sure to kill yer." Here the ragged girl seated herself on the grass quite close to Faith. "You'll never guess where I'm a going this afternoon," she said.

"No; how could I guess?" replied Faith.

"Well, now, you're *werry* neat dressed, and folks like you have a kinder right to be there. But for h'all that, though I'm desperate ragged, I'm goin'. You're sure you can't guess, can you?"

"No, I can't guess," answered Faith. "I ain't going nowhere particular myself, and I never wor good at guessing."

"Well, now, ain't it queer?—I thought h'all the 'spectable folks went. Why, I'm going to Sunday-school—'tis to Ragged Sunday-school, to be sure; but I like it. I ha' gone twice now, and I like it wonderful well."

"I know now what you mean," replied Faith. "I often wished to go to Sunday-school, but father don't like it; he'd rayther I stayed to take care o' Roy."

"I guess as my father wouldn't wish it neither. But, Lor' bless yer! I don't trouble to obey him. 'Tis *werry* nice in Sunday-school. Would you like to hear wot they telled us last Sunday?"

"Yes, please," answered Faith, opening her eyes with some curiosity.

"Well, it wor a real pretty tale—it wor 'bout a man called Jesus. A lot o' women brought their babies to Jesus and axed Him to fondle of 'em, and take 'em in His arms; and there wor some men about—ugh! I guess as *they* wor some'ut like father—and they said to the women, 'Take the babies away as fast as possible; Jesus is a great, great man, and

He can't no way be troubled.' And the mothers o' the babies wor going off, when Jesus said—I remember the exact words, for we was got to larn 'em off book—'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and don't forbid 'em;' and He tuk them 'ere little babies in His arms and kissed 'em. I guess as some of 'em worn't too clean neither."

"I wish ever so as I could take Roy to him," answered Faith. "That's a real lovely story. Mother, afore she died, telled me 'bout Jesus; but I don't remember 'bout Him and the babies. Now I must be going home. Thank you, little ragged girl. If you like you may kiss Roy once again, and me too."

Chapter Three.

Faith and Roy were late, and their father was waiting for them. He was very particular about his meals, which were never entrusted to Faith's young efforts at cooking, but were sent from a cook-shop close by. Now the potatoes and a little piece of roast beef smoked on the table, and Warden, considerably put out, walked up and down. When the children entered, Roy ran up to his father confidently—he had never been afraid of any one in his life—and wanted a ride now on the tall, strong shoulder.

"Up, up," said the little fellow, raising his arms and pointing to his favourite perch.

Warden endeavoured to get out of his way, but Roy clasped his little arms round his knees.

"Fader, up, up," he said.

"No; I can't, Roy. Don't be troublesome. Faith, that child is in every one's way. Take him and put him in the bedroom until his dinner is ready."

Little Roy was very hungry, and there was that in his father's hard tone which caused him to raise his baby-blue eyes in wonder and some shadowy alarm. Faith took him, sobbing, into the bedroom, from which she returned with a very sad heart to her own dinner. Warden helped her sullenly; but to eat while her little brother was alone seemed to choke her. She found she could not swallow her nice Sunday dinner. She was always terrified of her stern father, but now for Roy's sake she must brave his anger.

"Please, father, may little Roy have his dinner first? He's se'ch a baby, and he's so hungry."

"No, Faith; I make a rule, and I won't break it. 'Tis a very proper punishment for you for being so late."

Roy's little sobbing voice at the other side of the door, for the bedroom was inside the sitting-room, saying "Open, open," made it almost impossible for Faith to sit quiet, and she was much relieved when her father rose from the table and went out. Then what petting followed for little Roy! what feeding him with the choicest bits! until at last the little fellow, worn out from his walk and fit of crying, fell asleep in his sister's arms.

Faith laid him tenderly on the horse-hair sofa, covered him over, and sat down by his side. She sat on a low seat, and, folding her hands on her lap, gazed straight before her. Faith was nearly eleven years old now, but she was small for her age—small, thin, and very sad-looking. Only when playing with Roy, or tending Roy, did her little fallow face grow childish and happy in expression. Faith possessed her mother's sensitive temperament. Love alone could make this child bright and happy; without love she must pine and die, perhaps as her mother died. Tears gathered slowly in her eyes as she recalled the little scene between her father and Roy. After a time, hearing steps in the street, she rose and went to the window. Some children, with their parents, were walking up the street—happy children in their Sunday best, and happy parents, caring for and loving them. Faith watched one little group with special interest. There were four in this group—a father and mother, and boy and girl. The girl held her father's hand, and danced as she walked. The boy, a very little child, was led most tenderly by his mother. Faith turned away with a great sigh, and the tears now rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Ain't it a hard, hard thing when a little child loses of his mother?" she said to herself. "Oh! my little darlin' Roy, if mother had been there he wouldn't a been kep' waiting fur his dinner."

She went over, knelt down by her little brother, and kissed his soft cheek. Then a further thought occurred to her. That was a pretty story the ragged girl in Regent's Park had told her to-day. She had never heard it before, though her mother, when alive, had often spoken to her about Jesus, but somehow this story, the sweetest of all, had never reached her ears before to-day.

"I wish as Jesus wor alive now, and I could take Roy to him," she said to herself. She felt that if Jesus took Roy in his arms and blessed him, that then he might not miss his mother so much; that the great fact of his having received the blessing of Jesus would make up to him for the loss of his mother.

"But wot's the use," continued Faith very sadly to herself, "when Jesus be dead years ago?"

At this juncture in the little girl's thoughts, the room-door was opened, and a neighbour, who had often been kind to both the children, came in. She had come to borrow a saucepan, and was in a hurry; but seeing the tears on Faith's cheeks, she stopped to inquire the cause.

"There be nothink wrong wid the little 'un, I 'ope, Faith," she said.

"Oh, no," answered Faith. "Roy's well enough. 'Tis only as I'm so sorry as Jesus is dead."

Mrs Mason, the neighbour, stepped back a pace or so in some astonishment.

"Bless us and save us!" she exclaimed. "Wot a queer child! But it ain't true, Faith, fur Jesus ain't dead. He's as alive as possible!"

"Do the Bible say that?" asked Faith.

"Yes, the Bible says it h'over and h'over."

"And could I go to him, and take Roy? Could I, Mrs Mason?"

"Bless us, child, you're a queer 'un; but the Bible sartin' do say as He'll receive all as come to Him. Yes, in course you can go; but I can't tell you the exact way. There, Faith, child, why don't you go to Sunday-school, same as the other little lads and lasses about? They teach everythink about coming to Jesus in Sunday-school."

"I wish with h'all my heart I could go," answered Faith.

"Well, child, I see nothink agen it. There's one jest round the corner, and the bell's a-ringing now; but there, I can't stay another moment."

Mrs Mason hurried away, and Faith still sat still; but a devouring wish was now possessing her. If she only could just once go to Sunday-school and hear about Jesus, and learn that He was really alive, and that she could take Roy to Him! Oh! if only it were possible that Roy might receive this great and wonderful blessing, why it would be worth even her father's great anger, should he learn that she had disobeyed him. Faith trembled and hesitated, and finally rose to her feet. If only Roy would awake, she could take him with her. But no; Roy was very tired and very sound asleep. By the time little Roy awoke, Sunday-school would be over, and she would have lost all hope of hearing of Jesus for another week.

Suppose she left Roy just for once—just for the first and last time in all her life—she would only be an hour away, and in that hour what possible harm could happen to the little child? and she would learn so much, oh! so much, which could help him by-and-by.

Yes; she thought she might venture. She would have returned long before her father came back, most likely long before Roy awoke. It was worth the little risk for the sake of the great gain. She placed the fireguard carefully before the fire, kissed her little brother, and with a beating heart slipped out.

No; there was no possible fear for little Roy.

Chapter Four.

Before Faith had been gone quite half an hour her father returned. This was an unusual proceeding, for generally he spent his Sunday afternoons in a working men's club round the corner. He was one of the most influential members of this club—its most active and stirring representative. He organised meetings, got up debates, and did, in short, those thousand and one things which an energetic, clever man can do to put fire and life into such proceedings. He had come home now to draw up the minutes of a new organisation which he and a few other kindred spirits were about to form.

It was to be a society in every way based on the laws of justice and reason. Religious, and yet allowing all harmless and innocent amusements both for Sundays and weekdays; temperate, but permitting the use of beer and wine in moderation.

Warden felt very virtuous and very useful as he sat down with pen and paper before him. No one could say of him that he spent his time for nought. How blameless and good and excellent was his life! Never, never would it be necessary for those lips to cry to his Maker, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

A little restless movement, and faint, satisfied baby sigh from the sofa, interrupted these self-satisfied meditations. He looked round and saw little Roy. "Bless us! is the child there? and wherever is Faith?" he said to himself.

He got up and approached his little boy. The child was looking as beautiful as such a lovely creature would look in his sleep. Warden went on his knees to watch him more earnestly. Yes; the golden-brown eyelashes, the tangled mass of bright hair, the full pouting lips, the rounded limbs, made up a picture which might well cause any father's heart to beat with love and pride; and doubtless there was much of both in Warden's soul just then. He gazed long and earnestly. Before he rose to his feet he even bent and kissed the little flushed cheek.

"Yes," he said to himself; "he's a very, very lovely boy. If ever a man had cause for ambition I have. With God's help, that boy shall take his place with any gentleman in the land before I die."

He sat down again by his table, but instead of continuing his work he remained for a time, one hand partly shading his eyes, while he indulged in a meditation. Yes; he must save as much money as possible; for Roy's education must begin early. Roy must have this, Roy must have that. He did not think of Faith at all. Faith was but a girl. He began to consider by what means he could add to his earnings, by what means he could retrench his present expenses. The rooms they now lived in were comfortable, but far from cheap. Ought they not to go into poorer lodgings? for now they spent all he earned, and where, if that was so, would be the money to put little Roy to school by-and-by?

In the midst of these thoughts, the door was pushed softly open, and a man's face appeared. It just appeared above the frame of the door, and looked in with timid, bloodshot eyes.

"I cannot assist you, Peter Davis," called out Warden in his full, loud tones. "There's no manner of use in your waiting

here. You know my opinion of such conduct as yours."

"Yes; but I means to reform—I do indeed," replied Davis. He had so far gathered courage now as to advance a step or two into the room. "'Tis h'all so 'ard on a feller. When he's down h'every one throws a stone at him. I'm h'ever so sorry fur givin' way to the drink, and I'm goin' to take the pledge—I am indeed."

