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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCAMP AND I: A STORY OF CITY BY-WAYS ***

L.T. Meade

"Scamp and I"

"A Story of City By-Ways"

Chapter One.

I'd Choose to be a Queen.

The time was the height of the London season for 1875; the height of that gay time when the parks, and streets, and shops are full, when pleasure-promoters are busy keeping up a fresh supply of every form of entertainment, when pleasure-seekers are flocking to the garden parties, and strawberry parties, the operas, and theatres, and all other amusements provided for them; when the world—the world at least of Regent Street, and Piccadilly, of Eaton Square, and all Belgravia—looks so rich and prosperous, so full of life and all that makes life enjoyable.

It was that gay time when no one thinks of gloom, when ambitious men dream of fame, and vain women of vanity, when the thoughtless think less than any other time, and when money seems to be the one god that rules in every breast.

This was the time in the merry month of May, when one afternoon, at the hour when Regent Street is brightest and fullest, a little ragged urchin of about ten pushed his way boldly through the crowd of carriages and people surrounding Swan and Edgar's, and began staring eagerly and fearlessly in at the windows.

He was the only ragged child, the only representative of poverty, within sight, and he looked singularly out of place, quite a little shadow in the midst of the splendid carriages, and brilliant and prosperous men and women.

The few who noticed him wondered languidly what brought him there, why he intruded his disreputable little person in the midst of scenes and people with which he never had, and never could have, anything in common.

The little fellow seemed to guess the thoughts which a few in the crowd favoured him with, and in his own way to resent them. In and out among the rich and fashionable people his small head kept bobbing, his agile body kept pushing.

He avoided the police, he escaped unhurt from under the impatient horses' legs, he was never stationary, and yet he was always there. He pressed his dirty little form against more than one fine lady's dress, and received more than one sharp reprimand, and sharper tap on the head, from the powdered and liveried footmen.

Still he held his ground and remained faithful to Swan and Edgar's. He was a dirty, troublesome little imp, but on his worn and prematurely old face might have been seen a curious, bright expression. Those who looked at him might have pronounced him hungry, certainly poor, but, for the time being, not at all unhappy.

Round and round the splendid establishment he dodged rather than walked, examining with a critical eye the mantles and costumes on view in the windows; then he carefully looked over and reckoned the carriages, gazed up with a full, bright, impudent stare into the face of more than one proud and titled dame, and at last, apparently satisfied, turned his back on the gay shop and gay crowd, and set off down Regent Street at a swinging pace. Presently, by means of a series of short cuts, he found himself in Old Compton Street, from thence he proceeded through Seven Dials into a street which we will call Duncan Street.

He had come this distance very quickly, and had withstood several temptations to linger on his road. A band of musical niggers, who danced, and sang, and played the bones, had waylaid him in vain; his own particular chum, Jenks, had met him, and called to him to stop, but he had not obeyed; the shrimp man, who always gave him a handful, had come directly in his path. He had paused for nothing, and now dashing headlong, not into a house, but through a hole in the pavement, down a slippery ladder, into a cellar, he called out "Flo."

From the bright sunshine outside, the gloom of this Place, lit by the flickering flame of one tallow candle, was profound. Its roof was on a level with the road, its floor several feet below the gas-pipes and sewage; it had no window, and its only means of light and ventilation was through the narrow opening in the pavement, against which a ladder was placed.

The ragged boy, rushing down these steps, made his way to a cobbler's stool, in the middle of the room, on which was seated a little girl busily repairing an old boot, while a heap of boots and shoes, apparently in the last stage of decay, were scattered round her. This child, a year or so younger than the boy, had the utterly colourless appearance of a flower shut away from the sunshine.

"Flo," said her companion eagerly.

A little voice, very thin, but just as eager, responded with,—

"Yes, Dick dear."

"Is you up to a bit o' 'joyment this 'ere blessed minit, Flo?"

"Oh, Dick! *is* it the shops, and the picters, and the fine ladies? *is* it, Dick?"

"Yes; queens, and ladies, and lords goin' about in golden carriages, and shops full up to bustin', and we a standin' and a lookin' on. Better'n wittles, eh?"

"Oh yes, Dick!"

She threw aside the old boot, held out her dirty little hand to Dick, and together the children scampered up the broken, rickety ladder into the air and light of day.

"Now, Flo, you 'as got to put your best foot forrard, 'cos we 'as a goodish bit o' a way to tramp it. Then I'll plant you front o' me, Flo; and when we gets there, you never mind the perleece, but look yer fill. Oh, my heyes! them is hosses!"

Flo, seen by daylight, had brown eyes, very large and soft; curling, golden brown hair, and a sweet gentle little face. Had she been a lady she would have been pronounced a lovely child, and in all probability would have been a lovely child, but her cellar-life had produced sharp shoulders, a complexion of greyish-white, and a certain look of premature age and wisdom, which all children so brought up possess. She raised her hand now to shade her face, as though the daylight pained her, looked round eagerly, then tightened her clasp of Dick.

"Is there blue, and yaller, and red, and majinta dresses in them 'ere winders, Dick? and is there lace on 'em? and is there welwet and silk dresses, Dick?" Dick winked, and looked mysterious.

"Silk gownds, and satin gownds, and welwet gownds," he replied, "and gownds—some trimmed with wot looks like paper cut into 'oles, and gownds made o' little round 'oles hall over. And the bonnets in them shops! My heyes, Flo! them bonnets 'ave got about hevery bird in Saint Martin's Lane killed and stuffed, and stuck in 'em. But come," he added, hastily bringing his vivid description to a close, "the lords and ladies will be gone."

He held the slight little fingers placed in his, with a firm hold, and together they trotted swiftly from their dark Saint Giles's cellar, to the bright fairy-land of Regent Street.

There were plenty of people, and carriages, and grand ladies and gentlemen still there; and the dresses were so fine, and the feathers so gay, that Flo, when she found herself really in their midst, was speechless, and almost stunned. She had dreamed of this day for months—this day, when Dick was to show her the other side of London life, and she had meant when the time came to enter into it all, to realise it if possible.

She and Dick were to carry out quite a pretty play; they were to suppose *themselves* a grand lady and gentleman; Flo was to single out the nicest looking and most beautifully dressed lady present, and imagine *herself* that lady; those clothes were *her* clothes, those silken dresses, those elegant boots and gloves, that perfect little bonnet, were all Flo's; the carriage with its spirited horses was hers, and the fine gentleman with the splendid moustache seated by her side, was none other than Dick.

They had arranged the whole programme; the carriage was to drive off rapidly—where?

Well, *first* Dick said they would stop at a restaurant, and instead of, as the real Flo and Dick did, standing a sniffin' and a sniffin' outside, they would walk boldly in, and order—well, beef, and potatoes, and plum-pudding were vulgar certainly, but once in a way they *would* order these for dinner. Then back in the carriage to Swan and Edgar's, where Flo would have the creamiest of silk dresses, and a new bonnet with a pink tip, and Dick, who was supposed to be in perfect attire as it was, would talk loudly of "my tailor," and buy the most beautiful flower, from the first flower-girl he met, to put in his button-hole. Then at night they would have a box at the theatre.

Their whole plan was very brilliantly constructed, and Dick, having got Flo into a capital position, just opposite a row of lovely dresses, with carriages close up to the footway, and grand ladies sweeping against her tattered gown each moment, was very anxious for her to begin to carry out their play.

"Come, Flo," he said, giving her a nudge. "S'pose a bit, Flo. Which fine lady'll yer be? Look at that 'ere little 'un, in blue and white, I guess she's an hearl's wife. Come, Flo, choose to be her. I'll be the hearl, and you the hearl's wife, Flo."

"Be hearls the biggest swells?" asked Flo.

Dick opened his eyes.

“Bless us!” he said. “Why, Flo, I’m ‘shamed o’ yer hignorance. Why there’s markises, and dooks, and there’s kings and queens—all them’s bigger than hearls, Flo.”

“Is queens the biggest of all swells?” asked Flo.

“Sartinly, they be the biggest woman swells.”

“Then, Dick, I’ll s’pose to be the biggest swell, I’ll s’pose to be a queen. Find me hout a queen to take Pattern of, Dick.”

“Oh! Flo, there ain’t none yere, there be but one queen, Flo, and ’ers away, locked hup at Bucknam Palace. You can’t s’pose to be the queen, Flo, but I guess we’ll be the hearl and the hearl’s wife, and let us s’pose now as we is turnin’ in fur our dinners, and the kivers is orf the roast beef, and the taters is ’ot and mealy, and a whackin’ big puddin’ is to foller.” At this juncture, when Dick’s imagination was running riot over his supposed dinner, and Flo’s little face was raised to his with a decided gesture of dissent, a hand was laid familiarly on his shoulder, and turning quickly he discerned the smiling, mischievous face of his friend Jenks.

“Wot ails the young ‘un?” said Jenks.

Dick was ashamed of his play beside his tall friend (Jenks was fourteen), and answered hastily—

“Nothing.”

But Flo replied innocently, and in an injured tone—

“I wants fur to be a queen, and there is no queens hout this arternoon fur me to take pattern of.”

The black eyes of Jenks sparkled more mischievously than ever; but he liked Flo, and knew she was fond of supposing herself a great lady.

“Look at that ‘ere ‘oman,” he said, pointing to a stout old lady in black velvet and white lace shawl; “s’pose you is ‘er, Flo. My heyes! wot a precious big swell you would look in that ‘ere gownd.”

Here Dick and Jenks both laughed uproariously, but the ambitious little Flo still answered in a fretful tone—

“I’ll not be that ‘ere swell, I’ll choose to be a queen.”

“Then come along both o’ yers,” said Jenks, “and see the queen. She ‘ave got to pass hout of Bucknam Palace in arf an ‘our, on ‘er way to Victoria Station. Come, Flo, I’ll ‘old yer ‘and. Come, Dick, old pal.” The children, only too delighted to be seen anywhere in Jenks’s company, followed eagerly, and led by their clever friend down several by-ways, soon found themselves in the midst of the crowd which had already collected outside Buckingham Palace gates to see the queen.

Flo was excited and trembling. *Now* she should behold with her own eyes the biggest swell in all the world, and for ever after in her dark Saint Giles’s cellar she could suppose, and go over in her imagination, the whole scene. No vulgar “dook” or “markis” could satisfy Flo’s ambition; when she soared she would soar high, and when she saw the queen she would really know how to act the queen to perfection.

So excited was she that she never observed that she was really alone in the crowd, that Jenks and Dick had left her side.

She was a timid child, not bold and brazen like many of her class, and had she noticed this she would have been too frightened even to look out for the greatest woman in the world. But before she had time to take in this fact there was a cheer, a glittering pageant passed before Flo’s eyes,—she had never seen the Life Guards before!—a carriage appeared amidst other carriages, a lady amidst other ladies, and some instinct told the child that this quietly-dressed, dignified woman was the queen of England. The eager crowd had pushed the little girl almost to the front, and the queen, bowing graciously on all sides, looked for an instant full at Flo.

She was probably unconscious of it, but the child was not. Her brown eyes sparkled joyfully; she had seen the queen, and the *queen had seen her*.

They were to meet again.

Chapter Two.

A Hot Supper.

When the royal carriage had passed by, the crowd immediately scattered, and then for the first time Flo perceived that she was deserted by her companions. She looked to right and left, before and behind her, but the little rough and ragged figures she sought for were nowhere visible.

She was still excited by the sight she had witnessed, and was consequently not much frightened though it did occur to her to wonder how ever she should find her way home again. She turned a few steps,—Saint James’s Park with the summer sunshine on it lay before her. She sat down on the grass, and pulled a few blades and smelt them—they were withered, trampled, and dry, but to Flo their yellow, sickly green was beautiful.

She gathered a few more blades and tucked them tenderly into the bosom of her frock—they would serve to remind her of the queen, they had sprouted and grown up within sight of the queen's house, perhaps one day the queen had looked at them, as to-day she had looked at Flo.

The child sat for half-an-hour unperceived, and therefore undisturbed, drinking in the soft summer air, when suddenly a familiar voice sounded in her ears, and the absent figures danced before her.

"I say, Flo, would yer like somethink *real*, not an ony s'pose?"

Flo raised her eyes and fixed them earnestly on Dick.

"No, Dick," she replied slowly, "there beant but one queen, and I've seen the queen, and she's beautiful and good, and she looked at me, Dick, and I'm not a goin' to take 'er place, so I'll be the hearl's wife please, Dick dear."

The two boys laughed louder than ever, and then Jenks, coming forward and bowing obsequiously, said in a mock serious tone—

"Will my Lady Countess, the hearl's wife, condescend to a 'elpin' o' taters and beef along o' her 'umble servants, and will she condescend to rise orf this 'ere grass, as hotherwise the perleece might feel obligated to give 'er in charge, it being contrary to the rules, that even a hearl's wife should make this 'ere grass 'er cushion."

Considerably frightened, as Jenks intended she should be, Flo tumbled to her feet, and the three children walked away. Dick nudged his sister and looked intensely mysterious, his bright eyes were dancing, his shock of rough hair was pushed like a hay-stack above his forehead, his dirty freckled face was flushed. Jenks preceded the brother and sister by a few steps, getting over the ground in a light and leisurely manner, most refreshing to the eyes of Dick.

"Ain't 'ee a mate worth 'avin'?" he whispered to Flo.

"But wot about the meat and taters?" asked Flo, who by this time was very hungry; "ain't it nothink but another 's'pose' arter all?"

"Wait and you'll see," replied Dick with a broad grin.

"Here we 'ere," said Jenks, drawing up at the door of an eating-house, not quite so high in the social scale as Verrey's, but a real and substantial eating-house nevertheless.

"Now, my Lady Countess, the hearl's wife, which shall it be? Smokin' 'ot roast beef and taters, or roast goose full hup to chokin' o' sage and onions? There, Flo," he added, suddenly changing his tone, and speaking and looking like a different Jenks, "you 'as but to say one or t'other, so speak the word, little matey."

Seeing that there was a genuine eating-house, and that Jenks was in earnest, Flo dropped her assumed character, and confessed that she had *once* tasted 'ot fat roast beef, long ago in mother's time, but had never so much as *seen* roast goose; accordingly that delicacy was decided on, and Jenks having purchased a goodly portion, brought it into the outer air in a fair-sized wooden bowl, which the owner of the eating-house had kindly presented to him for the large sum of four pence. At sight of the tempting mess cooling rapidly in the breeze, all Flo's housewifely instincts were awakened.

"It won't be 'ot roast goose, and mother always did tell 'as it should be heat up 'ot," she said pitifully. "'Ere, Dick, 'ere's my little shawl, wrap it round it fur to keep it 'ot, do."

Flo's ragged scrap of a shawl was accordingly unfastened and tied round the savoury dish, and Dick, being appointed bowl-bearer, the children trudged off as rapidly as possible in the direction of Duncan Street. They were all three intensely merry, though it is quite possible that a close observer might have remarked, that Dick's mirth was a little forced. He laughed louder and oftener than either of the others, but for all that, he was not quite the same Dick who had stared so impudently about him an hour or two ago in Regent Street. He was excited and pleased, but he was no longer a fearless boy. An hour ago he could have stared the world in the face, now even at a distant sight of a policeman he shrank behind Jenks, until at last that young gentleman, exasperated by his rather sneaking manner, requested him in no very gentle terms not to make such a fool of himself.

Then Dick, grinning more than ever, declared vehemently that "'ee wasn't afraid of nothink, not 'ee." But just then something, or some one, gave a vicious pull to his ragged trouser, and he felt himself turning pale, and very nearly in his consternation dropping the dish, with that delicious supper.

The cause of this alarm was a wretched, half-starved dog, which, attracted doubtless by the smell of the supper, had come behind him and brought him to a sense of his presence in this peremptory way.



"No, don't 'it 'im," said Flo, as Jenks raised his hand to strike.—A. 15

"No, don't 'it 'im," said Flo, as Jenks raised his hand to strike, for the pitiable, shivering creature had got up on its hind legs, and with coaxing, pleading eyes was glancing from the bowl to the children.

"Ain't 'ee just 'ungry?" said Flo again, for her heart was moved with pity for the miserable little animal.

"Well, so is we," said Dick in a fretful voice, and turning, he trudged on with his load.

"Come, Flo, do," said Jenks, "don't waste time with that little sight o' misery any more, 'ees ony a street cur."

"No 'ee ain't," said Flo half to herself, for Jenks had not waited for her, "'ees a good dawg."

"Good-bye, good dawg," and she patted his dirty sides. "Ef I wasn't so werry 'ungry, and ef Dick wasn't the least bit in the world crusty, I'd give you a bite o' my supper," and she turned away hastily after Jenks.

"Wy, I never! 'ee's a follerin' o' yer still, Flo," said Jenks.

So he was; now begging in front of her, paying not the least attention to Jenks—Dick was far ahead—but fixing his starved, eager, anxious eyes on the one in whose tone he had detected kindness.

"Oh! 'ee *is* starvin', I must give 'im one bite o' my supper," said Flo, her little heart utterly melting, and then the knowing animal came closer, and crouched at her feet.

"Poor brute! hall 'is ribs is stickin' hout," said Jenks, examining him more critically. "I 'spects 'ees strayed from 'ome. Yer right, Flo, 'ees not such a bad dawg, not by no means, 'ee 'ave game in 'im. I ses, Flo, would you like to take 'im 'ome?"

"Oh, Jenks! but wouldn't Dick be hangry?"

"Never you mind Dick, I'll settle matters wid 'im, ef you likes to give the little scamp a bite o' supper, you may."

"May be scamp's 'ees name; see! 'ee wags 'is little tail."

"Scamp shall come 'ome then wid us," said Jenks, and lifting the little animal in his arms, he and Flo passed quickly through Seven Dials, into Duncan Street, and from thence, through a gap in the pavement, into the deep, black cellar, which was their home.

Chapter Three.

What the Children Promised Their Mother.

In the cellar there was never daylight, so though the sun was shining outside, Flo had to strike a match, and poking about for a small end of tallow candle, she applied it to it. Then, seating herself on her cobbler's stool, while Jenks and Dick squatted on the floor, and Scamp sat on his hind legs, she unpacked the yellow bowl; and its contents of roast goose, sage and onions, with a plentiful supply of gravy and potatoes, being found still hot, the gutter children and gutter dog commenced their supper.

"I do think 'ees a dawg of the right sort," said Jenks, taking Scamp's head between his knees. "We'll take 'im round to Maxey, and see wot 'ee ses, Dick."

"Arter supper?" inquired Dick indistinctly, for his mouth was full.

"No, I wants you arter supper for somethink else; and look yere, Dick, I gives you warning that ef you gets reg'lar in the blues, as you did this arternoon, I'll 'ave no callin' to you."

"I'll not funk," said Dick, into whose spirit roast goose had put an immense accession of courage.

"Lor! bless yer silly young heyes, where 'ud be yer supper ef you did? No, we'll go on hour bis'ness to-night, and we'll leave the little dawg with Flo. He's lost, por little willan, and 'ave no father nor mother. He's an horfan, is Scamp, and 'as come to us fur shelter."

The boys and girl laughed, the supper, however good and plentiful, came to an end, and then Dick in rather a shamefaced way prepared to follow Jenks; the two lads ran up the ladder and disappeared, and Flo stood still to watch them with a somewhat puzzled look on her woman's face.

She was eight years old, a very little girl in any other rank of life, but in this Saint Giles's cellar she was a woman. She had been a woman for a whole year now; ever since her mother died, and she had worked from morning to night for her scanty living, she had put childish things away, and taken on herself the anxieties, the hopes, and fears, of womanhood. Dick was ten, but in reality, partly on account of her sex, partly on account of the nature within her, Flo was much older than her little brother.

It was she who worked all day over those old shoes and boots, translating them, for what she called truly "starvegut" pay, into new ones. It was Dick's trade, but Flo really did the work, for he was always out, looking, as he said, for better employment.

But the better employment did not come to Dick, perhaps because Dick did not know how to come to it, and Flo's little fingers toiled bravely over this hard work, and the wolf was barely kept from the door.

Her mother had taught her the trade, and she was really a skilful little work-woman.

Comforted now by her good meal, by her run in the open air, by the wonderful sights, and by the crowning sight of all she had seen; comforted also not a little by Scamp's company, she resumed her employment.

The dog, satisfied and well pleased, rolled himself up as close as possible to her ragged gown, and went to sleep; and Flo, feeling sure that she would be now undisturbed, arranged quite a nice amusement for herself.

She would begin supposing now in earnest.

She had seen the queen, she had seen fine ladies, she knew at last what velvet and silk, what lace and feathers, what horses and carriages were like. She could suppose to any amount. She had no longer need to draw wholly on her own resources, she knew what the real things were, at last.

She had a very vivid imagination, and she dropped her work, and her big brown eyes looked far away from the real and ugly things about her, to beautiful things elsewhere. But somehow, and this was strange, unpleasant thoughts would intrude, a present anxiety would shut away imaginary joys, and with a sigh the little girl resumed her work and her cares.

Her trouble was this. What railed Dick? His embarrassment, his fear of the police, his forced mirth, had none of them escaped Flo's observant eyes.

Generally he was the merriest little fellow in the world, but to-night, even while partaking of a supper that would have rejoiced any heart, even while eating those exasperatingly delicious morsels, he had been grave, subdued, and his laugh (for through it all he laughed constantly) had no true ring in it. He was also the bravest little boy possible; he had never in all his life funk'd any one or anything, and yet to-night at the sight of a policeman even in the far distance he had got in the most cowardly way behind Jenks.

There was some cause for this. There was also something else to be accounted for.

How was that supper bought? Where had the money come from? Flo knew well that 'ot roast goose, with sage and onions, with taters and gravy, not to make any mention of the bowl that held them, had not been purchased for a few pence; so where, where had the money come from?

Dick had it not, and Jenks, though *werry* liberal, liberal to the amount of now and then presenting her with a whole red herring for their supper, was to all appearance as poor and as hard up as themselves.

True, Flo did not know how Jenks made his living; his trade—for he told her he had a trade—was a secret, which he might enlighten her about some time, but certainly not at present.

Jenks got his money, what little money he had, in some mysterious way, of that there was no doubt.

She thought over it all to-night, and very grave were her fears and suspicions.

Was it possible that Jenks was a bad boy, and that he was teaching Dick to be a bad boy?

Was it possible that Jenks was not honest, and that the delicious supper they had just eaten was not honestly come by?

What a pity if this was so, for 'ot roast goose *was* so good. Perhaps Dick had helped some old lady to find a cab, and she had given him a shilling, and perhaps Jenks, who was *werry* good-natured, had kindly assisted some other body, and thus earned 'arf-a-crown; this sum would pay for their supper, good as it was!

But no; had they earned the money in that way, they would have told Flo, they would have been proud to tell Flo, whereas the word money had never been mentioned at all between them!

Had Dick got the money rightly he would have been only too glad to speak of it; so it was clear to Flo that in some wrong manner alone had it come into his possession!

Well! why should she care? They were very poor, they were as low down in the world as they well could be; nobody loved them, nobody had ever taught them to do right. Dick and Flo were "horfans," same as Scamp was an orphan. The world was hard on them, as it is on all defenceless creatures. If Dick *could* "prig" something from that rich and greedy world that was letting them both starve, would it be so very wrong?

If he could do this without the police finding out, without fear of discovery, would it not be rather a good and easy way of getting breakfasts, and dinners, and suppers? For surely some people had *too* much; surely it was not fair that all those buns and cakes, all those endless, countless good things in the West End shops should go to the rich people; surely the little hungry boys and girls who lived, and felt, and suffered in the East End should have their share!

And if only by stealing they could taste roast goose, was it very wrong, was it wrong at all to steal?

Flo knew nothing about God, she had never heard of the eighth commandment, but nevertheless, poor ignorant little child, she had a memory that kept her right, a memory that made it impossible for her, even had she really starved, to touch knowingly what was not her own.

The memory was this.

A year ago Flo's mother had died in this cellar. She was a young woman, not more than thirty, but the damp of the miserable cellar, together with endless troubles and hardships, had fanned the seeds of consumption within her, and before her thirty-first birthday she had passed away. She knew she was dying, and in her poor way had done her best to prepare her children for her loss. She taught them both her trade, that of a translator,—not a literary translator, poor Mrs Darrell could not read,—but a translator of old boots and shoes into new; and Flo and Dick, young as they were, learned the least difficult and lighter parts of the business before her death. She had no money to leave them, no knowledge beyond that of her trade; she knew nothing of God or of heaven, but she had one deeply-instilled principle, and this she endeavoured by every means in her power to impart to the children.

Living in a place, and belonging to a grade of society, where *any* honesty was rare, she was nevertheless a perfectly honest woman. She had never touched a penny that was not her own, she was just and true in all her dealings. She was proud of saying—and the pride had caused her sunken, dying eyes to brighten even at the last—that none of her belongings, however low they had fallen, had ever seen the inside of a prison, or ever stood in a prisoner's dock. They were honest people, and Dick and Flo must keep up the family character. Come what might, happen what would, they must ever and always look every man in the face, with the proud consciousness, "I have stolen from none."

On the night she died, she had called them both to her side, and got them to promise her this. With pathetic and solemn earnestness, she had held their little hands and looked into their little faces, and implored of them, as they loved their dead father and mother, never, never to disgrace the unstained name they had left to them.

"'Tis just hevery think," said the dying woman. "Arter hall my 'ard life, 'tis real comfa'ble to look back on. Remember, Dick and Flo, I dies trustin' yer. You'll never, wot hever 'appins, be jail-birds—promise me that?"

"Never, mother," said Flo, kissing her and weeping; and Dick promised, and kissed her, and wept also, and then the two children climbed up on the bed and lay down one at each side of her, and the poor dying woman closed her eyes and was cheered by their words.

"Is you dying to-night, mother?" asked Flo, gazing with awe at her clammy cold face.

"Yes, dearie."

"Where'll you be to-morrer, then, mother?"

A shadow passed over the peaceful, ignorant face, the brown eyes, so like her little daughter's, were opened wide.

"Oh! I doesn't know—yes, it be *werry* dark, but I guess it 'ull be all right." Then after a pause, very slowly, "I doesn't mind the grave, I'd like a good bit o' a rest, for I'm awful—awful tired."

Before the morning came the weary life was ended, and Dick and Flo were really orphans.

Then the undertaker's men came, and a coffin was brought, and the poor, thin, worn body was placed in it, and hauled up by ropes into the outer world, and the children saw their mother no more.

But they remembered her words, and tried hard to fight out an honest living for themselves.

This was no easy task; it sent them supperless to bed, it gave them mouldy crusts for dinner, it gave them cold water breakfasts; still they persevered, Flo working all day long at her cobbling, while Dick, now tried a broom and crossing, now stood by the metropolitan stations waiting for chance errands, now presented himself at every shop where an advertisement in the window declared a boy was wanting, now wandered about the streets doing nothing, and occasionally, as a last resource, helped Flo with her cobbling.

But the damp, dark cellar was unendurable to the bright little fellow, and he had to be, as he himself expressed it, a goodish bit peckish before he could bear it. So Flo uncomplainingly worked in the dismal room, and paid the small rent, and provided the greater part of the scanty meals, and Dick thought this arrangement fair enough; "for was not Flo a gel? *she* could bear the lonely, dark, unwholesome place better'n him, who was a boy, would one day be a man, and—in course it was the place of womens to kep at 'ome." So Flo stayed at home and was honest, and Dick went abroad and was honest, and the consciousness of this made them both happy and contented.

But about a month before this evening Dick returned from his day's roaming very hungry as usual, but this time not alone, a tall boy with merry twinkling eyes accompanied him. He was a funny boy, and had no end of pleasant droll things to say, and Dick and Flo laughed, as they had not laughed since mother died.

He brought his share of supper in his pocket, in the shape of a red herring, and a large piece of cold bacon, and the three made quite merry over it.

Before the evening came to an end he had offered to share the cellar, which was, he said, quite wasted on two, pay half the rent, and bring in his portion of the meals, and after a time, he whispered mysteriously, he would go "pardeners" with Dick in his trade.

"Why not at once?" asked Dick. "I'd like to be arter a trade as gives folks red 'errings and bacon fur supper."

But Jenks would neither teach his trade then, nor tell what it was; he however took up his abode in the cellar, and since his arrival Flo was much more comfortable, and had a much less hard time.

Scarcely an evening passed that some dainty hitherto unknown did not find its way out of Jenks's pocket. Such funny things too. Now it was a fresh egg, which they bored a tiny hole in, and sucked by turns; now a few carrots, or some other vegetables, which when eaten raw gave such a relish to the dry, hard bread; now some cherries; and on one occasion a great big cucumber. But this unfortunately Flo did not like, as it made her sick, and she begged of Jenks very earnestly not to waste no more money on cowcumburs.