"It is disgusting, any man drinking himself into the condition of a beast—lower, far lower than a beast," answered Warden, in his most bitter tones. "There now, Davis, you know my opinion. I am pleased, however, to hear you mean to change your ways."

"Yes, indeed, indeed I do—Mr—Mr Warden; and wot I made bold to come yere fur were to axe ef you'd may be help me. I don't mean fur myself, but fur the poor wife. The wife, her 'ad a little 'un last night, and we h'an't never a sup nor a bite in the house. I thought, may be, Mr—Mr Warden, as seeing we belonged to the werry same club, as you'd may be let me have the loan of five shillings, or even harf-a-crown, jest one harf-crown, and returned most faithful, Mr Warden."

Warden laughed loudly.

"No; not a shilling, nor a sixpence," he said. "I never encourage drunkards; and as to your belonging to our club, you won't have that to say long unless you mend yer ways."

"But 'tis fur the wife," continued Davis. "The wife, as honest a body as h'ever breathed, and she's starving. No, no, it h'aint, h'indeed it ain't, to spend on drink. I'm none so low as that comes to. I won't spend a penny of it on drink. Oh! Mr Warden, the wife and the new-born babe is a dying of hunger. Lend us jest one shilling, h'even one shilling, for the love of h'Almighty God! How 'ud you like ef yer h'own little lad there were starving?"

"Look here," said Warden, rising to his feet. "I'm busy, and I can't be interrupted. If you don't leave the room at once I must just put you out I may as well tell you plainly that I *don't believe a word you say*, and not one farthing will you ever get from me."

"Then God furgive yer fur the werry 'ardest man I h'ever met," said poor Davis. "I think," he added, "as I'd as lief 'ave my chance wid the h'Almighty as yourn, when h'all is reckoned up. I never, never heerd as you did a real kind thing in yer life, and I pity them children as h'is to be brought h'up by you."

Warden laughed again disagreeably, and, shutting the door on Davis, returned to his work; but the little incident and the burning, angry words of the despairing man shook him unpleasantly, and his temper, never one of the best, was in such a ruffled condition, that it only wanted the faintest provocation to kindle it into a blaze. This provocation (not a very slight one) came in the shape of his little son. Roy had awakened, and after looking round in vain for Faith, had slid down off the horse-hair sofa. He was thoroughly refreshed by his sleep, and was just in the mood when a very little child, in its eager desire for occupation, may do incalculable mischief.

Warden did not know that the little fellow had awakened. He sat with his back to the sofa, and was now thoroughly absorbed in his work. He was drawing up a prospectus for the new society, and his head was bent low over the paper. By his side lay, in a neat and complete form, a prize essay, which he had taken some three months of hard work and hard thought to put together. The subject was one of the popular subjects of the day. The prize was only open to working men. Warden had every hope of gaining the prize. If so, he would win 50 pounds. His essay was complete. He had sat up late the night before, finishing it, and it was to be posted to its destination that very evening. Now, with an unconscious jerk of his elbow, he tossed the neatly pinned together pages on to the floor. He knew nothing of this fact; but as they lay wide open from their fall on the floor, they presented a very tempting spectacle to the eager eyes of little Roy. He approached the precious manuscript softly, sat down on the carpet, and began the delicious work of tearing it into pieces. For a quarter of an hour there was perfect stillness, at the end of which time nothing whatever remained of Warden's prize essay but a pile of scattered fragments which surrounded little Roy. When the deed of mischief was fully done, and not before, the little fellow gave utterance to a deep sigh of satisfaction, and, raising his clear, baby voice, exclaimed, in a tone of triumph:

"'Ook, fader, 'ook!"

Warden did look, and comprehended at a glance. His essay was hopelessly lost! He had no other copy! A quieter and better man might have felt provocation. Into Warden's breast there entered a devil. He caught the little child roughly in his arms, dealt him several sharp blows, and rushed with him into the adjoining bedroom.

"There, you bad, bad boy! Get out of my sight! I never want to see you again." He locked the door on Roy, and might have been heard pacing up and down his sitting-room. He was in a furious rage, and would scarcely have minded then had any one told him that he had seriously injured his child.

Meanwhile the little child, stunned by the blows, terrified by the rough, hard words, totally uncomprehending what he had done wrong, for Faith had many times given him old papers to tear, lay for a moment or two trembling on the floor. Then he began to sob loudly; then he rose to his feet. It was growing dark in the bedroom, and Roy hated the dark. He ran to the door which divided bedroom and sitting-room, and, shaking it cried loudly:

"Yet me in—yet me in!"

No regard was paid to his eager little voice, and his cries and distress were redoubled. Where was Faith? What did it all mean? He was confused, frightened, pained. He could not comprehend how or why. Turning his back at last to the inhospitable closed door, and standing, a pitiably little object, with all his golden curls lying in a tangled mass on his forehead, he saw a welcome light in another part of the room. This light came from the door which opened on to the passage, and was but very seldom used. Now, through some accident, it was about an inch or two ajar.

Roy saw the light in the passage beyond, and ran to it with a glad cry. When he got there, the thought entered his baby head that he would go and look for Faith. His father had turned him away; his father had hurt him and not been at all nice. Roy, heaving a great sob, felt he did not at all understand his father. Yes; he would go and look for Faith. When she was neither in the sitting-room nor in the bedroom she was out. He would go out to look for her, for *she* was always very nice.

Down step after step he stumbled, no one meeting him, no one observing. Down the long hall at the end he ran, and out through the open door. His head uncovered, his little round arms bare, he ran quickly away from his home. A baby of two years to be lost in the London streets!

Chapter Five.

When Faith came in a few moments later, she found her father pacing up and down the room. His anger and vexation were still burning hot; he was still in his heart wishing that Roy were an older child, so that he might punish him more severely. It was a great relief to see Faith's pale, anxious little face. Yes, without any doubt Faith was the real culprit. On Faith then should the full vials of his wrath fall.

"See what you have done," he said; "come here, right over here, and see what you have done."

Faith, her face growing a shade whiter, approached and saw the scattered pieces of the prize essay still lying on the floor.

"Wot h'ever is that, father?" she ventured to say.

"What ever is that? 'tis my essay, my prize essay, that your brother tore all into bits. How dare you, how dare you, I say, disobey me and leave the child alone? You have done mischief that can never be put right, and I'll never forgive you."

"Oh! father," said Faith piteously. She went on her knees and took some of the tiny torn fragments into her hand.

"There! don't touch them; 'tis jest enough to madden a man, but you shall suffer. If you can't take care of the child, some one else shall. Yes, you shan't hear the last of this. Now, tell me where you have been this hour and more."

"I went to Sunday-school, father. I don't know why I disobeyed you; indeed I never did it before, but I 'ad a kind of hankering to go jest once. I left Roy asleep, and I never guessed as he 'ud wake; I thought I'd be back long afore, and I never guessed as you'd come home; I never, never guessed it. Oh! indeed I'm dreadful, bitter sorry, indeed I am."

"You have need to be; you can't even guess how angry God Almighty is with you; you're a very, very wicked girl. There, get out of my sight go into the bedroom, you shan't have no tea to-night."

Faith went slowly towards the bedroom door, she opened it and shut it behind her; she cared nothing for the punishment of going without her supper, she was glad to be away from her father, glad to be alone with the dreadful, dreadful weight which rested on her heart. Her father had said that she was a very, very wicked girl, that no one could even guess how angry God was with her. Yes, she believed her father; she had done wrong. It was most certainly wrong to disobey, she had disobeyed her father's strictest command. Tears burned in her eyes, but lay too heavy there to roll down her cheeks; she sat on the floor, a little bent-up bundle of misery, and forgot Roy and every one else in the anguish of being under God's displeasure. And she had been having such a happy time. How sweet that Sunday-school was! how kind the teacher, who had welcomed the timid child standing at the door! then how gentle and good were her words—all, all about Jesus and His love—all about the tender care the great Heavenly Father takes of His little ones. Faith listened, and when all was over, with her heart quite full of her great question, she lingered behind the other scholars.

"You will come again to my class next Sunday?" said the Sunday teacher, smiling at her.

"I'm dreadful afear'd as I can't," answered Faith. "I'd like to beyont any words, but I'm feared as I can't come no more; I only come to-day 'cause I do want to know how to bring Roy to Jesus."

"Who is Roy?" asked the teacher.

"Please, lady dear, he's my little, little brother; he's quite a baby boy; I do want to bring him to Jesus."

"The Bible tells us how to bring little children to the dear Saviour Jesus," answered the teacher in her sweet, low voice. "But I think you need to have it explained to you, Faith. If you can manage to come even once again to Sunday-school, and if you will be here just five minutes before the school opens, why I will come too, and tell you all about it. I am sorry I must run away now."

She nodded and smiled at Faith, and Faith went away with a great and wonderful joy in her heart. But oh! how changed was everything now! God, who was spoken of as very loving, very forgiving, very kind at Sunday-school, was dreadfully angry with her. Her father had said he never would forgive her, and Faith felt that she deserved some punishment, for in disobeying her father she certainly had done wrong.

Oh! what a lonely, lonely little girl she was; were it not for Roy, how without love and interest would her life be! but yes, she still had her darling, precious baby boy. At the remembrance of him she raised her face, and then got up slowly from her crouching position. It was full time to give him his supper and put him to bed. She reproached herself afresh for having forgotten him so long. Was it possible that he was still asleep on the sofa in the sitting-room! no, this could scarcely be the case, for her father had said that he had done the incalculable mischief of tearing up his

prize essay. Poor, poor little Roy, how innocently he had committed this great crime! how often had she kept him quiet by giving him an old newspaper to tear! Yes, she, and she alone, was the only one to blame for the mischief done that night; but whoever was the guilty party, Roy must have his supper and go to bed; it was far too late already for a little child only two years old to be up. Faith must brave her father's anger and fetch Roy from the sitting-room. She trembled a little as she approached the door, and thought of her stern father's voice and manner; but though far too timid to raise even a finger to help herself, Faith was one of those who would gladly take her very life in her hand to save or aid one whom she loved. She opened the door softly and looked in. Her father was seated by the table, the gas flaring high over his head; he was trying laboriously to put some of his torn essay together; he heard the movement at the door, but without looking up called out harshly—"Go away; I can't be disturbed."

"Please, father, 'tis only me fur Roy. I want Roy to give him his supper."

"Roy ain't here. Go away, I say." Faith's heart gave a great bound. No, Roy was certainly not in the room. Could she have overlooked him in the bedroom? There was no light, except from the gas outside, in the room. Had her father been very harsh and angry with little Roy, and had he crept in here and fallen asleep? She went back, struck a light with a trembling hand, and looked around her.

No, he was not in the big bed. He was not in his own little cot. He was nowhere, either under the bed or on the floor.

"Roy, Roy, little darling Roy," she called, but no sweet, gay voice answered to hers. Oh! where was little Roy? She went into the tiny dressing-room where her father slept. No, Roy was not there.

A horrible dread came over Faith. Where was Roy? Her father had said that as she could not take proper care of him, some one else should. Had he really taken Roy away, and given him into the care of some stranger, some dreadful, dreadful stranger who would not love him, or care for him as he ought to be loved and tended? The agony of this idea took all fear away from Faith. Without a particle of hesitation now, she went back to her father. He was so busy he did not even hear her swift step, and started when her voice sounded at his elbow.

"Please, father, I must know where you ha' tuk Roy. It 'ull kill me unless I know that much at once."

The agony and consternation in her tone caused Warden to raise his head in surprise.

"I don't know what you mean, Faith. I only took Roy into the bedroom. There! go, and put him to bed, and don't act more foolishly than you can help."

"You only tuk him inter the bedroom?" repeated Faith. She did not stay another second with her father, she rushed away from him and back to the inner room. A fear even more terrible than her first fear had come to her. She remembered that the door leading into the passage was open. Was it possible, possible that little Roy, her little sweet baby Roy, had gone out through that open door, had slipped down-stairs, and into the street? Oh! no, it never could be possible. However angry God was with her, He could never allow such an awful punishment as this to overtake her. She rushed wildly up-stairs and down-stairs, looking into every room, calling everywhere for Roy. No one had seen him, no one had heard the baby steps as they stole away. The whole house was searched in vain for little Roy. He was not to be found. In five minutes, Faith came back to her father. She came up to him, her breath a little gone, her words coming in gasps. She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Yes, father," she said, "you wor quite, quite right. God h'Almighty's werry angry wid me. I don't know how I'll h'ever bear it. Little Roy ain't in the house, father. When you put him in the bedroom he runned out by the other door, he ran inter the street. We ha' searched h'all the house over, and he ain't there. My little Roy is quite, quite lost."

"Lost!" echoed Warden. He sprang to his feet. "Roy not in the house! Roy lost!" Back over his memory came the picture of the lovely sleeping boy, of the real love and pride with which he had kissed him. His prize essay became as nothing to him. But swift through his hard, cold heart passed an arrow of intolerable pain. "Roy, lost?" he repeated. "God help me! and I wor werry rough to the little chap."



"Roy lost!" he repeated. "God help me! and I wor werry rough to the little chap."—Page 58.

They were the humblest words that had ever passed his lips. He rushed from the room, for he must find his son.

Chapter Six.

Meanwhile, little Roy pursued his way down the long street which led from his home to another, which on weekdays was full of shops and gay with light and many-coloured windows. To-day, being Sunday, the shops were closed, and the place looked dull. Sobbing slightly under his breath, and a very little alarmed at the temerity of his own act, little Roy ran down this street. His object lay very clear before his baby mind—he was going to meet Faith. Faith was out, and, as he too had gone out, he would, of course, find her very soon. At the corner of this second street he came suddenly upon a flaring gin-palace, which, Sunday though it was, was brilliant with light and full of people. The bright light streaming right out into the street attracted little Roy. He stopped his sobbing, paused in his short, running gait, and pressed his little face against the pane. "Pitty, pitty!" he said to himself—he even forgot Faith in the admiration which filled his baby soul. After a time it occurred to him that Faith would be very likely to be in such a lovely place. The swing-doors were always opening and shutting. Roy, watching his opportunity, pushed his way in by the side of a ragged woman and two coarse men. They advanced up to the counter to ask for gin, but the baby child remained on the threshold. He looked around him with the wide open eyes of admiration, innocence, and trust. Anything so lovely gazing at anything so evil had been seldom seen; certainly never seen before within those walls. The men and women drinking themselves to the condition of beasts, stopped, and a kind of shocked feeling pervaded the whole assembly. It was as though an angel had alighted on that threshold, and was showing those poor hardened wretches what some of them had once been—what, alas! none of them could ever be again. Little Roy's cheeks were slightly flushed; his tangled yellow hair, ruffled more than ever by his running in the wind, surrounded his head like a halo; and as gradually it dawned upon him that all those people surrounding him were strangers, his blue eyes filled with tears. The directness of his aim, the full certainty of his thought were brought to a stand-still; all movement was arrested by the terrible certainty that Faith was not there.

"Bless us! who h'ever h'is the little 'un?" said the ragged woman who had come into the gin-palace with him. "Wot's yer name, my little dear, and wot h'ever do yer want?"

"'ittle 'Oy want Fate," said the boy in a clear high tone.

The woman laughed. "Hark to the young 'un," she said, turning to her companions. "Did yer h'ever hear the like o' that afore? He says as he wants his fate. Pretty lamb, it 'ull come to him soon enough."

"'Oy want Fate—'Oy do want Fate," said the little child again.

The woman bent down and took his hand.

"No, no, my dear," she said. "You run away home, and never mind yer fate; it 'ull come h'all in good time; and babies have no cause to know sech things."

"'Oy do want Fate," repeated the boy. Two other women had now come round him, and also a man.

"It don't seem no way canny like, to hear him going on like that," said one of the group. "And did yer h'ever see sech a skin, and sech 'air? I don't b'lieve a bit that he's a real flesh-and-blood child."

A coarse red-faced woman pushed this speaker away.

"Shame on yer, Kate Flarherty; the child ain't nothink uncanny. He's jest a baby boy. Bless us! I 'ad a little 'un wid 'air as yaller as he. You ha' got lost, and run away. Ain't that it, dear little baby boy?"

This woman, for all her red face, had a kind voice, and it won little Roy at once.

“Will 'oo take me to Fate?” he said; and he went up to the woman, and put his little hand in hers. She gave almost a scream when the little hand touched her; but, catching him in her arms, and straining him to her breast, she left the gin-palace at once.

Chapter Seven.

Warden spent all that night looking for Roy. He went to the police courts; he got detectives even to his aid. By the morning advertisements were placarded about, and rewards were offered for the missing child. He did all that could be done, and was assured by the police that whoever had stolen little Roy away would now certainly bring him back. Warden was a carpenter by trade. He was engaged now over a job which was to be finished by a given time, and which would, when completed, pay him handsomely. He had engaged to have it done by this date, and he was a man who had never yet failed in his appointments. But for all that he came home that morning, and never thought of going out again to work. His whole heart, and soul, and energies were concentrated, waiting and listening for a little voice, for the sight of a dear golden head, the return of the blue-eyed boy who was his own, and whom now that he had lost, he knew, indeed, to be bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. So near, so precious had little Roy become, that without him it would be agony to live. Warden went home, and saw on the floor some of the scattered fragments of his torn essay. The pieces he had been laboriously trying to put together when Faith had come to him with the news that little Roy had ran away, still lay on the table. In the grate were some burnt-out ashes; the room was untidy—dusty. It had not been touched since last night. It was Faith's duty to make this room ready for breakfast; and, as a rule, Warden would have been angry with her for its present state of neglect; but this morning he said nothing, only when his eyes rested on the torn pieces of the essay he uttered a groan, and, stooping down, he picked them all up and put them in the grate. There he set fire to them. When they had been reduced to a few white ashes he sat down on the horse-hair sofa and wondered when Faith would appear. She came in presently from the inner room, and Warden roused himself to say, in a new and wonderfully kind tone:

“I ha' had rewards put up, and the detectives are on the watch. We'll have him home werry soon, Faithy.”

Faith did not make any answer. There was a queer, dull, almost stupid look on her face. She moved half-mechanically about the room, getting her father's breakfast and pouring it out for him as if nothing had happened. When she gave him his cup of hot coffee, she even seated herself in her accustomed place opposite. Roy's little empty chair was pushed against the wall. Faith moved her own so that her eyes should not rest on this symbol of the lost child.

“Eat some breakfast, Faith,” said her father; then he added, in a tone which he endeavoured to render cheerful, “The little chap 'ull be back very soon, I guess. Do you hear me, Faith? I expect little Roy to be brought back almost immediately.”

“Yes, father,” answered Faith. She raised her dull eyes to his face. He saw not a gleam of either hope or belief in them, and, unable to endure the despair of the little daughter whom he had never loved, he pushed back his chair and left the room. The moment he did so Faith breathed a slight sigh of relief. She left the breakfast-table, and, getting a chair, she mounted it and took down from a high shelf an old and dusty copy of the Bible. It was a copy she had seen in her mother's hands. She had watched her dying mother read in this old Bible, and smile and look happy as she read. Afterwards Faith had tried herself to read in the old book. But one day her father, seeing it lying about, and feeling that it reminded him of his wife, who never had it very far from her side, had put it up out of the children's reach, and Faith had hitherto been too timid to dare to take it down; but there was nothing at all timid about the little girl's movements to-day. An absorbing agony of grief and pain was filling her poor little heart to the utter exclusion of all lesser feelings. She fetched down the old Bible from its dusty hiding-place, because it had come back to her memory in the long hours of the wakeful night she had just gone through, that the Sunday teacher who had given her that sweet and peaceful lesson the day before had said that the Bible was full of stories about Jesus. If only she *could* find the place where he took the babies in His arms, and was so good and kind to them. Perhaps if she found the account of the story she might also learn how the mothers and the sisters—for surely there must have been little sad orphan sisters like her in that group—she might learn how they came to Jesus with the babies; she might find out how He was to be found now. Her teacher had said He was not dead. The neighbour down-stairs had said He was not dead. Then, if that was so, would not the very best thing Faith could do be to go to Him first herself, and tell Him that Roy was lost—that he had gone quite, quite far away, and ask Him to help her to find him? She placed the Bible on the table, got a duster, and, tenderly removing its dust, opened it. It was a large book—a book with a great, great deal of writing, and Faith wondered how soon she could find this particular story that she longed for. She could read very slowly, and very badly. She might be a long time seeing the place where Jesus blessed the babies; but here unlooked-for help was at hand. Faith's dead mother, too, had loved this special story. The place opened at the very page, and, to help Faith still further, the words were heavily marked with a pencil.