On the whole she and Dick enjoyed his society very much. Dick indeed looked on him with unfeigned admiration, and waited patiently for the day when he should teach him his trade. Flo too wondered, and hoped it was a girl's trade, as anythink would be better and less hard than translating, and one day she screwed up all her courage, and asked Jenks if it would be possible for him when he taught Dick to teach her also.

"Wot?" said Jenks eagerly; "you'd like to be bringin' carrots and heggs out o' yer pocket fur supper? Eh!"

"Yes, Jenks, I fell clemmed down yere, fur ever 'n ever."

Then Jenks turned her round to the light, and gazed long into her innocent face, and finally declared that "she'd do; and he'd be blowed ef she wouldn't do better'n Dick, and make her fortin quite tidy."

So it was arranged that when Dick learned, Flo should learn also. She had never guessed what it meant, she had never the least clue to what it all was, until to-night.

But now a glimmering of the real state of the case stole over her. That supper was not honestly come by, so far things were plain. Once in his life Dick had broken his word to his dying mother, once at least he had been a thief. This accounted for his forced mirth, for his shamefaced manner. He and Jenks had stolen something, they were thieves.

But perhaps—and here Flo trembled and turned pale—perhaps there were worse things behind, perhaps the mysterious trade that Jenks was to teach them both was the trade of a thief, perhaps those nice eggs and carrots, those red herrings and bits of bacon, were stolen. She shivered again at the thought.

Flo was, as I said, a totally ignorant child; she knew nothing of God, of Christ, of the Gospel. Nevertheless she had a gospel and a law. That law was honesty, that gospel was her mother.

She had seen so much pilfering, and small and great stealing about her, she had witnessed so many apparently pleasant results arising from it, so many little luxuries at other tables, and by other firesides, that the law that debarred her from these things had often seemed a hard law to her. Nevertheless for her mother's sake she loved that law, and would have died sooner than have broken it.

Dick had loved it also. Dick and she had many a conversation, when they sat over the embers in the grate last winter, on the virtues of honesty.

In the end they felt sure honesty would pay.

And Dick told her lots of stories about the boys who snatched things off the old women's stalls, or carried bread out

of the bakers' shops; and however juicy those red apples were, and however crisp and brown those nice fresh loaves, the boys who took them had guilty looks, had downcast faces, and had constant fear of the police in their hearts.

And Dick used to delight his sister by informing her how, ragged and hungry as he was, he feared nobody, and how intensely he enjoyed staring a "p'leece-man" out of countenance.

But to-night Dick had been afraid of the "p'leece." Tears rolled down Flo's cheeks at the thought. How she wished she had never tasted that 'ot roast goose, but had supped instead off the dry crust in the cupboard!

"I'm feared as mother won't lay com'fable to-night," she sobbed, "that is, ef mother knows. Oh! I wish as Dick wasn't a thief. S'pose as it disturbs mother; and she was so awful tired." The little girl sobbed bitterly, longing vainly that she had stayed at home in her dark cellar, that she had never gone with Dick to Regent Street, had never seen those fine dresses and feathers, those grand ladies and gentlemen, above all, that in her supposing she had not soared so high, that she had been content to be a humble hearl's wife, and had not wished to be the queen; for when Flo had seen the great queen of England going by, then must have been the moment when Dick first learned to be a thief.

Chapter Four.

A Dog and his Story.

If ever a creature possessed the knowledge which is designated "knowing," the dog Scamp was that creature. It shone out of his eyes, it shaped the expression of his countenance, it lurked in every corner and crevice of his brain. His career previous to this night was influenced by it, his career subsequent to this night was actuated by it.

Only once in all his existence did it desert him, and on that occasion his life was the forfeit. But as then it was a pure and simple case of heart preponderating over head, we can scarcely blame the dog, or deny him his full share of the great intellect which belongs to the knowing ones.

On this evening he was reaping the fruits of his cleverness. He had just partaken of a most refreshing meal, he had wormed himself into what to him were very fair quarters, and warmed, fed, and comforted, was sleeping sweetly. By birth he was a mongrel, if not a pure untainted street cur; he was shabby, vulgar, utterly ugly and common-place looking.

He had however good eyes and teeth, and both these advantages of nature he was not slow in availing himself of.

By the pathos of his eyes, and a certain knack he had of balancing himself on the hinder part of his body, he had won Flo's pity, and secured a shelter and a home. He guessed very accurately the feelings of his hosts and hostess towards him.

Dick's hospitality was niggardly and forced, Jenks made him welcome to his supper, for he regarded him with an eye to business, but Flo gave him of her best, from pure kindness of heart. The wise dog therefore resolved to take no notice of Dick, to avoid Jenks, and as much as possible to devote himself to Flo.

He had passed through a terrible day, had Scamp.

In the morning he had been led out to execution. To avoid the dog-tax, his master, who truth to tell had never regarded him with much affection, had decreed that Scamp should be drowned. In vain had the poor faithful creature, who loved his brutal master, notwithstanding the cruel treatment to which he so often subjected him, looked in his face with all the pathetic appeal of his soft brown eyes, in vain he licked his hand as he fastened the rope with a stone attached to it round his neck. Drowned he was to be, and drowned he would have been, but for his own unequalled knowingness. Scamp guessed what was coming, hence that appeal in his eyes; but Scamp was prepared for his fate, rather he was prepared to resist his fate.

As his master was about to raise him in his arms and fling him far into the stream, he anticipated him, and leaped gently in himself, when, the stone being round his neck, he sank at once to the bottom.

His master, well pleased, and thinking how nicely he had "done" Scamp, laughed aloud, and walked away. The dog, not wasting his breath in any useless struggles, heard the laugh as he lay quietly in the bottom of the stream, he heard also the retreating footsteps.

Now was *his* time.

He had managed to sink so near the edge of the stream as to be barely out of his depth, he dragged himself upright, pulled and lurched the heavy stone until his head was above water, and then biting through the rope with those wonderful teeth, was a free dog once more.

Quite useless for him to go home; he must turn his back on that shelter, and come what may, face the great world of London.

So all day long he had wandered, foot-sore, exhausted, and hungry, over many a mile of street, until at last the smell of hot roast goose had so overcome him, that he had in his desperation fastened his teeth into Dick's trousers, thereby ultimately securing for himself a supper, and another home.

Now after all his troubles, hardships, and alarms, he was sleeping sweetly, enjoying the repose of the weary. It was unpleasant to be disturbed, it was truly annoying to have to open those heavy brown eyes, but Scamp had a heart, and sobs of distress had roused him from his pleasant dreams. He cocked his ears, stretched himself, rose, and

pushing his big awkward head against Flo's, bent low in her hands, began licking her face with his small, rough tongue.

Finding she took no notice of this, he forced her to look up and attend to him, by jumping wholesale into her lap.

"Oh! Scamp," said the child, putting her arms round him, "does *you* know as Dick isn't an honest boy no more."

Had Scamp comprehended the words addressed to him, he would not have considered them a subject for sorrow, as any means by which such a supper as they had just eaten was attained would have been thought by him quite justifiable.

It was however his wisest course at present to sympathise with Flo, and this he did by means of his tail, tongue, and eyes.

"Oh! you *be* a nice dawg," said the little girl, comforted by his caressing.

She laid her head on his shaggy coat, and in a few moments both were asleep.

Two hours later Jenks and Dick returned. Dick's cheeks were now flushed, and his eyes bright. Jenks, on the contrary, was as cool as usual.

"Shall we take orf the dawg now, or in the mornin'?" asked the little boy of his companion.

"No, no, in the mornin', or maybe to-morrow night; old Maxey's sure ter be shut up afore now."

"How much 'ull he give us, Jenks?"

"Well, Scamp's a likely lookin' tyke, and good size. I 'spect he'll about suit fur 'is young 'un. Maybe, ef we're lucky, we may get a matter o' a bob, or a bob and a tanner, but wot I'll count on more, and bargain fur, is a sight o' the fight."

"Oh, Jenks! is it werry jolly?"

"Awful—real pretty sport," said Jenks, "partic'lar ef yer cur 'ave a bit of blood in 'im, as I 'spects this 'un 'ave."

"Will you bring me to see it, Jenks?"

"I can't rightly say yet, but don't tell nothink to the little 'un," jerking his thumb over his shoulders at Flo. "Now come to bed, and don't let us talk no more."

They lay down, and soon Jenks was asleep.

Yes, Jenks was asleep—his hardened heart knew no fears, his conscience did not trouble him. Flo, wearied with her sorrow, was also slumbering, and gentle breathings of sweet content and rest came from Scamp, who knew nothing of his impending fate, and felt that he had done his duty.

But Dick could not sleep; he lay in the dark tired enough, but wide awake and trembling.

On that very bed in this cellar had lain not quite a year ago the still, stiff, and cold form of his mother; of the mother who, with her thin arms round his neck, and her beseeching eyes looking into his, had begged of him to keep from bad ways, and to be honest.

He had promised that never, happen what might, would he touch what was not his own, he had promised her solemnly, as even such ignorant little children will promise their dying mothers, that he would ever and always be an honest boy; and until to-day he had kept his word bravely, kept it too in the midst of very great temptations, for he was only a Street Arab, a gutter child, living on his wits, and for such children to live on their wits without priggings off stalls and snatching off counters, is very hard work indeed. He was such a clever little fellow too, and had such a taking innocent face, that he could have made quite a nice living, and have had, as he expressed it, quite a jolly time, if only he had consented to yield to his many temptations, and do as his companions did. But he never had yielded. One by one, as the temptations arose, as the opportunities for thieving came, he had turned from them and overcome them. Not that he thought thieving wrong—by no means. Whatever he might say to Flo, he had in his heart of hearts a strong admiration for those plucky young thieves, his companions, and though they *were* afraid of the "p'leece," and often did disappear for longer or shorter periods altogether from their gay life, yet still they had a jolly time of it on the whole. Then, how splendidly the robbers acted at those delightful 'penny gaffs!—oh, yes! it was nonsense to starve rather than take from those who had more than they could use themselves. Nevertheless Dick had often passed a day from morning to night without food rather than steal—why was that?

Ah! how strongly we cling to our first and tenderest memories! Dick could never forget the time when poor as they were, when, struggling as they were, he and Flo were rich, as the richest of all children, in love.

He could never forget the pressure of his mother's arms, he could never forget the sweetness of the dry crust eaten on his mother's knee. Had he an ache or a trouble, his mother was sorry for him. Even when he was bad and vexed her, his mother forgave him. She was always working for her children; never resting on account of her children. She stood between them and the cold world, a great shelter, a sure refuge.

They thought it mighty and everlasting, they did not know that it was mortal, and passing away.

She grew tired—awful tired, as she herself expressed it, so weary that not even her love for Dick and Flo could keep her with them, so exhausted that no rest but the rest of the grave could do her any good. So she went to her grave,

but before she went her children had promised her to keep honest boy and girl, to grow up honest man and woman, and this promise was to them both more precious than their lives.

They kept it faithfully,—it was a great principle for light in the minds of these little children.

Yes, they had both kept their promise carefully and faithfully until to-day; but to-day, in a moment of great and sudden temptation, goaded and led on by Jenks, Dick had slipped his clever little hand into a lady's pocket, and drawn out a purse with six bright new shillings in it.

The theft had been most cleverly done, and triumphant with his success, and elated by the praise Jenks had lavished on him, he had felt little compunction until now.

But remorse was visiting him sternly now. He was frightened, he was miserable; he had let go the rudder that kept him fast to anything good,—he was drifting away. But the act of thieving gave him no pain, he was not at all sorry for that smiling, good-natured looking woman whose purse he had taken; he was quite sure *she* never knew what hunger was; he quite agreed with Jenks in his remark, that "'Ee and Dick and Flo wanted 'ot roast goose more'n 'er."

No; the agony was the memory of his mother's face.

He was afraid even to open his eyes, afraid, sore afraid, that if he did he should see her standing before him, asking him to answer to her for this day's deed.

He was afraid that tired, awful tired as she was, she would get up out of her grave to reproach him with his broken promise, to tell him that on account of him there now could be no more rest for her. And he loved his mother,—oh, how he loved his mother!

A second time that night was Scamp disturbed by sobs, but the sobs did not proceed from Flo this time. The tired little girl was sleeping heavily, her head on the dog's neck. Scamp could only open his eyes, which he did very wide; if he moved the least bit in the world he would wake Flo. The sounds of distress grew louder, he gave a low growl, then a bark, then with a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, he was off Flo's lap and on the bed with Dick,—he was cuddling down by Dick, fawning on him, and licking the tears off his face.

The boy repulsed him rudely. It was quite beyond the capacity of Scamp, great as his powers were, to comfort him. Nevertheless, Scamp had again done his duty. In his rude exit from Flo's lap he had effectually awakened her. She, too, heard the low smothered sobs of distress, and rising from her cobbler's stool, she lay down on the straw beside her little brother.

"I'm real glad as you is cryin', Dick," said Flo.

This speech of Flo's was an immense relief to Dick. Of all things he had dreaded telling his sister of his theft.

He dreaded telling her, and yet he longed for her to know. Now by her words he felt sure that in some way she did know. He nestled close to her, and put his arms round her neck.

"Is mother in the room, Flo?"

"No, no, Dick; wot makes you say that? Mother's in her grave, 'avin' a good tidy bit o' a sleep."

"You ain't sure," said Dick, half-defiantly, "you ain't sure but ef you opened yer heyes werry wide you mightn't see mother—just there, acrost our bed and Jenks'—standin' and a shakin' her 'ead."

"Why, ef she were I couldn't see," said Flo. "It be as dark as dark,—I couldn't see nothink ef I was to look ever so."

"Oh yes, you could," said Dick, "you could see ghosts, and mother's a ghost. I seed ghosts at the gaff, and them is hall in wite, with blue lights about 'em. Ef you opened yer heyes werry wide you could see, Flo."

"Well, I 'as 'em open," said Flo, "and I tell you there ain't no ghosts, nor nothink."

"Are you sure?" asked Dick.

"No doubt on it," responded Flo encouragingly. "Mother ain't yere, mother's in 'er grave, 'avin' a good time, and restin' fine."

"Are you quite sure?" persisted Dick. "Are you quite sartin as she ain't turnin' round in 'er corfin, and cryin'?"

"Oh no; she's restin' straight and easy," said Flo in an encouraging tone, though, truth to tell, she had very grave misgivings in her own mind as to whether this was the case.

"Then she don't know, Flo?"

"It ain't reached 'er yet, I 'spect," said Flo. Then hastening to turn the conversation—

"Wot was it as you took, Dick?"

"A purse," said Dick.

"A purse full o' money?" questioned Flo.

"There was six bobs and a tanner," said Dick, "and Jenks said as I did it real clever."

"That was wot bought us the 'ot roasted goose," continued Flo.

"Yes. Jenks said, as it wor the first time, we should 'ave a rare treat. They cost three bobs, that 'ere goose and taters. I say, worn't they jist prime?"

"'Ave you any more o' that money?" asked Flo, taking no notice of this last query.

"Yes, I 'ave a bob and I 'ave the purse. Jenks said as I was to have the purse, and I means the purse for you, Flo."

"You needn't mean it for me, then," said Flo, raising her gentle little voice, "fur I'd rayther be cut up in bits than touch it, or look at it, and you 'as got to give back that 'ere bob to Jenks, Dick, fur ef we was to starve hout and hout we won't neither of us touch bite nor sup as it buys. I thought as you was sorry, Dick, when I heard you cryin', but no, you ain't, and you 'ave furgot mother, that you 'ave."

At these words Dick burst out crying afresh. Flo had reserved her indignation for so long, that when it came it took him utterly by surprise.

"No, I 'aven't forgot, Flo—I be real orfle sorry."

"You won't never do it again?"

"No."

"And you'll give back the purse and bob to Jenks, and tell 'im yer'll 'ave no more to do wid 'is way?"

"Oh! I doesn't know," said Dick, "'ee would be real hangry."

"Very well," replied Flo; "good-night to you, Dick. I ain't goin' to sleep 'long of a thief," and she prepared to retire with dignity to her cobbler's stool.

But this proposal filled Dick with fresh alarm, he began to sob louder than ever, and promised vigorously that if she stayed with him he would do whatever she told him.

"'Zactly wot I ses?" asked Flo.

"Yes, Flo, I'll stick fast to you and never funk."

"You'll translate the old boots and shoes wid me fur the next week?"

"Yes."

"And you'll break orf wid Jenks, and be his pardener no more?"

"Yes," with a sinking heart.

"Werry well—good-night."

"But, Flo," after a long pause, "is you *sure* as mother isn't ris from her grave?"

"No, I'm not sure," answered Flo slowly, "but I thinks at the most, she 'ave on'y got a sort o' a wake, and I thinks, Dick, ef you never, never is a thief no more, as mother'll 'ave a good longish rest yet."

Chapter Five.

Jenks Passes his Word.

But Flo knew even better than her little brother that it would be easier for Dick to steal the second time than the first.

Very few boys and girls she had ever heard of, none indeed, had left off priggig from stalls, and snatching from bakers' shops, and thrusting their hands into old gentlemen's pockets, when once they had begun to do so.

Not punishment, not even prison, could break them. They had their time of confinement, and then out they came, with more thieving propensities than ever.

Her mother had told her stories upon stories of what these children, who looked some of them so innocent, and began in this small way, had ended with—penal servitude for life—sometimes even the gallows.

She had made her hair stand on end with frightful accounts of their last days in the murderers' cells—how day and night the warder watched them, and how when being led out to execution they passed in some cases over their own graves.

And children once as innocent as Flo and Dick had come to this.

Now Flo knew that as mother had not appeared the first time Dick stole, she might not the second, and then he would gradually cease to be afraid, and learn to be a regular thief.

The only chance was to save him from temptation, to part him from Jenks.

Flo liked Jenks very much—he had a bright way about him, he was never rough with her, but, on the contrary, had not only helped to keep the pot boiling, but had cobbled vigorously over her old boots and shoes, when he happened to come home in time in the evenings.

Still, nice as he was, if he was a thief, and they meant never to be thieves, the sooner they parted company the better.

She knew well that Dick would never have courage to say to Jenks what he ought to say, she knew that this task must be hers.

Accordingly, in the first light of the summer morning, though all they saw of it in the cellar was a slanting ray which came down through the hole in the pavement, when in that early light Jenks stumbled to his feet, and running his fingers through his shaggy hair by way of toilet, ran up the ladder, Flo, rising softly, for fear of waking Dick, followed him.

“Jenks,” she said, laying her hand timidly on his coat-sleeve, “I wants fur to speak to you.”

Jenks turned round with merry eyes.

“I’m yer ‘umble servant, my Lady, the Hearl’s wife,” he said, with a mock bow to Flo; but then noticing her white little anxious face, he changed his tone to one of compassion. “Why, wot hever ails you, young ‘un? You is all of a tremble. Come along and ‘ave a drop of ‘ot coffee at the stalls.”

“No, Jenks, I doesn’t want to. Jenks, I come fur to say as you, and me, and Dick mustn’t be pardeners no more. You mustn’t come no more to this yere cellar, Jenks.”

Jenks was about to ask why, but he changed his mind and resumed his mocking tone.

“My Lady, you is alwis werry perlite—you is not one of them fine dames as welwet, and silk, and feathers maks too ‘igh and mighty to speak to a chap. Might a poor and ‘umble feller ax you then to be so werry obligin’ as to tell ‘im the reason of this ‘eart-breakin’ horder.”

Here Jenks pretended to whimper.

“Yes, Jenks, I’ll tell you,” said Flo; “‘tis because Dick and me isn’t never goin’ to be *thiefs*, Jenks. Dick did prig the purse yesterday, but ‘ees never, never goin’ to do so no more.”

Jenks was silent, and Flo after a pause continued—“I wants fur to be perlite to you, Jenks. I likes you, Jenks, and now I’m goin’ to tell you why.”

“Oh! my heyes,” said Jenks, “that’s an honour. Oh! my stars! can I abear so big an honour? ‘Old me, Flo, I feels kind of top ‘eavy. Now then, break it heasy, Flo.”

“I never know’d as yer trade was that of a thief, Jenks,” quietly continued the little girl. “I thought as it wor a real nice trade as me and Dick might larn, and we mustn’t larn that, not ef we was to starve. Dick and me must never be thieves. But, Jenks, I’m not a blamin’ you—it ain’t wrong fur you, Jenks—you ‘adn’t never a mother, as telled you to keep an honest boy.”

At these words Jenks started violently, the fun died out of his face, and he looked quite white and shaky.

“Why does you say that?” he asked rather savagely. “How does yer dare say as I ‘av’n’t a mother? as honest a woman as hever walked.”

“I doesn’t say it, Jenks. I on’y ses that *if* you ‘ad a mother as was alwis honest, and, no, not ef we was starvin’ would prig anythink, and that mother lay a dyin’, and she axed yer werry soft and lovin’ to keep honest, and never, no never to steal nothink, and you promised yer mother ‘cause you loved ‘er; would you be a thief then, Jenks?”

“Moonshine!” growled Jenks.

“No, but *would* you, Jenks?”

“How can I tell?” replied Jenks. “Look yere, Flo, leave *off* about mothers, do. Wot does I know of such? Say wot yer ‘as to say, as I must be gone.”

“I wants you not to come back no more, dear Jenks, and never, never to speak to Dick no more.”

“*Dear* Jenks, come back no more,” mimicked the boy. “And why not, little sweetheart?”

“‘Cause you is a thief, and you is larnin’ thiefin’ to Dick.”

“Oh my! the precious young cove, I didn’t know as ‘ee was to be reared hup so tender. But why does you say as I am a thief, Flo—it wor Dick tuk the purse yesterday.”

“But you larned ‘im ‘ow to take it, Jenks.”

“No, I didn’t, ‘ee larned ‘imself, ‘ee wanted none of my coddlin’ and dressin’. Tell yer ‘ee’d make a real stunnin’ thief arter a bit. But I’ll not teach ‘im nothink, not I. No, Flo,” (this gravely), “I’ll promise yer this, and yere’s my ‘and on it, ef I sees ‘im touch so much as a brass farthing, I’ll give ‘im a whackin’ as ‘ull soon teach ‘im to be an honest boy.”

"And you won't come back no more?"

"I won't say that—the cellar's convenient, and I pays fur 'arf. Yes, I'll turn in to-night, and as long as I 'ave a mind to. Now I'm orf to my work—wot *ain't* that of a thief," and snapping his fingers disdainfully, Jenks disappeared.

Flo stood for a moment, her hand over her eyes, looking up the hot street. Her mission she felt was only half accomplished, but it was some consolation to know, that the next time Dick acted the part of a thief, his companion, instead of loading him with praise, would bestow on him instead a far-sounding whacking.

Flo did not mind how hard it was, if only it saved her brother from following in the steps of those boys of whom her mother had so often told her.

Chapter Six.

Give the Poor Dog a Bone.

That knowing dog Scamp was rather puzzled on the evening after his arrival, at the marked change in the manners of Dick and Jenks towards him. Clever as he was, their total change of manner threw him off his guard, and he began to accuse himself of ingratitude in supposing that at any time they had not wished for his company, that at any time they had treated him as an intruder. Not a bit of it. Here were they patting and making much of him; here was that good-natured fellow Jenks allowing him to repose his big, awkward body across his knees, while Flo and Dick, who had been indoors all day very grave and silent, were now in fits of laughter over his rough attempts at play.

"Flo," said Jenks, pulling some loose coppers out of his ragged vest pocket, "ef you'll buy wittles fur the dawg fur a week, I'll pay 'em."

And then he further produced from some mysterious store a good-sized, juicy bone, cut from a shank of mutton, which bone he rubbed gently against the dog's nose, finally allowing him to place it between his teeth and take possession of it. As Scamp on the floor munched, and worried, and gnawed that bone, so strong were his feelings of gratitude to Jenks, that he would have found it easy, quite easy, to follow him to the world's end.



Dick walked a little in advance of his companion, and kept his eyes well open.

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And so Jenks seemed to think, for when supper was over he arose, and giving Dick an almost imperceptible nod, he called Scamp, and the boys and the dog went out.

They walked nearly to the end of the street, and then Jenks caught up Scamp, and endeavoured to hide him with his ragged jacket. This was no easy matter, for in every particular the dog was ungainly—too large in one part, too small

in another. Impossible for a tattered coat-sleeve to hide that great rough head, which in sheer affection, caused by the memory of that bone, would push itself up and lick his face. Jenks bestowed upon him in return for this regard several severe cuffs, and was altogether rough and unpleasant in his treatment; and had Scamp not been accustomed to, and, so to speak, hardened to such things, his feelings might and probably would have been considerably hurt. As it was, he took it philosophically, and perceiving that he was not at present to show affection, ceased to do so.

The boys walked down several by-streets, and took some villainous-looking short cuts in absolute silence. Dick went a little in advance of his companion, and kept his eyes well open, and at sight of any policeman exchanged, though without looking round, some signal with Jenks; on which Jenks and Scamp would immediately, in some mysterious way, disappear from view, and Dick would toss a marble or two out of his pocket and pretend to be aiming them one at the other, until, the danger gone by, Jenks and Scamp would once more make their appearance. At last they came to streets of so low a character, where the "nippers," as they called them, so seldom walked, that they could keep together, and even venture on a little conversation.

Dick, who had been sadly depressed all day, began to feel his spirits rising again. He had quite resolved never, never to be a thief no more, but this expedition would bring them in money in a way that even Flo could hardly disapprove of; at least, even if Flo did disapprove, she could hardly call it dishonest. The dog was theirs, had come to them. If they could get money for the dog would they not be right to take it? *They* were too poor to keep Scamp.

Just then Dick turned round and encountered a loving, trusting glance from the dumb creature's affectionate eyes, a sudden fit of compunction came over him, for *he* knew to *what* they were selling Scamp.

"S'pose as Scamp beats Maxey's young 'un?" he questioned to his companion.

"Not 'ee," said Jenks contemptuously, "'ee's nothink but a street cur, and that young 'un is a reg'lar tip-topper, / can tell yer."

"Well, Scamp 'ave sperrit too," said Dick.

"And ef 'ee 'adn't, would I bring 'im to Maxey? Would I insult Maxey's young dawg wid an hout and hout street cur wid no good points? Why, Maxey wouldn't give a tanner fur a cur *widout* sperrit, you little greenhorn."

Here they stopped at the door of a low ale-house, where the company were undoubtedly "doggy."

Jenks transferred Scamp to Dick's care, and disappeared into the public, from whence in a few moments he issued with a small stoutly-built man, of ill-looking and most repulsive aspect.

"I 'ave named my price," said Jenks, putting Scamp down on the ground and beginning to exhibit his different points. "Two bobs and a tanner, and a sight o' the fight fur me and this 'ere chap."

"Come, that's werry fine," said the man addressed as Maxey; "but 'ow is it, you young willan, you dares to insinniwate as / 'ave dog-fights? Doesn't you know as dog-fight's 'gainst the law of the land? You wouldn't like to see the hinside of Newgate fur bringin' this 'ere dog to me fur the purpose o' fightin' another dog? You didn't reckon *that* in the price of the dog. Come now, ef I doesn't give you into the hands of the perleece, and ef I takes the dog, and puts 'im away tidy, and gives you and yer pardener a tanner between yer? Come, that's lettin yer off cheap, ain't it?"

Dick was considerably frightened, but Jenks, taking these threats for what they were worth, held out firmly for two bobs and a tanner, which in the end he obtained a promise of, on condition that for one week he should tie up Scamp at home and feed him well. At the end of that time Maxey was to have him back, who further promised that Jenks and Dick should see the fight.

"And that 'ere's pretty sport," said Jenks, as well satisfied he turned away. "Maxey's young 'uns are alwis tip-toppers. Won't 'ee just give it to this willan! I guess there'll be an hawful row, and not much o' Scamp left, by the time 'tis hover." But the further details with which Jenks favoured his young companion are too horrible to relate here. In our Christian England these things are done—done in the dark it is true, but still done.

Dog-fights, though punishable by law, are still held, and young boys and old men flock to them, and learn to be lower than the brutes in diabolical cruelty because of them.

It may still however puzzle those who read Scamp's history to know of what use he could be in a dog-fight, as only thorough-bred dogs can fight well.

Alas! Scamp could be made use of; such dogs as Scamp can further this wicked sport.

Such dogs are necessary in the training of the fighting-dogs. Jenks knew this well, hence his desire to obtain the poor animal.

His use was this—I here quote from Mr Greenwood's well-known "Low Life Deeps."