Yes, it was all there; all that the ragged girl had told her yesterday. Faith had a vivid imagination, and she saw the whole picture—she saw the waiting mothers and the lovely baby children. She saw the angry disciples trying to send them away, and the face of the dear Saviour of the whole world as, taking one after the other of these lambs in His arms, He said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Faith read the story over and over until she really knew it all by heart. Yes, it was all there, but one difficulty was not over. She had read with her own eyes the story, but she saw nothing in the sacred words to help her special need—nothing about where Jesus lived now, nothing of how she, Faith, could go to Him, and ask Him to help her to find her little brother. She had less doubt than ever in her own mind of His perfect willingness to help her—of His perfect power to find Roy again. But how could she find Him? In what part of vast London did Jesus live now?

Faith returned the old Bible into its place. She had found out what it could tell her. Who was there who could give her the further knowledge for which she craved? On one point, however, she had quite made up her mind. With the aid of

Jesus, or without, she must go herself to find her little brother. This course of action seemed to her right, and clear as daylight. It was all very well to talk of police and detectives searching for the child. Faith did not know anything about such people. Knowing nothing, she believed not at all in their power, but she did believe most fully in the power of her own great love. Surely no one else in all the world could distinguish Roy's little face so far away; no one else could detect the clear ring of his voice in the roar and din of London. The little child had run away in fear and loneliness; but Faith, by the strength and power of her love, could bring him back again. She did not think at all about her father. She failed either to see or comprehend his new-born affection or anxiety. Her little heart felt hard against him; he had been cruel to her darling baby boy, and Faith could make no allowance for the torn prize essay. Her father was hard and cruel to every one. Faith did not pity him; nor did she believe in the least in *his* ability to bring the lost child home. No, this must be her task. She tied on her hat, and put on her out-door jacket, and ran downstairs, for she had not a moment to lose. At the foot of the stairs she met the neighbour who had come into their room the evening before. She stopped her for a moment.

"Please, Mrs Mason, 'ull you tell father as I ha' gone out to look for Roy?"

"Bless us, child!" exclaimed the good-natured woman; "but you do look real bad. I think as I wouldn't go out, Honey; the little 'un will be brought back now they has put it inter the hands of the perleece."

"I know best how to find him—please 'ull you tell father?" answered Faith in her quiet little voice, and the woman did not trouble to detain her further.

Chapter Eight.

Faith thought first of going to Regent's Park, for Roy was so accustomed to visiting this park on fine Sunday mornings with his sister, that perhaps his little feet might guide him there unconsciously. She forgot that at the time at which Roy had run out into the warm darkness of the autumn night, the park gates must have been shut. She walked rapidly in this direction now, entered the pleasant and beautiful place, and walked towards the spot where she and Roy had been so happy on Sunday. Yes, there was the wide-spreading oak-tree, there were the daisies still left that Roy had picked and thrown away the day before. Faith stooped down now and picked up these withered flowers, and put them carefully into her pocket. Roy's castaway flowers were there, but not Roy—not her precious little Roy himself. Faith pressed her hands to her eyes, her heart was too heavy—too absolutely oppressed—for tears to come. But she was puzzled to know what course now to pursue. Faith was no common street child; though her father was only a carpenter, he was too steady, too respectable not always to obtain full employment and excellent pay, therefore the dire evils of poverty had never been experienced by little Faith. With the exception of a great loneliness, and a great dearth of the holy love of fatherhood, her life had been sheltered from all the rough winds which blow upon the class a little below her own. Had she been a common street child she would have known much better how to seek for Roy; as it was, she was puzzled. Not finding him in the one place where it would be utterly impossible for him to be, she did not know where else to look. Oh, if only she could discover the place where Jesus lived now, and ask Him to come and help her in her search! Jesus, however, was far nearer to the little lonely girl than she had any idea of, and He now sent her unlooked-for assistance.

A sharp, high voice sounded in her ear, "Well, wot h'ever ere you up to, and where's the little un?"

It was the ragged girl who had washed her lips to get a kiss from little Roy on Sunday. Faith gave a great sigh of relief at sight of her.

"I'm so real glad yer come," she said; "h'our little Roy ha' run away—h'our little Roy is lost!"

"Lost!" said the girl; she went down on her knees close beside Faith, and stared hard into her face. Her own face, even through its dirt, looked blanched, and a frightened expression came into her eyes. "Tell us how yer little Roy got lost," she said presently.

The sympathy in the girl's face and tone caused some softening of Faith's little heart.

"It was on Sunday," she continued; "I did think a deal o' what you said 'bout Jesus blessing the little children, and I disobeyed my father and ran away to Sunday-school. While I was away, little Roy ran out into the street: that wor how my little Roy got so lost—it wor all my fault; I wish as you ha'n't told me nothing about Jesus."

"I didn't mean no harm," answered the girl, "I only telled 'bout what I loved. But did you do nothing since? Why you should ha' done heaps and heaps—you should ha' gone to the perlice, and put the young 'un inter the 'Hue and Cry;' you should ha' done all that last night, Faith."

"I don't know wot h'ever you mean," replied Faith; "how could we put our little Roy into a place when we don't know wherever he is? We don't want to put our little Roy anywhere, only jest to bring him home."

The ragged girl laughed. "Yer rare and innercent," she said; "I didn't mean no *place* by the 'Hue and Cry;' I meant a paper. You should ha' said what kind o' looking child he wor—what wor the colour of his eyes, and his hair, and how big he wor, and what clothes 'e 'ad h'on—all that 'ud be printed and pasted up for folks to read; not that the talk about the clothes 'ud do much good, fur in course they'd be made away wid first thing."

"His clothes 'ud be stole!" exclaimed Faith. "No, I don't believe that; I don't believe that any one 'ud be so *dreadful* wicked as to steal away little Roy's clothes."

"Then you don't believe as nobody ha' stole *him* away. Why, Faith, in course ef he wor not picked up and carried off by some one he'd be brought back afore now by the perleece—why in course yer little baby Roy is stole away."

"Oh!" exclaimed Faith. She gazed hard at the girl by her side, every vestige of colour leaving her face, as the dreadful idea became clear to her. Presently a hand touched her rather softly.

"Look here, I'm a willin' to help yer, I am, indeed; don't 'ee go on so, Faithy—don't 'ee now—my name's Meg, and I'm a willing to help ye."

"Oh, please, Meg," answered little Faith, putting her hand into the older girl's.

"It's a bargain, then," said Meg, squeezing the little hand very hard.

"I'll never, never go home again till I find Roy," said Faith solemnly.

"I call that plucky; and ha' yer any money?"

"No," answered Faith.

"That's rayther blue!" exclaimed Meg, indulging in a long whistle; "fur I h'an't none ne'ther; but never mind, we'll get along somehow. Now let's set down on the grass and make up our plans—you don't mind if I speak a bit plain, Faithy?"

"No," answered Faith; "I don't mind nothink but to find Roy again."

"Well, it's right as you should know that little 'un ha' bin stole. Many and many a body as I could tell on, steals the well-dressed babies; they does it fur the clothes and the reward offered. My mother—she ha' stole two or three."

"Oh, how dreadful wicked she must be!" said Faith. "I hope, Meg, as we h'an't got to live wid yer mother while we're looking fur Roy?"

"No," answered Meg, shaking her head gravely; "I parted wid mother yesterday—we 'greed as it wor 'bout time fur me to purvide fur my own self. I mayn't never see mother agen—it all comes natral. I'm real glad as we're parted, for now I won't be walopped no more."

"I never, never thought as mothers wor like that," said Faith; "she must be most desp'rate wicked."

"Oh, no, she's not so werry; I ha' seen far worse nor mother."

"But to steal the babies!" said Faith.

"Bless us, Faith, heaps and heaps on 'em does that. They most times gives the young 'uns back again. They jest watches for the 'Hue and Cry' and the rewards put up by the perlice stations, and then they brings 'em back and purtends as they ha' found 'em. Mother tuk all back but one, he—"

"Yes," said Faith eagerly.

"Well," continued Meg, speaking with a slight shade of hesitation; "that 'ere little 'un—there worn't no reward offered. Mother waited and waited, and I coaxed her ter take him back, but she got h'angered, and she wouldn't—she 'ud never—h'all I could do—take that ere little child back home again."

"Oh, Meg! and ha' she got him still?" Meg indulged in a short, rather hard laugh. "Bless yer, Faithy, not a bit o' it; that 'ere little 'un tuk the fever and he died. I tuk on most bitter after he died, as I did care fur him; yer little Roy put me in mind o' his purty ways! but he's h'all right now, he's with Jesus now—it wor arter he died as I went to Sunday-school and larned 'bout Jesus. Little Charlie's safe in the arms of Jesus this long time past now."

"Do you think," asked Faith, "as Jesus wot loves the little children, 'ud help us to find our little Roy again?"

Meg looked very grave for half a minute, then she said, her face brightening, "That's a good thought, Faithy; we'll jest tell Him all about little Roy."

Faith sprang to her feet, "Then let's go to Him at once," she said, "let's find out His address and go to Him; we'll ask Him to lose no time in finding that werry wicked woman who has stole little Roy."

"But we can say it all here," said Meg. "I don't know wot h'ever you mean by going to Him; we needn't go a step away from here, we can say it here."

"But Jesus ain't here," said Faith.

"Well, yes, He is, and He isn't; I don't know how to explain—wot do you mean, Faith?"

"I mean," said Faith, "as I thought as Jesus lived somewhere, in London maybe, and that we might go to Him and tell Him 'bout our little Roy. I wor told as He worn't dead—I mean that He did die, but He woke up again. Ef He's alive, why shouldn't He live in the place where the most babies 'ere, Meg?"

"Oh, dear!" answered Meg, "ain't you a queer 'un! You're a deal better dressed than me, and you're so clean that there ain't a speck nowhere, and you look as ef you allers had yer fill o' vickles. You h'an't never a rag nowhere, but fur h'all that I never did meet a more h'ignorant gal—where *was* yer riz, Faith?"

"I think 'tis 'cause my mother died," said Faith. "I know as I am very ignorant; I'm ever so sorry."

"Well, never mind," replied Meg, "'tis fun rayther teaching yer, only you won't mind ef I laugh now and then; why,

Faith, Jesus is h'up in Heaven now. He ha' most wonderful powers of hearing tho', and ef we speak in a whisper a'most down on earth He can tell wot we are a saying. He ain't never a living in London tho', but He's alive, and can hear what we say, fur h'all that."

"And will He help us?" asked Faith; "is He real sorry fur us, and will He help us?"