"He at once good-naturedly explained to me the way in which a young (fighting) dog is trained.

"I was given to understand that the first practice a fighting pup had was with a 'good old gummer,' that is to say, with a dog which had been a good one in his day, but was now old, and toothless, and incapable of doing more than 'mumble' the juvenile antagonist that was set against him, the one great advantage being that the young dog gained practical experience in the making of 'points.'

"The next stage, as I was informed, in training the young aspirant for pit-honours was to treat him to a 'real

mouthful,' or, in other words, 'to let him taste dog'..." What this means, Mr Greenwood goes on partially to explain, but the explanation is too fearful to be repeated here; suffice it to say that Scamp was the dog that Maxey's young 'un was to taste.

Considerably elated, the boys started off on their way home. The thought of two-and-sixpence, and a sight of a real dog-fight, was quite enough to silence all Dick's scruples, and Jenks never had any.

Yet once, long ago now, Jenks had cried when the cat pounced on his canary, once Jenks had a kind heart. It was not all hard yet, though very nearly so. Still some things could touch him, some faces, some words, some tones, could reach a vulnerable part within him. He hardly knew himself that the better part of him, not yet quite dead, was touched, he only called it being in a fix. He was in a fix about Dick. It had been his intention, it had been his motive, in coming to live in the Saint Giles's cellar, to train Dick as a thief, and if possible Flo also.

He was a very expert young hand himself,—no boy in London with lighter fingers, or more clever in dodging the police, than he. He knew that the first requisite for any successful thief was to possess an innocent appearance, and the moment he saw Dick and Flo he knew that their faces would make their own, and probably his fortune, in this criminal trade. He had gone cautiously about his work, for eyes much less sharp than his must have perceived that the children were strictly honest. Their honesty, their horror of theft, had filled him with surprise, and added greatly to his difficulties. He saw, however, that Dick was the weaker of the two, and his scruples he determined first to overcome. It took him some time, a whole month, but at last Dick fell, and Jenks was triumphant. All now was smooth sailing with him, he was in high, the highest spirits. Dick should be taken down skilfully step by step the broad descent, and presently Flo would follow.

The bad boy's plans were all laid, when suddenly there came an obstacle—such an obstacle too—such a feather of a thing,—only a child's pleading voice and tearful eyes. What a fool Jenks was to mind so slight a thing!

He *was* a fool then, for mind it he did. He liked Flo, in his way he was fond of Flo, but she herself might go to ruin sooner than have any of his plans injured. It was not for her sake he hesitated. No. But she had told him *why* they were honest, why hard crusts and lives full of hunger and want were sweeter to them than luxuries unfairly come by; and strange to say, for some inexplicable reason, this motive for honesty approved itself to the boy, for some reason known only to himself it raised a pain in his hardened heart, it roused the nearly dead conscience within him. He said to himself that the children's conduct was plucky—real, awful plucky; that it would be a mean act of him to make thieves of them.

For ten minutes after his interview with Flo he resolved that nothing in the world should induce him to do so; he resolved to go away as she had asked him to go away, and leave them to pursue their honest career unmolested, untempted by such as he. But in half-an-hour he had wavered, had partly laughed off Flo's words, and had called all that stuff about mothers—dead mothers—nonsense.

All day long he was undecided—he came back to the cellar at night undecided; he had gone out with Dick and Scamp still not sure whether to keep his promise to Flo or to break it. How was it that in returning from his interview with Maxey his resolutions to do right wavered more and more?

Perhaps it was because he had committed another cruel and evil deed, and so the little good in him died quickly out; perhaps, as certainly was the case, Satan was tempting him more than ever. Be this as it may, before Jenks fell asleep that night his mind was made up. Flo's scruples were all folly, Dick had yielded once, he could, would, and should yield again. If he proved obstinate Jenks had means in his possession which would compel him to lead the life he wished. Yes, Jenks resolved that before many months were over their heads, not only Dick, but Flo herself should be a thief. It should not be his fault if Dick and Flo were not two of the cleverest little thieves in London.

Chapter Seven.

At the Derby.

Scamp had spent a very patient but not unhappy week in the cellar. He knew nothing of his impending fate, consequently, as he had his meals regularly, he felt himself troubled by no present cares.

Had he known of his fate it is doubtful whether it would have caused him uneasiness.

"Fight with another dog! with pleasure; with all the good will in the world, and never show signs of flight, or turn felon."

So would have thought the dog whose father and mother were curs, but in whose breast reigned as brave a spirit as ever one of the canine species possessed.

But Scamp, alas for you, poor fellow! you are inexperienced, and you do not know how the trained bull-dog can fight.

Jenks had secured him with a piece of rope to the broken table, but when Jenks and Dick were out Flo would unfasten him, and he would lie at her feet and never attempt to run away.

Flo felt happy too at her hard work, for Scamp was such good company, and since his arrival none of the wicked boys and girls dared to throw down broken bits of crockery, or sticks, or other rubbish at her.

Knowing she was timid they had often led her a sorry life, but now one note of Scamp's fine deep bay (a gift from an old ancestor) would send them flying, and Flo could pursue her work in peace.

For the present, too, her mind was at rest about Dick—he was not only not thieving, but he was doing quite a profitable business in another way. Every morning he carried away his broom, and every evening, the weather being rather wet, he brought her in a nice little handful of coppers, as the result of his day's brooming; quite enough money to buy honest red herrings and other dainties for supper and even breakfast.

Flo began to consider a broom and crossing quite a good trade, and rather contemplated taking it up herself. But in this desire both Jenks and Dick quite vehemently opposed her, and for the present she was happy over her never-ending cobbling.

Scamp's company was so pleasant, and so soothed the tedium of her life, that now and then little snatches of mother's old songs would rise to her lips.

She was walking down Duncan Street one day singing one of these in quite a sweet, clear voice, when a little pale girl on crutches, who lived in a cellar some six doors off, stopped her with the question—

"Does yer know the Glory Song?"

"No," said Flo; "wot is it?"

"I doesn't know it hall," said the little pale girl, "on'y a bit. Yere it is:

"I'm glad I hever saw the Day,
Sing glory, glory, glory,
When first I larned to read and pray,
Sing glory, glory, glory."

"Go on," said Flo, "that's pretty—that is."

"Oh! I doesn't know any more," said the little girl. "I larned that bit wen I wor in 'Orspital, time my leg was tuk orf. Sister Evelina taught it to me. There wor a lot more, and it wor werry pretty, but I on'y 'members that bit."

"Well, sing it agen," said Flo. The little girl sang.

"Wot's 'read and pray'?" asked Flo.

"Oh! doesn't you know? Read! hout o' books of course; and pray! pray to God—you knows that?"

"No, I doesn't," said Flo.

"Oh dear," said the other child rather patronisingly, "doesn't you know, 'Our—Father—chart—'eaven'? Why, yer *be* hignorant."

"Yes, I be," said Flo, no way offended. "I knows nothink 'cept being honest. Wot's 'Our Father,' Janey?"

"Oh! 'tis quite long," said Janey, "you couldn't 'member it a bit. 'Our—Father—chart 'eaven.' Our Father lives in 'eaven. There! that's hall—I'm in a 'urry."

"Then that ain't true," said Flo, "that ain't a bit o' it true. My father ain't in 'eaven, wherever that is, 'ee's dead and in 'is grave, and yer father is at the Dolphin most times I guess. I wouldn't tell lies ef I was you."

The pale girl flushed up angrily.

"There now, yer real oncivil," she said, "and I'll 'ave no more words wid yer."

And she disappeared down the ladder into her cellar. Flo went back also to hers and resumed her work. She had a great deal to do, for that evening she, and Dick, and Jenks, were to start on foot for the Derby. Jenks went every year as long as he could remember, but Dick and Flo had never been.

They had heard of it of course, as what London child has not? and were much excited at the prospect of at last joining the great and vast army of tramps who year by year find their way to Epsom Downs.

Jenks assured them, too, that money honestly come by was made wholesale at the Derby. Money come to you almost for the asking; sixpences were changed into sovereigns by some magic art at that wonderful place. The children were not going empty-handed. Flo was to be a "little-doll" girl.

Some dozens of these bought for twopence a dozen were to be sold to-morrow for a penny a-piece, or perhaps for more.

Flo counted how much she could make on her six dozen of dolls, and quite expected to realise a sum that would make things comfortable in the cellar for some weeks.

Dick was to sell fusees, and Jenks was to appear on the scenes in the character of a boot-cleaning boy, balancing a black-box and brushes on his head, and Scamp was to stay at home and keep house.

Flo had proposed his coming with them, but to this the boys objected, and she, considering she would have more than enough use for her legs, hands, voice, and eyes, and *might* find Scamp an extra care, did not grieve much over their decision.

What walking she would have, all the way from London to Epsom Downs; what use for her hands in holding her tray

of dolls for so many hours; what use for her voice in advertising her property, in properly proclaiming the value of her property, and endeavouring to attract the gents with white hats, who were fond of wearing such goods in their button-holes, or stuck in a row round their head gear; above all, and this was the pleasant part, what use for her eyes!

Right and left, before and behind, pretty things would surround her, and Flo *did* so love pretty things.

It would be a grander sight than Regent Street, or Swan and Edgar's, grander, because the fine ladies, and the smart dresses, and the lovely spirited horses would be there in such much vaster numbers!

She had her own slight but essential toilet preparations too to make. Her poor ragged cotton frock had got a rinse, and was drying by a small fire, which, hot as the day was, was lit for the purpose, and she meant to look up mother's old bonnet, and if it *could* be made presentable, wear it.

She hauled it out of a pasteboard band-box, and sat down on her cobbler's stool to contemplate it.

It was a very shaky, indeed fall-to-pieces, affair. A bonnet that had once been of a delicate white, but in its journey through life, having had to put up at several pawn-shops, had now reached a hue as far removed from that colour as possible.

Flo, however, thought it quite fit to wear. She snipped it, and dusted it, and by the aid of some pins secured the battered old crown in its place.

She unfolded carefully every leaf of the gorgeous bunch of artificial flowers with which mother had ornamented it before she died. That bunch, consisting of some full-blown roses, tulips, and poppies, which at a second-hand finery establishment had cost twopence, and to purchase which mother had once done without her dinner, that bunch was placed so as to rest on Flo's forehead, while two dirty ribbons of flaming yellow were to do duty under her chin.

But while she worked she thought of Janey's words. She was sorry Janey had turned crusty, for undoubtedly the words were pretty, prettier than any of mother's old songs. She would have liked to know more about them!

"'I'm glad I hever saw the day,'" sang Flo, catching the air with her quick ear and voice.

But then she stopped to consider.

What day was she glad to see?

Well! no day that she knew of, unless it was to-morrow, the Derby Day.

She was not glad of the day she could read and pray, for that day had never come to her.

In her Duncan Street cellar, "the Board," that object of terror, had never reached her, therefore she could not read—and pray?—she did not even know what "pray" meant.

Why did Janey go about singing such songs as nobody could understand?

Just then Jenks and Dick came rattling down the ladder crying noisily that it was full time to be off; and Flo had to bustle about, and pack her dolls, and put on her clean frock and wonderful bonnet, and finally, when she thought no one was looking, to stoop down and kiss Scamp on his forehead, in return for which he washed her face quite over again with his tongue. A basin of broken bread was set near the dog, then the children ran up the ladder, fastened down the door of the cellar, and set off.

"Will Maxey know which is *hour* cellar wid the door shut?" asked Dick.

This remark Flo could make nothing of, but she was too much excited then to ask an explanation.

It was eight o'clock when the children started, therefore the great heat was over. At first they walked alone, then two or three, going in the same direction, joined them, then half-a-dozen more, and so on, until they found themselves with quite a number of people all Epsom bound.

At first Flo did not like this, she would have much preferred to trudge along, away past hot and dismal London, with only Dick and Jenks for company, but after a time she saw the advantage of this arrangement, for she was unaccustomed to walking, and soon her little feet grew very, very weary, and then the good-natured cadgers and tramps turned out agreeable acquaintances. One woman kindly carried her tray of dolls, and some men with a large barrow of fried fish, taking pity on her weary little face, allowed her to have a seat on one corner of their great barrow, and in this way she got over many a mile. But the way was very long, and by the time the weary multitude had reached Epsom town it was nearly one in the morning.

No rest for them here, however; whether they wished it or not, whether they could pay for food and shelter or not, the vigilant police would allow no halt in the town, they must move on. So on they moved, until at last Flo and Dick and Jenks, with many other worn-out tramps, were very glad to huddle together against the walls of the Grand Stand, which, quiet enough now, would in a few hours blaze with such life and beauty.

The little girl was in a sound sleep, dreaming confused dreams, in which Janey's songs, Scamp's face, and the Epsom races were all mingled, when a hand laid on her shoulder roused her from her slumbers.

"Wot is it, Jenks? is it time fur me to begin sellin'?" she exclaimed with a confused start.

"No, no," said Jenks, "it ain't time fur hages yet. Wait till the folks begin to come. Why, there's on'y us tramps yere yet."

"Then why did you wake me, Jenks? I was so werry sound asleep."

"Well—see, Flo—I wanted fur to tell yer—you see this is a big place, and we 'as come, you and me and Dick, to do a trade yere, and wot I ses is this, as we mustn't keep together, we mustn't on no 'count keep together. You go one way wid the dolls, and a pretty penny *they'll* fetch this blessed day, I hears said; Dick 'ull start in another 'rection wid the fusees, and I must be yere, and there, and hevery wheres, to keep the gents' boots bright. So good mornin' to yer, Flo; you meet us yere in the evenin' wid a good pocket full, and yere's sixpence fur yer breakfast," and before Flo had time to open her lips from sheer astonishment, Jenks was gone.

She was alone, alone on Epsom common. With that sea of strange faces round her she was utterly alone.

Very poor children, at least those children who have to fight the battle of life, never cry much. However tender their hearts may be—and many of them have most tender and loving hearts, God bless them!—there is a certain hardening upper crust which forbids the constant flow of tears.

But something very smarting did come up now to the little girl's eyes. She sat down wearily,—so much fun had she expected roaming about with Dick and Jenks, how happy she thought she would have been with the country air blowing upon her, the country sun—he never shone like that in the town—shining on her face. And now she would be afraid—for she was a timid child—to stir.

Oh, it was wrong of Jenks, though Jenks was only her friend, but how truly *unkind* it was of Dick to leave her!

Just then another hand was laid on her shoulder, and a gentle voice said—

"Is anything the matter, little child?"

Flo raised her eyes, and a middle-aged woman, with a face as kind as her voice, and an appearance very much more respectable than the crowds about her, stood by her side.

"Are you waiting for your mother, my dear?" said the woman again, finding that Flo only gazed at her, and did not speak. "Or don't you want to come and get some breakfast?"

"Please, mum," said Flo, suddenly starting to her feet, and remembering that she was very hungry, "may I go wid you and 'ave some breakfast? I 'ave got sixpence to buy it, mum."

"Come, then," said the woman, "I will take care of you. Here, give me your dolls," and holding the dolls' tray in one hand, and the child herself by the other, she went across to where a bustling, hungry throng were surrounding the coffee-stalls.

Flo and her companion were presently served, and then they sat down on the first quiet spot they could find to enjoy their meal.

"Is you in the small-dolls, or the Aunt Sally, or the clothes' brusher's, or the shoe-blacker's line, mum?" asked Flo, who observed that her companion was not carrying any goods for sale.

"No, child, I don't do business here—I only come to look on."

"Oh, that's werry fine fur you!" said Flo; "but is it as yer don't find sellin' make? Why, I 'spects to make a penny, and maybe tuppence, on hevery one of these blessed dolls."

"Is this the first time you have been here?" asked the woman.

"Yes, mum."

"And have you come alone?"

"Oh no, mum; I come along o' my brother, a little chap, and a bigger feller."

"Then you ought to be with them. This is not a safe place for a little girl to be all alone in."

"Oh, they doesn't want me," said Flo; "the little chap's in the fusee line, and the big 'un's in the blackin' line, and they says as it 'ud spile the trade fur a small-dolls seller to be along o' them. That's 'ow I'm alone, ma'am," and here veritable tears did fill the child's eyes to overflowing.

"Well, I am alone too," said her companion in a kinder tone than ever; "so if you wish to stay with me you may; I can show you the best parts to sell your dolls in."

And this was the beginning of one of the brightest days Flo had ever yet spent. How she did enjoy the breezes on the common now that she had a companion, how she did gaze at the wonderful, ever-increasing crowd.

She had soon told her story to her new friend; all about Dick and herself, and their mother, and their promise to be honest; something too about Scamp, and also about the big feller who she was afraid was a thief, but whose name somehow she forgot to mention.

In return her companion told her something of her own story.

"I come year after year out here," she said sadly. "Not that I sells here, or knows anything of the Derby; but I come looking for one that I love—one that has gone like the prodigal astray, but like the prodigal he'll come back—he'll come back."

This speech was very strange and incomprehensible to Flo; but she liked her companion more and more, and thought she had never met so kind a woman, she looked at her once or twice nearly as nicely as mother used to look.

But now the business of the day began in earnest.

The Grand Stand was filled; the men with betting lists were rushing with heated faces here and there; the cadgers and tramps, the vendors of small dolls, of pails of water, of fried fish, of coffee and buns, of ices, of fruit and sweeties, the vendors of every conceivable article under the sun were doing a roaring trade; and even Flo, aided by her kind companion, made several shillings by her dolls.

The races went on, and at last the great event of the day, the Derby Race, was to be run.

By this time Flo had sold all her dolls, and stood in the midst of the heaving, swaying mass of people, as eager as anybody else.

An unwonted excitement had taken possession of the little girl, the joy of a fresher, brighter life than she had hitherto ever felt, drove the blood quickly through her languid veins, she stood by her companion's side, her large bonnet thrown back from her forehead, her cheeks flushed, her eyes quite bright with interest and pleasure.

Perhaps to her alone the beautiful, wonderful sight came without alloy—she had no high stakes at issue, nothing either to gain or to lose.

But when the race was over, and the name of *Galopin*, the winning horse, was in everybody's mouth, and men, some pale and some flushed with their losses, turned broken-hearted away; and men, some pale and some ruddy with their gains, joined in the general cheer; then Flo began again to think of and miss her absent companions. Already vast numbers of tramps were returning to London—the kind little woman by her side had also expressed a wish to go, but nowhere were Jenks and Dick in sight.

They had promised to meet her in the evening, but she could neither ask her companion to wait until then, nor wait herself alone in the midst of the vast, unruly multitude.

"I will see you safe as far as our roads lie together," said the little woman, and Flo, without a word, but no longer with an exultant, joyful heart, accompanied her.

They walked slowly, keeping close to the other walkers, but still a little apart, and by themselves. Now and then a good-natured neighbour gave them a lift, but they walked most of the way.

"'As you found 'im whom you loves, mum?" questioned Flo once; but the little woman shook her head, and shook it so sorrowfully that Flo ventured to say no more.

It was quite dusk when they got to London, or rather to the outskirts of London, for they went very slowly, and often paused on the road.

By this time they were quite a vast army, fresh tramps arriving to swell their ranks each moment.

Here too they were met by numbers of Londoners who had not gone to the races, but who now thronged the footways to see them return.

At one particular angle of the road these crowds congregated so thickly that for a few moments there was quite a block, and neither multitude could proceed.

As Flo stood by her companion's side, two boys pushed quickly and roughly against her.

They did not recognise or look at her, but she did them—they were Jenks and Dick. She was quite overjoyed at seeing them so near her, but how funny they looked! or rather, how funny Dick looked! His face was blackened, and he had on a false nose; he carried a little fiddle which he capered about with, and pushing his way fearlessly into the very heart of the throng, made altogether such a droll appearance that many people looked at him, and laughed very heartily, and shied him halfpence Jenks, on the contrary, was grave and sober, no one minding him.

But suddenly, while all eyes and tongues were eagerly greeting some fresh arrivals, Flo observed Dick give a red-faced, stout old gentleman a tremendous push, and quick as lightning Jenks had his hand in the old man's pocket, and out had come his purse and gold watch.

And before the terrified and astonished child had time to utter an exclamation, or to draw a breath, Police Constable 21 B. laid his hand heavily on Jenks' shoulders, and with the other drawing Dick towards him, informed them both that they were his prisoners.

Chapter Eight.

A Ghost in the Cellar.

In the confusion that immediately ensued, Flo found herself torn away from her kind companion, and brought very

near to Police Constable 21 B. and his charge. Like most children of her class she had been taught to consider policemen very dreadful people, but she had no fear of this one now: her whole desire was to save Dick. She went boldly up and laid her little dirty hand on the great tall man's arm.

"Please—please," said Flo, "it ain't Dick as tuk them things. Indeed I thinks as Dick *is* an honest boy."

"Oh! yes, and I suppose you are an honest girl," said the policeman, looking down with some contempt at the queer disreputable-looking little figure. "Tell me now, what do you know about Dick? and which of the two is Dick to begin with?"

"That 'ere little chap wot yer 'ave such a grip of," said Flo, "that's Dick, and I be 'is sister, I be."

"Oh! so you are his sister. And what's the name of the big fellow? you are his sister too?"

"No, I ain't," said Flo, "I ain't that, but 'ee lives wid Dick and me."

"He does—does he? Perhaps you saw what he did just now?"

Flo had seen—she coloured and hesitated.

"You need not speak unless you wish to," said the policeman more kindly, "but I perceive you know all about these boys, so you must appear as witness. See! where do you live?"

"Cellar number 7, Duncan Street, Saint Giles," said Flo promptly.

"Ah!" said the policeman, "I thought those cellars was shut up. They ain't fit for pigs. Well, my dear, 'tis a nice-sounding, respectable address, and I'll serve you a notice to-morrow to appear as witness. Don't you go hiding, for wherever you are I'll find you. On Thursday morning at 10 o'clock at Q— Police-Station." And nodding to Flo, he walked off, bearing his sullen, ashamed, crest-fallen prisoners with him.

"Come 'ome wid me, dear," said a poor miserable-looking neighbour, an occupant of another Duncan Street cellar. "Come 'ome wid me," she said, touching the dazed, stunned-looking child; "I'll take care of yer the rest of the way," and she took her hand and led her out of the crowd.

"There now," said the woman kindly, "don't yer fret, dearie—it ain't so bad, and it won't be so bad. Dick, 'ee'll on'y get a month or two at the 'formatary, and t'other chap a bit longer, and hout they'll come none the worse. Don't yer fret, dearie."

"No, ma'am," answered Flo with a little smile, "I ain't frettin'." Nor was she exactly. She had an awful vision before her of mother's dead face, that was all. During the rest of the long walk home that patient, tired face was before her. She was not fretting, she was too stunned as yet—that would come by and by.

Her neighbour tried to make her talk, tried to smooth matters for her, but they could not be smoothed, nothing could soften the awful fact that Dick was going to prison, that he had broken his word to his dying mother. It was quite dusk, past 9 o'clock, when they reached Duncan Street, and the cellar door of number 7, which the children had fastened when they had started so light-hearted and happy for the Derby the day before, was now open. Flo hardly noticed this. She ran down, eager to throw her arms round Scamp's neck, and weep out her heart with his faithful head on her bosom.

"But—what had happened?"

Flo expected to hear his eager bark of welcome the moment she entered the cellar, but there was no sound. She called to him, no answer. She struck a match and lit the tallow candle,—Scamp's place was empty, Scamp was gone. She stooped down and examined the spot carefully. If he had freed himself there would have been some pieces of the rope hanging to the table, but no, all trace of it was gone.

It was quite plain, then, some one had come and stolen Scamp, some one had come meanly while they were away and carried him off—he was gone. One extra drop will overflow a full cup, and this extra trial completely upset the little tired, sad child. She sat down on the floor, that damp wretched floor, surely an unfit resting-place for any of God's creatures, and gave way to all the agony of intense desolation.

Had the dog been there he would have soothed her: the look in his eyes, the solemn slow wag of his unwieldy tail, would have comforted her, would have spoken to her of affection, would have prevented her feeling utterly alone in the world.

And this now was Flo's sensation.

When this awful storm of loneliness comes to the rich, and things look truly hard for them, they still have their carpeted floors, and easy-chairs, and soft beds, and though at such times they profess not to value these things in the least, yet they are, and are meant to be, great alleviations.

Only the poor, the very, very poor know what this storm is in all its terrors, and the desolate little child sitting there in this dark cellar felt it in its full power that night. Dick was gone from her, Dick was a thief, he was in prison, gone perhaps never to come back—and Jenks was gone, he had done wrong and tempted Dick, and broken his word to her, so perhaps it was right for him to go—and Scamp, dear Scamp, who had done no harm whatever, was stolen away.

Yes, she was alone, alone with the thought of her mother's face, all alone in the damp, dark, foul cellar, and she knew nothing of God.

Just then a voice, and a sweet voice too, was heard very distinctly at the mouth of the cellar.

"Sing glory, glory, glory," tuned the voice.

"Janey," said Flo, starting to her feet and speaking eagerly.

"Oh dear!" said the voice at the cellar door, "ain't you a fool to be settin' there in the dark. Strike a light, do—I'm a comin' down."

Flo struck a match, and lit a small end of tallow candle, and the lame girl tumbled down the ladder and squatted on the floor by her side.

"Oh dear!" she said, "ain't this a stiflin' 'ole? why 'tis worse nor 'ourn."

"Wot's 'Read and Pray,' Janey?" asked Flo.

"My!" said Janey, "ef yer ain't a real worry, Flo Darrell. Read—that's wot the Board teaches—and pray—Our—Father—chart—'eaven—that's pray."

"And 'Sing Glory,' wot's that?" continued Flo.

"That!" laughed Janey, "why that's a choros, you little goose. Niggers 'ave alwis choroses to their songs—that ain't nothink else."

"Well, 'tis pretty," sighed Flo, "not that I cares for nothink pretty now no more."

"Oh! yes yer will," said Janey with the air of a philosopher. "Yer just a bit dumpy to-night, same as I wor wen I broke my leg, and I wor lyin' in the 'orspital, all awful full o' pain hup to my throat, but now I 'as on'y a stiff joint, and I doesn't mind it a bit. That's just 'ow you'll feel 'bout Dick by and by. 'Ee'll be lyin' in prison, and you won't care, no more nor I cares fur my stiff joint."

Flo was silent, not finding Janey's conversation comforting.

"Come," said that young person after a pause, "I thought you'd want a bit o' livenin' hup. Wot does yer say to a ghost story?"

Flo's eyes, slightly startled, were turned on her companion.

"As big a ghost story as hever was got up in any gaff," continued Janey, her naughty face growing full of mischief, "and it 'appened in this 'ere cellar, Flo."

"Oh! it worn't mother come back, wor it?" asked Flo. "Just you wait heasy. No, it worn't yer mother, ef you *must* know, but as real a ghost as hever walked fur all that."

"Tell us," said Flo, really roused and interested.

"Oh, you wants fur to know at last! Well, I must be paid. I'm poor and clemmed, and I can't tell my tale fur nothink, not I."

"'Ow can I pay you, Janey?"

"Oh, yer can, heasy enough. Why mother said as yer sold quite a 'eap o' dolls to-day at the races, there! I'll tell 'bout the ghost fur a penny, no fur three ha'pence—there!"

"Well, tell away," said Flo, throwing the coins into her companion's lap.

Janey thrust them into her mouth, then taking them out rubbed them bright with her pinafore, and held them firmly in her bony little hand.

"Pease puddin' fur the ha'penny," she said, "meat and taters fur the penny—'tis real mean o' yer not to make it tuppence. Now I'll begin. Were's that ere dawg? were's that hawful, 'owlin' dawg?"

"Oh! I don't know," said Flo, "I don't know nothink 'bout my dear Scamp."

"Oh yes, 'ees dear Scamp to be sure," said Janey. "Well, I'll tell yer 'bout Scamp, and hall I 'opes is that we may never lay heyes on 'im no more."

"Why?" asked Flo.

"There! I'm a comin' to wy. Last night wen you, and Dick, and Jenks, and mother was orf to the Derby, and I mad like at bein' left, which mother *would* do 'cause I was lame, I came hover and sat close to the cellar, a-listenin' to Scamp, who was 'owlin' real orfle, and I thought as it 'ud be a lark to go down into the cellar, fur I knew he wor tied, and hanger 'im a bit, and I tried the door, but it wor locked as firm as firm, so arter a bit I went away, and I got a little stool and sat up on the ground houtside our cellar, and there I dropped orf asleep. And wen I 'woke it wor dark, and on'y the 'twinkle, twinkle, little stars' hout, and there wor a noise, and I looked, and hout o' your cellar, as was locked as firm as no one could move it, wor a man's 'ead a comin'—a man wid a round 'ead, and thick body, and bandy legs, and in 'is arms, a 'owlin' and a struggling that 'ere blessed dawg."