"Yes, He has a most desp'rate tender heart. I know as He will answer us, fur I told Him all about Charlie, and it wor arter-wards as I larned wot a deal He ha' done fur him."

"What did He do, Meg?"

"Why He tuk him out o' the arms o' death, and carried him straight away up to Heaven. That's wot He does to all the dead babies, He takes 'em in His arms up to Heaven. I know a hymn 'bout that, 'tis called, 'Safe in the arms of Jesus.' I'll sing it fur you another time."

"But I don't want Him to take Roy to Heaven," said Faith; "I want my little Roy safe back again wid me. He wanted for nothink when he wor with me. I don't wish him to be tuk so far away."

"Well, we'll axe that it may be so; let's kneel down now on the grass, and I'll say the words this 'ere time, and then you'll larn how He likes to be spoke to."

So the two knelt down, Faith in front of Meg, with her hand clasped in Meg's. Over the dirty thin face of the older girl there came a queer but expressive change. A look of hope and love and joy filled her dark eyes, as raising them to the blue sky overhead, she spoke.

"Jesus, one of the little children as you loves so well is lost. His name is Roy, he's about two year old; he's big fur that, Jesus, and he's werry, werry purty. He ha' yaller 'air, and blue h'eyes. I'm feared as some woman ha' stole him for the sake o' his clothes, and the reward offered fur him. Please, Jesus, don't let that 'ere woman be a bit happy wid little Roy. Make her real misribble till she takes him back again. We know that there 'ere many ways that you can love him. But, Faith here, she wants him back again, so please don't let him catch no fever, and don't take him to play wid Charlie, and the other babies yet awhile."

"That's all, Faith," said Meg, suddenly springing to her feet. "I think as Jesus knows werry well now wot we want, and you and me 'ull go and look fur little Roy, too, right away."

Chapter Nine.

The woman who had seen Roy in the public-house, and who had been attracted by his pretty face, bore him quickly in her arms down the street. He was quite contented in this queer resting-place, and being absolutely confident in his little mind that the woman was carrying him home to Faith, he laid his curly head on her shoulder and dropped asleep. When she saw that he was asleep, and not before, the woman paused to wrap her own dirty shawl a little over him. She did this partly to shelter him, and partly to consider. Did the police see such a woman as she was, with so well-dressed a child as Roy in her arms, they might stop to question her. She did not want them to do that; she had by no means made up her mind how to act by this poor lost baby, but she had no desire just then that the police should rob her of him. Hiding him very effectually with her shawl, she brought him home—to such a home as she called her own. It was a cellar in a miserable back court, an ill-smelling, ill-drained place. From such a cellar as Hannah Searles's stalked many times in the year the gaunt and grim spectre of fever. It had one advantage, however, over many around it, she lived in it alone; no other living creature shared it with her. She stumbled down the ladder which led to it, drew across the trap-door, and laying Roy, who still slept soundly, on the bed, she prepared a small fire in the grate. When it was kindled, making a little light and cheerfulness in the gloomy place, she removed her bonnet, and going over to the bed knelt down by it; in this position her hungry eyes could gaze long on the sleeping child. Yes, he was very fair; she had never seen any creature half so beautiful since her own child died; nay, she had even to acknowledge to herself that her own child, though he had yellow hair and fair skin, and though he was in very truth bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, yet even he was not so lovely as this child. Yet there was a likeness; the lips pouted with something the same pretty fulness, the little hands were folded in somewhat a similar attitude, the bright hair curled in much the same rings. Then kneeling there in the flickering twilight made by the fire, a strange fancy came over Hannah Searles; perhaps this was in very truth her own little child come back again. True, she had with her own hands closed the coffin on the sweet golden head, she had herself seen him laid in the grave, but perhaps God, seeing what a lost, abandoned woman she was without him, might have sent her baby back to her again. He had been a whole year in Heaven now. During that year, while she had been leading as bad a life as a woman could lead, he had been growing beautiful in the air of heaven, and now God had sent him back to save her. Where had that child come from who stood on the threshold of the dreadful public-house? Was it not more than probable that he was indeed an angel, that he was her own angel given back to her once more? The fancy was very sweet to her; but Roy opening his eyes at the moment dispelled it. Roy's eyes were blue, her baby's brown; but having for an instant thought him her very own child, she began from that instant to love him.



"She removed her bonnet, and going over to the bed knelt down by it; in this position her hungry eyes could gaze long on the sleeping child."—Page 91.

"'Oy want Fate," said the little child, raising his head and gazing about him.

"Wot's yer name, my little dear; wot they calls ye to home, I mean?" asked Hannah.—Hannah with all her roughness had a soft voice, it attracted the child to her, he sat up on the dirty bed, regarded her with decided favour, and replied in a contented voice:

"Fate calls! 'Oy."

"And I'd like to say Davie to yer, dear little man. May I call yer by the real beautiful name o' Davie? I 'ad a Davie of my h'own once."

"A Davie of 'oor own," repeated little Roy, and now he came close and stroked the rough, red cheek.

"I'll get yer some supper, my sweet little darlin'; you set still on the side o' the pretty bed, and I'll get a nice supper ready in a jiffy."

The woman had no candle, but she heaped on coals with a lavish hand, and prepared a mess of bread and milk. Little Roy was very hungry; he found no fault with the tin mug, nor with the pewter spoon. He thought the woman's rough red face rather nice, and her soft tones fell warm on his baby heart. The dreadful cellar, too, with the flickering firelight making fantastic shadows on its dirty, wet walls, became as a palace in his little mind; he clapped his dimpled hands and said, "Pitty, pitty." He ceased to ask for Faith, and even twice before he had again dropped asleep, he had answered to the name of Davie.

That night Hannah Searles slept again with a child clasped to her bosom. Her sleep was very sweet to her, but the morning brought fresh cares. She had now quite resolved to keep little Roy. He was not her child, she knew that, but he had been sent to her. She shut her eyes resolutely to the fact of some other woman's broken heart for the loss of him. No, if he had a mother living she must be strangely careless to allow so great a treasure to go away from her, and to be found in a public-house. But Hannah guessed that little Roy's mother was dead. If she was alive he would have spoken of his mammy, but no, he only mentioned some mysterious fate: *she* was his real fate—she would be a mother to him, and make up to him by her love for the loss of his own.

But though his mother might be dead, yet Hannah knew that so nicely dressed a child must have relations who would miss him and take means to have him returned to them. They would put up rewards; the police would get directions to search for the child. She must therefore on no account put his nice, dainty clothes on him, she must fold them up and put them carefully out of sight. Another woman would have pawned the little things, but Hannah did not care to make money by this child who had come in the place of her own. She put the dainty blue frock, the white pinafore, the little shoes and socks, into a box which was well hidden away under the bed; then while Roy still slept she slipped out, and purchased at a pawnbroker's for a shilling, a set of little garments such as her own child, were he alive, would wear.

When Roy awoke she dressed him in the dingy and ragged clothes. He did not like them and cried a little for his own "pitty fock," and spoke again in a complaining voice of Faith. But Hannah drew out of her pocket a small many-coloured ball, and for the sake of the ball he forgave her the ragged and ugly garments; he chased the ball into all the dark corners of the dingy cellar, and his gay laugh filled Hannah's heart with rejoicing.

That day the woman and child spent at home. She was very happy with Roy, but she was puzzled how to act; she dared not leave him alone at home, she dared not confide her secret to the neighbours, still less did she dare to take him with her into the streets, for by this time surely his description would be printed up by the police courts, and no rags could dim the beauty of his lovely little face. But for to-day she had money enough, so she spent her time cleaning the cellar and making it a more fit habitation for the young king who had made it his home.

Chapter Ten.

Two days passed so; on the third day Hannah was penniless. It now became absolutely necessary for her to go out to seek employment. She must leave little Roy, for she dare not take him with her. Already—going for a moment last night into the court, a woman had confided to her that a little child was being advertised for at all the police stations, and that she wished she could get hold of him, for the reward offered for his recovery was ten pounds.

This woman was not a resident in the court, or Hannah would have felt compelled to change her quarters. As it was, however, it was absolutely impossible for her to let any one know of Roy's existence. By this time, during the two complete days they had spent together, the woman and child had grown very close to each other. Hannah had a power over children. Little Roy had grown fond of her; he was contented with his cellar life, he liked to stand by her knee, and when she took him on her lap the feel of her arms put tightly round him was comfortable. Already the fickle baby mind had forgotten Faith, he was Hannah's boy to all intents and purposes. But all the same—though she had never known such pure happiness since Davie died—Hannah was puzzled what to do with this stolen child. Cleaning her cellar and playing with him brought no money to give food to either; she must go out to earn something, she must leave the child behind her, and if he cried in any way the neighbours overhead would discover his existence, and then her secret would be out, and her treasure torn from her arms. If only it were in the night she had to leave him, little Roy would sleep, and there would be no danger; but he was a wakeful, lively child, and seldom closed his eyes for the livelong day.

Hannah resolved to seek for coarse needlework, which she could do at home, but to obtain such she must be absent several hours, and during those hours was the time of danger.

On the evening of the second day, after putting her baby boy to bed, she went out, locking the door carefully behind her. She meant to visit a neighbour who lived in the opposite side of the court. This woman too occupied a cellar, but it was a far worse one than Hannah's, smaller, dirtier, and crowded with children, from ten years of age to a baby of six months. This baby now lay in profound sleep on the bed. Hannah went over to look at the little colourless, waxen face.

"How sound she ha' gone off, Jane Martin!" she exclaimed. "My Davie now 'ud never lie as still as that, and wid h'all them others makin' sech a din, too."

"'Tis h'all along o' them blessed drops," replied Mrs Martin. "Afore I knew of them there worn't a more worriting baby in the world."

"What drops?" asked Hannah.

"Some as a neighbour give me, I dunno the name. She give me a big bottle full, and I drops three or four into her milk, and she'll never wake now till mornin', and then she'll be drowsy like and I can hush her off any minute."

"They must be a real comfort," answered Hannah, and it darted into her head that it would be very nice to put Roy to sleep in the same way.

"They're a blessing to over-worked mothers, and that I will say," replied Mrs Martin. "Here's the stuff, it looks innercent, don't it? like a drop o' water; but fur all that,—it's wonderful how it soothes off a fretful baby."

Hannah took the bottle in her hand and looked at its contents with greedy eyes.

"I know a 'oman," she said presently, "as have a baby, a baby a deal and a sight bigger nor yourn. It must be two year old. But she's wore to a shadow wid him, he won't sleep not fur nobody. The poor thing is like to drop, but he hardly h'ever will close his eyes, the monkey."