"Oh! the willan!" said Flo. "'Ee stole my dawg. Did yer foller 'im, Janey?"

"No, I didn't," said Janey; "I foller 'im—I'd like it. Wy, Flo Darrell, 'ee worn't a man at all. 'Ow was a *man* in yer locked hup cellar? No, 'ee wor a ghost—*that's* wot 'ee wor. And Scamp ain't a real dawg, but a ghost dawg, and yer well rid o' 'im, Flo Darrell."

Chapter Nine.

Flo in the Witness-Box.

A small knot of policemen stood outside Q— Police-Court. They chatted and talked one to another, now and then alluding to the different cases to be tried that day, now and then dwelling on the ordinary topics of the times, now and then, too, speaking to a companion of home interests, and home, and personal hopes and fears.

For these stalwart-looking myrmidons of the law are just human beings like the rest of mankind, and they are quite capable now and then even of feeling and showing pity for a prisoner.

"Any cases of interest coming on to-day?" asked a young policeman of constable 21 B.

"Nothing of moment—a few thefts committed on the Derby Day. By the way, I have just brought in the drollest figure of a child to appear as witness in one of these cases."

Just then a little woman in a black dress, black, tight-fitting bonnet, and black veil, came up timidly to the constable and asked if she might see the trials.

"Certainly, missis; you have nothing to do but to walk in. Stay, I will show you the way to the court. May I ask if there is hany particular case as you is wanting to hear?"

"Not—not—that is, I am not a witness," replied the little woman, whose lips trembled. "I have a curiosity to see the proceedings."

"Well, ma'am, the affairs coming on are mostly hacts of robbery committed on the Derby day—but some of them may interest you. Walk this way, ma'am," and the constable preceded the little woman into the court.

"There," he said kindly, seeing that for some reason she appeared a good deal either upset or excited, "you need not stand where the crowd are, you may go up and seat yourself on that bench where the witnesses be. You'll be more quiet and comfortable hup there, and will see heverything."

"Thank you," replied the little woman, and she placed herself on the extreme edge of the witnesses' bench.

There was a case then on hand, one of those sad cases which police-courts see so many of. A woman had been brought up to be tried for that sin which, more than any other, blights homes, ruins children, spreads destruction through the land, sends souls to hell,—she was accused of drunkenness and disorderly conduct.

She stood in the prisoner's dock with a sullen, bleared, indifferent face, her half-dead, listless eyes gazing vacantly at the magistrate. She had appeared in that court charged with the same offence forty times.

Mr Vernon, the gentleman before whom she was accused, asked her what she had to say for herself. Even at this question the indifferent countenance never woke into life.

"Nothing," she answered listlessly, for the love of strong drink had killed all other love in that woman's breast. She hardly listened as Mr Vernon addressed her in a few solemn but kindly words, and when her sentence—a month at Wandsworth with hard labour—was pronounced, received it with the same stoical indifference.

Then two boys were led in by the jailor, and constable 21 B. appeared as the first witness against them. As he passed into his place in the witnesses' box he gave the little woman in black a nudge and an intelligent look, which would have told her, even if she had not known it before, that one of the Derby robbery cases had come on. Through her thick veil she looked at the two lads; one hung down his face, but the other gazed about him, apparently untroubled and unashamed. This hardened expression on the elder boy's face seemed to cause her much pain, she turned her head away, and some tears fell on her hands. And yet, could she but have seen into their hearts, she would have perceived something which would have kindled a little hope in her soul.

Each boy, standing in this dreadful position, thought of his mother.

Dick, with that sea of faces about him, with the eyes of the judge fixed on him, felt that the memory of his mother was the hardest thing of all to bear, for the conscience of the child who had stood out against temptation for so long was by no means yet hardened, and though he knew nothing of God, his mother's memory stood in the place of God to him. So the most ignorant among us have a light to guide us. Let us be thankful if it is a star so bright as that of mother's love. For, strange to say, the older lad, the boy who stood in the dock with that brazen, unabashed face, the clever, accomplished London thief, who though not unknown to the police, had hitherto by his skill and cunning almost always escaped the hands of justice, he too, down deep in his heart of hearts, thought of his mother; he took one quick, furtive glance around as if to look for her, then, apparently relieved, folded his arms and fixed his bold eyes on Mr Vernon. Then the trial, in the usual form in which such trials are conducted in police-courts, went on. The prisoners' names and ages were first ascertained.

"William Jenks, aged fourteen; Richard Darrell, aged ten," sounding distinctly in the small room.

Then Police Constable 21 B. identified the boys as the same whom he had caught in the act of removing a gold watch

and purse from a gentleman's pocket in the midst of the crowds who thronged the streets on Tuesday. He described very accurately the whole proceedings, stating how and why his suspicions had been aroused—how he had dodged the boys for some little time, had observed them whispering together, had seen Dick buy his false nose and sixpenny fiddle, had overheard a few words which gave him a further clue to some mischief, had seen them separate, had closely noticed Dick's antics, had watched the violent push he gave the old gentleman, and finally had laid his hand on Jenks as he drew forth the watch and purse from his victim's pocket.

His statements, delivered slowly and impressively, were taken down by a clerk of the court, and then read over to him, and signed as quite correct; then the constable retiring, the old gentleman who had been the victim of the robbery appeared in the witness-box.

Very irate was this witness, and very indignant the glances he gave over his spectacles at the prisoners.

Those were the boys of course!

Well, he had been befooled by the small chap's funny nose and absurd antics—any one else would have been the same. Well, he *had* a personal interest in the great race, and had come out to meet some friends who were returning from Epsom, he had given the small boy only a passing thought. When violently knocked by him, he had believed it to be accidental, and caused by the eagerness and swaying of the crowd—his was not a suspicious nature. No, he had felt no hand in his pocket—and knew nothing of any robbery until the policeman showed him his own purse and watch in the elder prisoner's hand. Though obliged to the constable for his zeal, he must add he thought it *shameful* that such a thing could happen in any well-governed land!

"Will you tell us precisely what your purse contained, and describe its appearance?" asked Mr Vernon.

"I can do that to the letter," replied the angry man. "I am not likely to forget my own purse or my own money."

"We must ask you to confine your remarks to answering the questions put to you," interfered the magistrate. "How much did your purse contain, and what kind of purse was it?"

"The purse you wish me to describe, and which I repeat I *can* describe, was a green Russian leather one, with silver fastenings. It contained (I know to a farthing what it contained) five sovereigns in gold, a half-sovereign, two florins, and sixpence, besides in one pocket a cheque for twenty pounds on the City Bank. The cheque was not signed."

The purse being opened, and its contents found to answer to this description, it was handed back to the old gentleman, who was then requested to describe his watch; and on his doing so, and also getting back this property, he became much more gracious, and retired, with his anger considerably cooled, to his former place beside the little woman in black.

"If you have a watch, ma'am, hold it safely," he whispered to her. "Even here, and surrounded by the officers of the law, we are not safe from the light fingers of these young ruffians."



Held by the hand of Constable 21 B, a little girl was led into the witness-box.
A. B. 3.

Just then there was a bustle, and a movement of fresh interest in the court. Another witness was appearing.

Led by the hand of Constable 21 B, a little girl was led into the witnesses' box, a little girl with an old woman's face, grave, worn, pale. At the sight of this witness Dick changed colour violently, and even Jenks gave way to some passing emotion.

For an instant a pair of sad dark eyes gazed steadily at both the boys. They were speaking eyes, and they said as plainly as possible—"I cannot save you. I would help you, even *you*, Jenks, out of this, but I cannot. I have come here to speak the truth, and the truth *will*, the truth *must* do you harm."

Flo, with all her deep ignorance, had one settled conviction, that no one was ever yet heard of who told a lie in the witnesses' box.

"How old is the little girl?" asked Mr Vernon.

The question was repeated to her.

"Don't know," she answered promptly.

"Have you no idea, child? try and think!"

"No, I doesn't know," said Flo. Then she added after a pause, "*Mother* knowed me age, and she said ef I lived till this month (ain't this month June?) as I'd be nine."

"Nine years old," said the magistrate, and the clerk of the court took a note of the fact.

"Now, little girl, what is your name?"

"Darrell."

"Darrell, do you know the nature of an oath?"

"Eh?" questioned Flo.

"Do you know who God is? You have got to take a solemn oath to God that you will speak nothing but the truth while you stand there."

"Yes," said Flo, "I'll on'y speak the truth."

"Do you know about God?"

"Mother used to say 'God 'elp me.' I don't know nothink else—'cept 'bout Heve," she added after another pause.

"What do you know about Eve?"

"She wor the first thief, she wor. She prigged the apple off God's tree."

A laugh through the court; but the odd little figure in mother's old bonnet never smiled, her eyes were turned again reproachfully on Dick—he was following in the footsteps of "Heve."

"You may administer the oath," said the magistrate to the usher of the court, and then the Bible was placed in Flo's hands and the well-known solemn words addressed to her.

"The Evidence you shall give to the court, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing else but the truth, so help you God."

"Yes," answered Flo.

"Kiss the book," said the usher.

She did so gravely, and handed it back to him. "Now, Darrell, just answer the questions put to you, and remember you are on your oath to speak the truth. Who are these boys? Do you know them?"

"Yes, yer Washup."

Flo had heard Mr Vernon spoken to as "Your Worship," and had adopted the name with avidity.

"What are they called?"

"Little 'un's Dick—t'other Jenks."

"Which of the two is your brother?"

"Little chap."

"Do you live together—you and your brother and Jenks?"

"Yes; number seven, Duncan Street."

"Have you a father and mother?"

"No. Father fell from a 'ouse and wor killed—he wor a mason; and mother, she died a year ago. We 'ad Scamp wid us too," added Flo; "leastways we 'ad till the night o' the Derby."

"Who is Scamp?"

"My dawg."

A laugh.

"Do not mind about your dog now, Darrell," said the magistrate. "Tell me how you live."

"'Ow I lives? Course I lives on wittles; and when I can't get wittles I lives on nothink."

"Mr Vernon means, what do you do to earn money?" explained the constable.

"Oh! I translates."

"You translate!" said Mr Vernon, raising his eye brows in wonder that anything literary should find its way to Flo's hands; "I did not know that you could read."

"No, more I can—I knows nothink 'bout 'read and pray.' I never was glad to see that 'ere day. No—I translates; and ef they is down at the 'eel, and bust at the sides, and hout at the toes, wy I makes 'em as good as new fur hall that."

"She cobbles old boots and shoes, your Worship," explained the amused constable. "They call it translating down in Duncan Street."

"Oh! Does your brother translate also, Darrell?"

"No, yer Washup; Dick 'ave a broom and crossin'. 'Ee wor doin' a tidy lot lately wid 'is broom and crossin'."

"Now remember you are on your oath. How did you spend your time on the Derby Day?"

"I sold small dolls to the gents."

"Were you with your brother and the other prisoner?"

"No, yer Washup. Jenks 'ee said as we worn't to keep company."

"Did he tell you why?"

"'Ee said as we'd do better bis'ness apart. 'Ee was in the blackin' line, and Dick in the fusee line."

"Where were you at the time of the Robbery?"

"Close ahint Jenks and Dick."

"Did they see you?"

"No."

"What were they doing? what did you see them do?"

"Dick, 'ee 'ad a funny little red nose on, and 'ee capered about, and played the fiddle."

"Well, go on."

"The people, they was pressing hevery way, and the folks was cheerin', wen—hall on a sudden—"

"Well?"

"Dick—'ee gave a great leap in the hair, and down 'ee come slap-bang 'gainst that 'ere gent," pointing to the red-faced gentleman; "and Jenks—"

"What about Jenks? Don't forget your oath, Darrell."

"I'm not a forgettin'—I'm a comin' to Jenks. No, Jenks," suddenly turning round and addressing him, "I wouldn't tell on you ef I wasn't standin' yere where no lies was hever spoke. 'Ee stepped forrard as soft as soft, and pulled hout a purse and a watch hout o' the gent's pocket."

"Are these the watch and purse?"

"Yes."

The clerk of the court then read over Flo's evidence, and as she could neither read nor write, she was shown how to put her mark to the paper.

"You may go now," said the magistrate; "I don't wish to ask you anything further."

Constable 21 B. took her arm, but she struggled against him, and held her ground.

"Please, yer Washup, I 'ave spoke the truth."

"Indeed, I hope so."

"May the little chap come 'ome wid me, and I'll—" But here official authority was called to interfere, and Flo was summarily ejected from the witness-box.

She found a seat at the other side of the little woman in black, who took the child's trembling hand in hers. A few moments of patient summing up of evidence, and then the magistrate asked the prisoners if they had anything to say for themselves.

"Please, I'll never do it no more," said poor little Dick, in a tone which nearly broke his sister's heart; but Jenks, the older and more hardened offender, was silent.

Then the sentence was made known. Dick, in consideration of his youth, and its being a first offence, was only to go to a reformatory school, but Jenks was doomed to Wandsworth House of Correction for nine long months.

Chapter Ten.

The Little Woman in Black.

"Come home with me," said the little woman by Flo's side.

She had thrown up her veil now, and the face the child saw was nearly as pale and sad as her own. She hardly noticed it, however, she was absorbed in a recognition. The little woman in black had the gentle voice and kind eyes, the little woman in black *was* her friend of the Derby Day.

"My dear, I am real glad to find you again. You shall come to my house and have a bit of dinner."

"No, ma'am," said Flo, shaking away her hand, "I knows yer, ma'am, and you is werry kind. But I'm not a goin' 'ome wid yer, missis; I'm not 'spectable to be in yer 'ouse. Dick, 'ee be a thief and in prison, I'm not 'spectable no more."

Flo said this without tears, and defiantly.

"Oh, my dear, you are quite respectable enough for me. You are poor and in trouble, child—just the one that Jesus Christ wants; and surely if the King of Glory wants you, I may want you too."

"Wot's glory?" asked Flo.

"Glory, child; that's where the King lives."

"Ain't kings and queens the same?"

"Oh! now, my dear, I see you don't know nothing about the matter, or you wouldn't speak of any king or queen in the breath with my King. Come and have a bit of dinner with me, and then I'll tell you about my King."

"I ain't 'ungry," said Flo; "but I'd real like to 'ear o' that King as wants me. Would 'ee make a swell o' me, missis?"

"He can raise you very high, little girl," said the woman; and taking Flo's hand, they walked together in silence.