"Them drops 'ud settle him fast enough," replied Mrs Martin.

"But how much ought she to give to a lad as big as that?"

"Well, let me see. I gives baby sometimes three drops, or four, ef I wants to keep her extra quiet; I should say fur a wakeful lad o' two years as ten drops 'ud do the business."

"Thank yer, neighbour," replied Hannah, "and now ef yer'll be so good-natured as to give me the name o' the bottle, why I'll run to the chemist's and get a little and run wid it to the poor worn-out critter this werry night."

"Ah! but you can't get it at no chemist's," answered Mrs Martin with a laugh; "the woman wot give it to me makes it her own self, she had the receipt from her mother afore her. You can't get it at no chemist's, Hannah Searles, and the neighbour wot give it me ha' gone to Ameriky; but see yere, fur I real feels for disturbed and worried mothers, I'll give yer a tiny drop in this yere bottle, and you can take it to her; ten drops ull settle that baby off as sound as a nut."

Hannah thanked her warmly for this offer and went back to her cellar with the precious sleeping drops in her pocket. Now she had a remedy for little Roy. Soundly and peacefully asleep, he would not miss her during the few hours she must be absent the next day. She rose accordingly with a light heart, and having prepared his breakfast, put carefully into his milk ten drops from her bottle. She noticed how fresh and rosy he looked after his healthful, unbroken slumbers, and she said to herself that a little more sleep would do him still greater good. He ate his breakfast with appetite, sitting on her lap. And now she watched anxiously for the effect of the drops. It came almost sooner than she had dared to hope. The blue eyes became languid and heavy, the little golden head fell wearily on her shoulder, another moment and Roy was sound asleep. She placed him on her bed, covered him up tight and warm, and went

out with an easy heart. As she walked quickly down the street which led directly from the court, she was met by two girls, one of whom she knew, and paused for a moment to accost.

“So you and yer mother ha’ left Spiller Court, Meg Harris?”

“Oh, yes,” answered Meg brightly; “I’m on my h’own spec’ now, I and this yere gal; we’re purwiding fur one another. I wor thinking, Hannah,” she continued, “as you might make us a shake-down in yer cellar; we’d pay yer two pence a night, that’s a penny each. I know as you ha’ plenty o’ room, for yer h’all alone.”

The other and younger girl had shrunk a trifle away from the bold, coarse-looking woman, but Meg had come up and laid her hand on Hannah’s arm.

“You’ll let us in to-night, won’t yer, Hannah?” said Meg again.

Now Hannah was rather fond of Meg, and would gladly have nearly paid the rent of her cellar by admitting these two little lodgers, but the presence of Roy of course made this impossible. To hide her real disappointment she spoke a little more roughly than usual.

“I can’t no how,” she said; “I ha’ a job on hand as ’ull take h’up all my spare room, and I can’t ha’ no gals a loitering around. You look further afield, Meg Harris.”

The younger girl seemed perceptibly relieved, and Meg, with a good-natured nod, walked on. But Hannah felt a vague sense of uneasiness. That youngest girl, had she seen her before? Her face puzzled, nay more, it annoyed her; she was an anxious, thin, dark-eyed child; her dress was as ragged as Meg’s, but somehow she looked far above Meg in respectability. Where *had* Hannah Searles seen her before? She turned a corner: she was now passing a police station, and yes, there was what she dreaded, a full description of little Roy; she stopped fascinated, to read it.

LOST.

Ten Pounds Reward.

Stayed away from his home on Sunday night, a little boy, aged two years, dressed in a light-blue frock, white pinafore, white socks, blue shoes.

He has golden hair, very fair skin, and blue eyes. Any one either bringing the child back, or coming with information which shall lead to his recovery, shall receive Ten Pounds Reward.

Chapter Eleven.

Hannah was unsuccessful in her search for coarse needlework. Badly and miserably paid as such work was, the slop-shops had their full complement of workers, and had nothing to give her, even though she went so far as to promise to do the work for even more wretched prices than had hitherto been given.

She was obliged to leave Roy the next day, and again the next, and for these two days the drops were each time resorted to. On the evening of the third day, she had obtained some partial success. She was given half-a-dozen shirts to make. These shirts were of the coarsest check, and Hannah would obtain tenpence for each. She was in quite good spirits, for she could now work and stay at home with Roy.

But there was a change in little Roy. He was no longer the laughing, rosy, healthy child whom Hannah had brought to her cellar. His blue eyes were heavy, his movements languid, and his fair skin was assuming that waxen tint which Hannah had noticed in Mrs Martin’s baby over the way. Hannah was a strangely ignorant woman, and she never associated this change in little Roy with the drops which he had taken now for three days in succession. She saw a vast difference in him, but she concluded that such was the way with all children. Through how many, many changes had her Davie gone? Why, at his very best he never looked half as healthy as little Roy did at his worst. No, she was not the least uneasy about the little fellow. But as he now had grown troublesome and restless at night, she gave him a few more drops from the fatal mixture, and when taking these he went off into feverish and fitful slumber, she congratulated herself on possessing so valuable a remedy.

While the shirts were being made she stayed quietly at home with the little boy, who in his waking moments would stand gravely and quietly by her knee, now and then putting up a small hot hand to stroke her cheeks, exclaiming as he did so in his broken English, “Pitty yed face, pitty yed face.” Then adding, as he raised his heavenly blue eyes to hers, “Oy ’oves ’oo vevy much.”

At these words, uttered so innocently by the little child, down would go Hannah’s work, needle, and thimble, and he would find himself clasped tightly to her bosom; while down the red cheeks, which he had praised, would flow large salt tears which had lain locked up and frozen since Davie died. Yes, Roy was becoming more and more a necessity to Hannah Searles, and a treasure without which she did not now believe she could find life endurable.

One evening, leaving the child asleep, she went into the court. She was gossiping with a neighbour, and enjoying the sensation of the outside air, which was at least better than the cellar atmosphere which she had quitted, when Meg Harris came up to her. Meg and Faith had found a shelter for themselves in another house in this court, and now Meg came up alone to speak to Hannah.

“And how ere you getting on widhout yer mother?” asked Hannah. “But I needn’t go fur to axe,” she continued, “fur though you ain’t much to boast on now, Meg, yet you look more peart than when she wor allers a walloping of yer.”

"But I have a h'anxiety on my mind," said Meg, shrugging her thin shoulders and speaking in a low, confidential tone. "I ha' a gal along wid me, and a young gal wot ain't none of h'our people. You might ha' noticed her, Hannah, when you was walking down Middle Street."

"Yes," answered Hannah, "she looked a white-faced, mealy-mouthed little 'un. I mind me as I thought as I had seen her somewhere afore."

"Her father is a carpenter, Hannah, a werry, werry upper kind o' carpenter. She's real respectable, is Faithy. And wot does yer think? She have a little brother, a little lovely duck of a child, and he went out o' the house on Sunday night last and got losted, and this poor little Faith, she's near distracted. She and me, we're a looking fur the young 'un h'everywhere. I thought as I'd tell yer, Hannah, fur you see's a deal o' life, and you might ha' noticed as they ha' put him in the h'advertisements, and ten pound offered fur him."

Hannah Searles had perfect control of feature.

"I ha' seen about a missing child," she said after a moment's pause. "A child h'aged two year, dressed in blue, wid real gold 'air?"

"Yes, yes," said Meg. "Oh! Hannah, ef you could only help us to find of him—I think as Faith ull die ef he ain't found."

"I'll keep my h'eyes open," said Hannah, and then she nodded to Meg and went back to her cellar.

She was trembling all over as she stumbled down the stairs. But when she had securely locked the door and lighted a long dip candle and had seen with her own eyes little Roy sleeping quietly, she became calmer. She went over and knelt by the bed, and took one of the little hands in hers.

"I'd rayther be torn in bits, nor give h'up this little hand," she said to herself.

But she had got a great fright, and gazed long and greedily at her treasure.

It was plain that if she wanted to keep little Roy, she must move away from here as fast as possible. She could scarcely find a cheaper home, but be that as it may she dare not stay so near to Faith. Presently, tired out, she sank down on the floor; she still trembled at the nearness of the danger, but she also felt disappointment. The baby whom she considered her own baby now was so beautiful, so grand, so fine and strong, so unlike any other child she had ever looked at, that she had often pictured to herself his high birth. He might, for aught she knew, be the son of a prince. Any prince in the land would be proud of him. And Hannah had delighted herself with the thought that this child, of perhaps Royalty, was happy and at home with such a woman as she—a woman at whom all respectable folks would point a finger of scorn; but yet whom the pure and innocent little child loved.

But he was of no high birth. He was only a son of the people after all. Many, many degrees above herself in respectability it was true, but still a child of the vast multitude. Her last scruple at keeping him vanished at this fact. He would lose nothing by remaining with her, and for his sake she would, she could, become good.

Chapter Twelve.

A week had passed away since Roy was lost. Sunday came round again, finding Faith no longer in her neat and comfortable home, but a gutter child, dressed as badly, and in quite as great rags, as the worst-looking child around her. Meg was her companion and staunch friend, but it seemed no hardship in Meg's eyes to counsel Faith to pawn her neat and good clothes, and to receive in exchange garments in which her father would scarcely recognise her. The money received for the clothes had enabled the little girls to live for some days; and then they had sold matches and flowers, and in one way and another had managed to keep life within them. Faith, though really unaccustomed to any hardship, had borne up bravely. The hope with which she had awakened each morning that surely before the evening they would find Roy, had supported her spirits; but each night as it came, with its invariable disappointment, until even Meg began to own that she was puzzled as to what had become of the child, brought an added weight to Faith's heart. She was more than ever determined not to go home again without her little brother. But as she lay down on her musty bed on Saturday evening in the wretched cellar where she and Meg had found for themselves quarters, hope had vanished to a very low ebb indeed.

Sunday morning dawned. It would be a whole week to-day since she last had seen her darling little Roy. She felt very, very miserable. No, hope would not visit her heart that day, and as she lay in bed watching Meg putting on her clothes, the tears rolled down her pale cheeks, and dark and sceptical thoughts filled her mind. When Meg noticed her tears, she spoke.

"It's all a lie, Meg; it's all a big, big lie."

"Wot's a lie," asked Meg, stopping in her dressing, and staring at Faith.

"Wot you telled me about Jesus. He didn't never love the little children; ef He loved 'em, and ef He is as strong as you say, He'd ha' helped us to find my little baby Roy."

A pained look came over Meg's white and careworn face. She did not answer Faith at all for a moment or two; but having quite finished her dressing, she bent down over her.

"I ha' made myself as clean as h'ever I could, and I'm off now to morning ragged school; ef you'll come too, I'll wait fur yer, Faithy."

"No, no," replied Faith, shaking her head. "I'll stay and wait here. The ragged Sunday-school's all about Jesus, and I don't b'lieve in no Jesus now."

Meg said nothing more; she smothered a faint sigh, and closing the door behind her ran down-stairs. She had more than a mile to walk to Sunday-school, and she was anxious to be in time; but as she walked along, the pained expression called up by Faith's words had not left her face.

Meg was a wild, untaught, uncared-for Arab child, a true offshoot of the lowest of the people. With a touch of gipsy blood in her veins, with the most ungoverned, uncontrolled passions, she yet was capable of a devotion, of an affection self-absorbing, self-forgetful. Offered up at any other shrine, it would have been idolatry; offered at this, it was worship. Meg loved, something as Mary Magdalene, something as the women who followed to the sepulchre, must have loved our Lord.

All the love of a most loving nature had Meg given to Jesus. It was not alone gratitude which inspired this love. "It's jest cause He's so wonderful beautiful His own self," she would say; and it was agony to her, greater even than it would be to a mother to hear her little child abused, to have a word breathed against Him.

Faith's words had wrung her heart. She was very sorry for Faith, very sorry that she could have so spoken; but she was more sorry for the pain she feared the words must have caused Jesus.

"I 'ope as yer'll soon let us find the little 'un, for she's beginning to think real hard things of yer, and I can't abear 'em, I can't abear 'em," said Meg, looking up at the sky, and comforting herself with this very direct little prayer.

As she was leaving the Sunday-school at the end of the morning's lessons, it came into her head that perhaps while she and Faith were so earnestly seeking for little Roy, he might all this time be safely at home. How stupid of them both never to have thought of this before! She had heard all about Faith's respectable home from the little girl herself. Yes; she would go there now and set her mind at rest on this point before returning to Faith.

She reached the house. There was a common staircase, and the hall door stood open. She met no one as she ran up-stairs, and her feet, innocent of shoes and stockings, made no sound. A door was a little open on the first landing, and Meg, peeping in, saw a man seated by a table. He was a tall and powerful man, and Meg knew at once that she was looking at Faith's father.

There was profound silence in the house, and Meg heard the man, whose face was bowed over his hands, presently say:

"It's a lie, it's all a lie. There is no good God. If there were, He would never have torn my children away from me like this. And I have asked Him so often and so long to bring them back again. Yes; God does not hear prayer. It's a lie, I say. There is no God, no Christ, no nothing."

"How dare yer!" said Meg, rushing into the room like a little fury. The man's words had stung her so hard that she lost both fear and self-control. She rushed at the man, and took his hands and shook them. "How dare yer, how dare yer!" she repeated. "Oh! yer a wicked, wicked man to say as there's no Jesus Christ."

Warden—for it was he—started, and stared at the furious little creature. He did not say a word, or attempt in his utter astonishment to oppose her. He only gazed hard, as one who was bereft of all reason.

"Oh! there is a Jesus Christ, and you sha'n't dare say there ain't," repeated Meg; and then she suddenly flung herself on the floor at his feet, and gave way to the most violent, most passionate sobs he had ever heard proceeding from human breast.

He got up and locked the door; then he got water and gave it to Meg. He was kind rather than otherwise to the poor child. When she was better, he even brought her over to sit on the sofa where little Roy had slept his last sleep in that room.

"Now, why did you rush in and speak to me in that strange way?" he asked.

"'Cause yer drove me near mad. You had no call ter say so dreadful a thing as that my Jesus Christ worn't there."

"You believe in Him then?" said Warden.

"I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord," said Meg. Her excitement was spent. She spoke quietly, raising her big, black eyes to heaven. There was something in her manner which must have impressed even the most utterly careless and indifferent with its absolute sincerity.

Warden was silent, gazing at her curiously, even with admiration.

"You must not only believe in Him, you must love Him very much," he said.

"Ay, I love Him; I'd die fur Him most willin'," said Meg, clasping her hard hands very tight together.

"But He hasn't treated you as He has me," said Warden. "You don't know, you can't even understand, what has happened to me. I was always a most respectable man. I tried to do my duty. I had two children. This day week I had two children, a son and a daughter. Now I have none. They did not die, but they ran away. The boy went first, then the girl. I may never see 'em again."

"May be you worn't a werry good father to 'em," said Meg. "May be Jesus let 'em run away so as to show yer how to be a better father to 'em. There is some as beats their children, and some as neglec's 'em. I dunno wot is best. May

be Jesus seen as you neglec'ed yer little children."

Warden felt the lines tightening round his mouth at these words. It was broad daylight, it was true, and Meg was only a poor, ragged child, but her face was so solemn, and her big eyes shone with so intense a light, and she was so absolutely fearless before him, that he felt impressed, even just a trifle afraid—something as he would have felt had he been looking at an accusing angel.

"You may have neglec'ed yer little children," she repeated.

When she did so, Warden nodded his head.

"It is true," he said. "It is very true, God forgive me; but I never meant it. I fear I was a very hard man."

"Then you jest tell Jesus that," said Meg, rising. "You tell Him as you believes in Him, as you loves Him, as yer real sorry you spoke so dreffle bitter. It wor awful the way as you *did* speak; but wot's so wonderful beautiful in Him is how He furgives. You tell Him as yer determined to neglec' yer children never no more, and I'm sure as He'll let yer have 'm back again."

"Little girl," said Warden, "tell me the truth as you profess to love God. Do you know anything, anything at all, of my little son, my little, lost son, Roy?"

"No," answered Meg. "I wishes as I did, I don't know nothink; but I means to pray to Jesus, and Jesus ull help me to find him. I feel as he'll be found, fur Jesus do love him so werry much."

Meg went away, and Warden, unlocking the door, saw her ragged figure disappearing down the stairs. He sighed when he saw the last of her. Then, relocking his door, he returned to his seat by the table. As he seated himself he remembered that he had neither asked her name nor where she lived. It would be impossible, then, for him if he wanted her again to find her.

He sat on perfectly motionless, recalling every word of the strange and passionate scene just enacted before him. At last his thoughts centred round one sentence, which began to burn into his heart like fire.

"May be Jesus seen as you neglec'ed yer little children."

He thought and thought, and more and more intolerable each moment became his feelings. At last he found that there was only one position in which he could bear them. He slid down from the chair to his knees. There he remained for some hours.

Chapter Thirteen.

That very same Sunday evening, while Warden remained upon his knees, and the Recording Angel, looking down at him, could declare for the first time, "Behold, he prayeth," Hannah Searles was very miserable. There was no longer any doubt, even to so untrained and ignorant a woman as she was, that little Roy was very ill. During the greater part of the past week he had been taking more or less of the fatal drops. A few in the day, more at night, had Hannah given him. They always seemed to her inexperience to have a most beneficial effect on him. His fretfulness ceased, his blue eyes closed, and he slept; but though sleep was always supposed to be so very good for children, Hannah could never discover that little Roy awoke refreshed or the better for his sleep. More fretful each time was the little voice, more dull and clouded the eyes. On Sunday he absolutely refused all food; but he was already intelligent enough to see that the bottle which held the drops gave him present relief, and he pointed to it and asked for more repeatedly. On Sunday, however, Hannah only gave him one small dose, for even to her obtuse mind the thought had occurred that it might not be doing him so much good as she had hoped.

After this dose he lay in her arms for long hours in heavy slumber. It was a foggy day, and very little light came into the cellar; but what fitful rays did penetrate the gloom fell upon a very white and sunken little face. Yes; there was no doubt at last, no doubt at all, that Roy looked as bad as Davie had looked; nay, more, that he looked worse than Davie had ever looked, except— Oh! good God! was Roy going to die too? Hannah felt herself trembling all over as this thought occurred to her. Was she a second time to lose her all; was a second time her one heart's treasure to be torn from her arms and from her love?

"And I promised God as I'd try hard to be good ef He'd leave me this yere young 'un as I found lost in the street," she said. In her sore despair she felt angry against God. What right had He not to take her at her word, and allow her to be good in her own way? It had never yet entered into her poor, untaught mind that in keeping little Roy she was keeping what was not her own. The other folks to whom God had first entrusted him had been careless of so great and precious a trust, so he had been sent to her. She regarded him as absolutely her own, and no idea of returning him to his people entered once into her head. Of course they might by great cleverness trace him until they found him, and then they would tear him from her arms; but never, until this happened, would she relinquish him. What! never! ah! she was not so sure of that. *Some one else*, even before his own people, might come to take little Roy away—some one who once already had visited this cellar. Before his call there was no resistance possible. With one magic touch, this great, awful, and mysterious *some one* would close the blue eyes and still the baby heart and—yes—yes—yes—break her heart for ever. A few big, heavy tears fell from her eyes at the terrible thought, but she wiped them away, dreading to disturb the sleeping child.

It was evening when little Roy awoke, and Hannah perceived with fresh terror that there was another change in him. He looked at her without a shade or gleam of recognition; he no longer called her red face pretty; he screamed at the sight of it, and cried often and wildly for Faith, who Hannah hoped he had forgotten.

"Fate, Fate, come to 'Oy. 'Oy want 'oo vevy much, vevy much."

Hannah was at her wit's end. She no longer feared discovery. She laid the child on the bed, and, pulling out the box which was hidden underneath, she took out again his little blue frock, his pretty shoes, and white pinafore. These she dressed him in, and he was pleased for the minute, and stroked the white pinafore, and called it "Pitty, pitty."

There came a knock at the door as she fastened the button into the last little shoe.

"Dat's Fate knocking," said little Roy, raising his eyes solemnly to her face.

Hannah felt it might be, but she had become indifferent. She got up, and, with the child in her arms, went to open the door. It was not Faith, however, but the woman from over the way—the woman from whom she had received the drops.

"I can't stay a minute, neighbour," she said; "but I thought it but right to tell yer as them drops they ha' done fur my babby—least way I'm feared as they ha' done fur her. She wor tuk wid convulsions last evening, and when the doctor come he said it wor the drops. He smelled to 'em and tasted 'em, and he said as there wor poison in 'em; and he threw 'em, bottle and h'all, out of winder. He said as it wor well the 'ooman as sold 'em had made off to 'Mericy, fur she had done wot might transport her. He may save my babby, but he ain't sure. I jest come h'over to ask yer to go and tell the other mother."

"This yere's the other mother, and this yere's the child," said Hannah, pushing Roy forward where what light there was might fall upon his white face. "So you ere the one as ha' killed my lad. Ay, but I'll be even wid yer, see ef I ain't."

"I meant no harm indeed, neighbour. I did it fur the best," said the poor woman, shrinking from Hannah's wild and angry eyes. "I'm main sorry fur yer. I never guessed as you had a child of yer h'own. I thought you had only that wee Davie wot died last spring. But, howsomedever, that ere young 'un don't look so bad as mine. Take him to a doctor at once. I'm real, real sorry as I did him an injury."

"Wot doctor?" said Hannah eagerly. "I'll furgive yer, neighbour, ef yer'll help me to save him. Wot's the name o' the doctor?"

"The doctor wot is saving mine is called Slade, he lives in Tummill Street, half a mile away; go to him at once, he may be to home now."

The woman went away, and Hannah lost not an instant in acting on the advice given to her. She wrapped her old shawl round little Roy, and forgetting even to close her cellar door, went out. The fog was less thick, and the gas made the place far brighter than it had been by day. Hannah walked briskly, for little Roy had laid his heavy head on her shoulder, and he felt cold in her arms. But she walked with hope going before and by her side. If the neighbour's baby, who was so much worse than Roy, might yet recover, why surely he might. Her heart danced at the thought. Yes, God was not going to snatch this second treasure away. How very good she would be in future for such a loving mercy as this! She reached the doctor's door, saw the name on the plate, and pulled the bell. In a moment a little maid opened it. But alas! the doctor was not at home, he was out at church, and so was the missis; he would be back in about an hour; would the woman call again in an hour? Hannah's heart sank within her; the night had turned very chilly, and little Roy, sleeping heavily in her arms, seemed to grow colder and colder; dare she keep him in the winter streets for a whole hour?

"Look yere, my lass," she said suddenly, "ef I may come in and rest anywhere in the house wid this little sickly young 'un, I don't mind how long it be. He's werry sick I'm feared, and I'm main terrified to have him out in this east wind. May we wait inside, my little maid?"

The little servant-girl had to refuse, however, though she did so with tears in her eyes. She was left in sole charge of the house. It was more than her place was worth to let any one in while master and missis were at church!

Hannah did not abuse her, but she turned away, with a feeling as though her feet were weighted with lead. What should she do with little Roy? she dare not keep him for a whole hour in the cold, cold street. Ah! there was one refuge, and it was close—a public-house shed its cheerful light upon the scene. There, in a place so warm and snug both she and the child might wait in shelter, in warmth and safety, and she had sixpence in her pocket, and she might spend twopence in gin. If little Roy were spared to her she meant never to drink again, but to-night she must have one little dram, for her heart was very low.

Chapter Fourteen.

Meg, after her interview with Warden, went straight bade to what home she possessed. Her violent anger, her passion of tears, had left behind them a kind of calm—nay more, a very deep calm; it was as though a thundercloud had rolled across a very blue sky, leaving it when past bluer and brighter than before. Meg, though tired in body and a little faint, for she had eaten no food that day, felt as though she was being carried home in the arms of Jesus. She looked up at the sky and behind all its London gloom and fog she seemed to see the smile of Jesus shining through directly upon her. She ran down the ladder to her cellar with almost gay steps, and she found Faith there, still very depressed and miserable. She told her of her interview with her father, by no means relating the whole scene, but simply that part which concerned little Roy. Faith listened and shook her head more dismally than ever.

"I seen mother in a dream last night," she said; "she come close to me and axed me what I had done wid Roy. I ought never to have left my little Roy wot mother give me to mind when she was dying; it's all my fault as little Roy is lost."

"Why that's som'ut like wot yer father said," answered Meg. "He said as he wor a hard man, and it wor his fault. It seems to me that wot you ought both to do is to get down on yer bended knees and pray most bitter hard to Jesus to furgive yer; when He ha' furgiven yer He'll let you have little Roy back again."

Faith stared very hard at Meg but made no reply, and Meg having devoured a small piece of dry crust, which remained over from the little which she had put carefully by for Faith to eat while she was out, lay down on the bed and dropped asleep. She awoke in the dusk of the evening to find Faith kneeling by her bed. Faith had lit a little bit of fire, and its cheerful rays revealed a change in her thin face, her eyes had lost their hardness and were full of tears.

"Meg, Meg!" she said, "near h'all the time you ha' bin asleep I ha' bin praying, and I think, I do think as Jesus has quite forgiven me."

"Ah! 'tis jest wonderful how willin' He is to forgive," said Meg, "and wot cuts me h'up so is when folks know that, why they're allus a fretting of Him."

"Well, I'll try not to fret Him no more," said Faith.

"Faith," said Meg lying still, and gazing hard at Faith out of her big black eyes, "how long 'ud you say as gals like me, under-fed, under-clothed gals, 'ud be like to live?"

"I dunno," answered Faith in some surprise; "I suppose same as other folks."

"No they don't though," replied Meg; "it comforts me a deal to think on it, fur they most sartin don't. Ef they're wot's called lucky and don't catch no 'fection, and don't meet no h'accident, why then they may pull through; they lives then to be werry, werry skinny and ugly. Ugh! I shivers when I sees 'em; I says to myself, that's me when I'm old. But, Faith, the chances ere h'all agen gals like me living to be old; let the least bit o' 'fection come to a gal like me, or the werry smallest h'accident, so as I'd have ter be tuk to 'orspital, and then where am I? why, no where. You never, never seen a gal like me come h'out of 'orspital, Faithy."

"But, Meg," said little Faith, "why do you say it comforts you to think that?"

"Well, and so it do! Why, Faith, I'm no use down yere; no one wants me, and I h'an't never a chance as far as this world goes, besides, besides," and here Meg pressed her hand upon her beating heart, "besides, I ha' a real hankering to see Him. Oh! to see wid my h'own, h'own eyes the lovely, lovely face o' Jesus! and then perhaps arter a time He'd take a bit o' notice of me and say, 'Is that you, Meg? I know as you love me, Meg.'"

Faith was silent, too puzzled, too unlike Meg in her own frame of mind to make any reply, and after a time the two little girls went out. As they went down the street which led from the court to the more open thoroughfares, Meg said something which comforted her little companion greatly.

"I think, Faith," she said, "as we'll werry, werry soon now see little Roy; I think may be as we'll find him to-night."

"Oh Meg! oh! where?" asked Faith.

"I dunno, only I feel it. Jest you wait and see."

As Meg said this the little girls turned a corner and came full upon the flaring light of one of the largest gin-palaces in the neighbourhood.

"Let's cross over to it," said Meg. "I allus do hanker fur light. Let's get inter the brightness of it."

She took Faith's hand as she spoke and ran across, hastening her steps, for the sound of wheels approaching rapidly were heard.

At this very instant, just as the little girls set their feet on the opposite pavement, a woman carrying a child in her arms came out of the public-house; she walked unsteadily, and unheeding, probably not hearing, the rapidly approaching carriage-wheels, stepped into the street. As she did so her ragged shawl was caught by the wind and flung aside, revealing to view a little child's blue frock, and showing for an instant a golden head pressed heavily on her bosom. Faith saw nothing, but Meg did. The woman was Hannah Searles; the child, little lost Roy—she recognised him by his blue frock and golden head. She uttered a joyful cry, and was about to touch Faith, when the sound on her lips was changed to a scream of horror. The carriage and prancing horses were on the woman, who was too tipsy either to see them or to save herself. In an instant she and little Roy must have been killed. Quick, quicker than thought brave Meg rushed to the rescue. She flew in the faces of the excited horses and caught their reins. They swerved in their course, swerved sufficiently to enable woman and child to pass by unhurt, but they knocked Meg down and the carriage-wheels went over her.

Many hours later on the same Sunday evening a group of persons were gathered round one of the white and narrow beds in a large London hospital. On this bed lay a bruised and dying girl. The girl was Meg; the people who stood so close were Roy's father, holding Roy in his arms, Faith, and Hannah Searles. Faith and Hannah were sobbing, but Warden, with dry eyes, knelt close, and when Meg at last opened her eyes he placed the baby hand of his little son in hers.

"Meg—dear, dear, brave Meg," said Warden, "let me thank you. You have saved the little chap's life. Oh, Meg, if for no other deed of mercy, I must all the rest of my life believe in the Lord Jesus Christ."

It was a public confession, wrung from a proud and hard man in the moment of his deep humiliation and thankfulness, and doubtless the angels in heaven recording it rejoiced. But the earthly ears for whom it was meant

were deaf. Never again would Meg hear human voice of either love or kindness; there was no place for Meg down here, she was going to a place prepared for her long ago in heaven. Her eyes travelled past those who surrounded her, and fixed themselves joyfully on a Presence unseen to any but her dying eyes.

“’Tis you, Lord Jesus Christ,” she said, “’tis you. You ha’ come your werry own self. I ain’t to live to be old, I ain’t to be ragged nor hungry no more. *You—ha’—come.*”

She tried to stretch out her arms, but they fell to her side, the breath ceased, and Meg was in Paradise.

After all, brave Meg was the only one to die. For long before the daisies came into blossom on her grave in the country cemetery to which Warden had her carried, the roses had come back to the bonnie cheeks of sweet baby Roy, and the health and brightness to his eyes. He had been rescued in time to save his little life. In that re-united home a new order of things was established. Faith and Roy had never to complain of a cold or hard father again. The great tribulation of those terrible eight days had done their work on the man’s heart, and the death of Meg seemed to set the seal to it. Warden told Meg that he believed in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is enough to say of his future life, that he acted as only a man could act who carried that belief to its logical conclusion, and who very humbly and very prayerfully followed in the steps of the Master whom he loved. Faith and Roy were to grow up knowing the meaning of true fatherhood, both human and divine. And Hannah! God was very gracious to poor lost Hannah Searles. He gave her treasure back to his own, but He did not take him quite away from her. She still saw her baby boy, and as she grew steadier and more respectable day by day, and week by week, Warden gradually gave her more to do in his house, until finally she almost lived there.

“I said to the Lord that I’d be good ef He spared me the child,” she was often heard to say, “and I’m a trying. I’m a rare and wicked woman, God h’Almighty knows that werry, werry well, but I’m a trying hard to be good.”

The End.

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