"You was fond of poor Jenks?" said the little woman at last.

"Yes, ma'am; 'ee wasn't a bad sort o' a feller. But 'ee shouldn't 'ave tempted the little chap. I don't go fur to blame Jenks, ma'am, fur 'ee 'adn't no mother—but 'ee shouldn't 'ave tempted Dick."

At these words the little woman withdrew her hand from Flo's, and pulling out her handkerchief, applied it to her eyes; and Flo, wondering what made her cry, and what made her appear so sad altogether, walked again by her side in silence.

They passed down several streets until at last they came to one of those courts hidden away from the general thoroughfares, so well-known to London district visitors. There are Sun streets in London, where the sun never shines—there are Jubilee courts, where feasts are never held, where Satan and his evil spirits are the only beings that can rejoice.

This place was called Pine Apple Court, and doubtless a few years ago it as nearly resembled Cherry Court and May-Blossom Court as three peas resemble each other; but now, as Flo and the little woman walked into it, it really and truly, as far as sweetness and purity went, was worthy of its name. Here, in the midst of London, was actually a place where the decent poor might live in comfort and respectability. (One of Miss Octavia Hill's courts.) The freshly-painted, white-washed houses had creepers twining against them; and before the doors was a nicely-cared-for piece of ground, where trees were planted, where the women could dry their clothes, and where, out of school-hours, the children could play.

The little woman conducted Flo across this pleasant court into one of the freshest and cleanest of the white-washed houses, where she brought her into a room on the ground floor, as bright as gay chintz curtains to the windows, neat paper on the walls, and the perfect purity which the constant use of soap and water produces, could make it. The polished steels in the grate shone again, a little clock ticked on the mantel-piece, and a square of crimson drugget stood before the fire-place. The window-sash was wide open, and on the ledge stood two flower-pots, one containing a tea-rose, the other a geranium in full blossom.

The rose was ticketed, prize 1st, and stood in a gaily ornamented pot, doubtless its prize at the last poor people's flower show. Had Flo ever heard of Paradise she would have supposed that she had reached it; as it was she believed that she had come to some place of rest, some sweet spot where weary limbs, and weary hearts too, might get some repose. She sat down thankfully on a small stool pointed out to her by her hostess and gazed around.

"Please, ma'am," she said presently, "wot am I to call yer?"

At this question the little woman paused, and a faint colour came into her pale cheeks.

"Why, now," she said, "that's a curious thing, but my name's Jenks, same as that poor fellow they put in prison this morning—Mrs Jenks is my name, little Darrell."

"Yes, missis," replied Flo respectfully.

She had admired Mrs Jenks very much on the Derby Day, but now her feelings of wonder and admiration amounted almost to fear. For aught she could tell the owner of such a room might be a "Dook's" wife in disguise.

"You sit in this chair and rest," said Mrs Jenks, "and I'll see about dinner."

And Flo did rest, partly stunned by what she had witnessed and undergone, partly soothed by the novel scene now before her.

Mrs Jenks had made her take off mother's old bonnet, and had placed her in the very softest of easy-chairs, where she could lie back and gaze at the little woman, with a wonder, a hunger of spiritual want, a sadness of some unexplained desire, all shining out of her eyes.

There were baked potatoes in a small oven at the side of the fire-place, and over the potatoes some nice pieces of hot bacon, and Mrs Jenks made coffee, fragrant coffee, such as Flo had never tasted, and toasted bread, and buttered it. Then she drew a little table up close to the open window, and placed a snowy cloth on it, then plates, and knives and forks, and then the potatoes and bacon, the coffee and toast; and when all was ready she put a chair for Flo, and another for herself.

But before they began to eat a more astonishing thing still happened. The little woman stood up, and folded her hands, and closed her eyes, and said these words:—

"I thank Thee, my God, for the dinner Thou hast given me; but more than all I thank Thee that Thou hast let me have

one of thy outcast little ones to share it with."

Then she opened her eyes, and bustled about, and helped Flo. And Flo, who had found her appetite come back in full vigour at the first smell of the coffee and bacon, ate very heartily of Mrs Jenks' liberal helpings, leaning back in her chair when she had finished, with quite a pink flush on her thin cheeks, and the hunger of bodily want gone out of her eyes.

"Now," said the little woman, after all the plates and dishes were washed up and put away, "Now," she said, "I will get to my work, and you shall tell me all that story over again. All about your poor dear mother and the boys, and when that poor fellow with the same name as mine came to live with you."

"Yes," answered Flo, whose little heart was so drawn to Mrs Jenks, and so comforted by her, that any words she asked her to say came easily to her lips; and the story of the Derby Day was repeated with fuller confidence by the child, and listened to with fuller understanding on the part of her kind listener. Flo told over again all about her mother, and mother's death, and the promise they had given mother—then of their own lives, and what hard work translating was, and how little Dick earned by his broom and crossing—finally how Jenks came, and how good-natured he was at first, and how glad they were to have him, and how they wondered what his trade was, and how he had promised to teach them both his trade.

Then at last, on the day she saw Regent Street and the Queen, and tasted 'ot roast goose for the first time, then too she discovered that Jenks was a thief. Then she related her interview with Jenks, and how he had promised to leave Dick alone, and *not* to teach him his wicked trade, and how on those terms she had allowed him to remain in the cellar; and then at last, when she was feeling so sure and so happy, he had deceived her, and now she was in great trouble, in great and bitter trouble, both the boys in prison, both thieves, and now mother could never rest any more.

Here Flo broke down and sobbed bitterly.

"I think if I were you, I would leave all that about your dear mother to God, my child," said little Mrs Jenks. "His ways are not as our ways. If I were you, I would not fret about your mother—I would just leave her to God."

"Who is God?" asked Flo, stopping her tears and looking up.

"Who is God?" repeated Mrs Jenks. "Why, He's the King of Glory I had to tell you about; and now I remember, at the trial to-day you seemed to know very little about Him—nothing, in fact. Well, you shall not leave this house without knowing, I promise you that. Why, God—God, little Darrell, He's your best friend, and your poor mother's best friend, and Dick's best friend, and my—that is, Jenks' best friend too. He loves you, child, and some day He'll take you to a place where many poor people who have been sad, and hungry, and wanting for everything down here, are having rest, and good times for ever."

"And will God give me a good time in that place?" asked Flo.

"Yes. If you love Him He will give you a better time than the Queen has on her throne—a time so good, that you will never want to change with anybody in all the world."

"Tell me about God," asked Flo in a breathless voice, and she left her stool and knelt at Mrs Jenks' feet.

"God," said little Mrs Jenks, putting down her work and looking up solemnly, "God—He's the Father of the fatherless, and you are fatherless. God's your Father, child."

"Our—Father—chart—'eaven," repeated Flo.

"Your Father in Heaven—yes, that's it."

Then the little woman paused, puzzled how best to make her story plain enough and simple enough for the ignorant child. Words came to her at last, and Flo learned what every child in our England is supposed to know, but what, alas! many such children have never heard of; many such children live and die without hearing of.

Do we blame them for their social standing? do we blame them for filling their country with vice and crime?

Doubtless we do blame them, we raise our own clean skirts and pass over on the other side. In church we thank God that we are not as these men are—murderers—thieves—unclean—unholy. Let them go to prison, and to death—fit ends for such as they.

True! virtue is to them not even a name, they have never heard of it at all.

The fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness has never come in *their* path. Their iniquities are unpurged, their sins unpardoned.

Christ, it is certain, would wash them white enough, and give them a place in His kingdom; but they know nothing of Christ, and we who do know, to whom His name is a sound too familiar to excite any attention, His story too often read, too often heard of, to call up any emotion—we are either too lazy, or too selfish, or too ignorant of their ignorance, to tell them of Him.

Now for the first time Flo learned about God, and about God's dear Son, our Saviour. A little too about Heaven, and a very little about prayer.

If she spoke ever so low, down in her dark cellar, God would hear her, and some day, Mrs Jenks said, He would come for her, and carry her away to live with Him in Heaven.

Only a glimmering of the great truth could be given at one time to the child's dark mind, but there is a vast difference between twilight and thick darkness, and this difference took place in Flo's mind that day.

She listened with hardly a question—a breathless, astonished look on her face, and when Mrs Jenks had ceased speaking, she rose slowly and tied on mother's old bonnet.

"May I come again?" asked Flo, raising her lips to kiss the little woman.

"Yes, my child, come again to-morrow. I shall look out for you to-morrow."

And Flo promised to come.

Chapter Eleven.

Maxey's Young 'Un.

As Flo walked down the street, the wonderful news she had heard for the first time completely absorbed her mind, so much so that she forgot that Dick was a thief, that Dick and Jenks were both suffering from the penalty of their crime, that she was returning to her cellar alone, without even Scamp to keep her company. The news she had heard was so great, so intensely interesting in its freshness and newness, that she could think of nothing else.

She walked down, as her wont was, several by-streets, and took several short cuts, and found herself more than once in parts of the town where no respectable person was ever seen.

The gutter children working at their several wretched trades called after her as she passed, one addressing her as "old bonnet," another asking how much she wanted a-piece for the flowers that dangled so ludicrously on her forehead.

And being a timid child, and, London bred as she was, sensitive to ridicule, she walked on faster and faster, really anxious to find any quiet place where she could sit down and think. At last, as she was passing a more open piece of ground, where a group of boys were playing pitch-and-toss, they, noticing her quickened movements, and rather frightened face, made a rush at her, and Flo, losing all presence of mind, began to run.

Little chance would she have had against her tormentors, had not just then a tall policeman appeared in sight, whereupon they considered it more prudent to give up their chase, and return to their interrupted amusements.

Poor Flo, however, still believing them to be at her heels, ran faster than ever down a narrow lane to her right, turned sharp round a corner, when suddenly her foot tripped against a cellar grating, the grating, insecurely fastened, gave way, and the child, her fall partly broken by a ladder which stood against the grating, found herself bruised, stunned, almost unconscious, on the ground several feet below the street.

For some moments she lay quiet, not in pain, and not quite insensible, but too much frightened and shaken to be capable of movement.

Then a sound within a foot or two of her caused her heart to leap with fresh fear. She sat up and listened intently.

It was a stifled sound, it was the whine of a dog.

For Scamp's sake Flo had learned to love all dogs. She made her way, though not without pain, to this one now, and put her hand on its head.

Instead of being angry and resenting this freedom, as a strange dog might, a quiver of joy went through the animal, its tail wagged violently, its brown eyes cast melting glances of love at Flo, its small rough tongue tried to lick her face and hands, and there, gagged and tied, but well fed, as yet unhurt, and a platter of broken meat by its side, was her own dog, her lost dog, Scamp.

Flo laid her head on the head of the dog, and burst into tears of joy.

The pain of her fall was forgotten, she was very glad she had knocked against that broken grating, that by this means she had stumbled into this cellar; her dog could accompany her home—she would not be so lonely now.

With her own hands she unfastened the gag, and loosened the chain from Scamp's neck, and the dog, delighting in his recovered freedom, danced and scampered madly round her, uttering great, deep bays of joy.

Alas! for Scamp, his foolish and untimely mirth excited undue attention to him.

His loud and no longer muffled bark brought two men quickly into the cellar.

Flo had the prudence of mind to hide behind some old boards, and Scamp with equal prudence did not follow her.

"Down, you brute," said the short thick-set man whom Jenks on a former occasion had addressed as Maxey. "Wot a noise, 'ee's makin'; the perleece'll get scent of the young dawg wid his noise," and the cruel wretch shied a great blow at Scamp, which caused the poor animal to quiver and cry out with pain.

"'Ee'll be quiet enough afore the night is hover," said the man's companion, with a loud laugh. "Lor! won't it be fun to see the bull-dawg a tearin' of 'im? I'm comin' to shave and soap 'im presently; but see, Maxey, some one 'as been and tumbled inter the cellar, down by the gratin', as I'm alive! See! them two bars is broke right acrost."

"Run and put them together, then, the best way possible," called out Maxey, "and I'll look round the cellar to give it to any one as is in hidin'."

How fast Flo's heart beat at those words, but Maxey, though he imagined he had searched in every available nook, never thought of examining behind the three thin boards almost jammed against the wall, and behind which the child had crushed her slight frame.

He believed that whoever had fallen into the cellar had beaten a hasty retreat, and after tying up Scamp more firmly than ever, took his departure.

Now was Flo's time. She had only a few moments to effect her escape and the dog's escape. A dreadful meaning had Maxey's words for her—her dog's life was in peril.

Never heeding an acute agony which had set in by this time in her right foot, she made her way to Scamp's side, and first putting her arms round his neck, entreated him in the most pathetic voice to be quiet and not to betray them by any more barking.

If dogs cannot understand words and their meanings, they are very clever at comprehending tones and *their* meanings.

Perfectly did this dog's clear intelligence take in that Flo meant them both to escape, that any undue noise on his part would defeat their purpose. He confessed to himself that in his first joy at seeing her he had acted foolishly, he would do so no more.

When she unfastened him he bounded up the ladder, and butting with his great strong head against the broken grating, removed it again from its place, then springing to the ground, was a free dog once more. Half a moment later Flo was by his side.

There were plenty of people, and idle people too, in the streets, but, strange to say, no one noticed the child and dog, and they passed on their way in safety. A few moments' walking brought them to Duncan Street, then to their own cellar, down the ladder of which Scamp trotted with a happy, confident air.

Flo followed him feebly, and tottering across the floor, threw herself on her straw bed. Not another step could she go. She was much hurt; she was in severe pain.

Was her foot broken? Hardly that, or she could not have walked at all, but her present agony was so great, that large drops stood on her brow, and two or three sharp cries came from her patient lips.

How she longed for Dick then, or Jenks then, or Janey then. Yes, she had Scamp, and that was something—Scamp, who was lying abject by her side, pouring out upon her a whole wealth of love, who, knowing what she had done for him, would evermore do all that dog could do for her sake. She raised her hand to his head and patted him, glad, very glad that she had rescued him from an unknown but dreadful fate.

But she wanted something else, something or some one to give her ease in her terrible agony, and God, her loving Father, looking down from heaven, saw His little child's sore need, and though as yet He sent her no earthly succour, He gave to her the blessed present relief of unconsciousness. Flo fainted away.

When she recovered an hour or two later, the scanty light that ever penetrated into the cellar had departed, and at first, when the child opened her eyes in the darkness, pain and memory of all recent events had completely left her. She fancied she was lying again by her mother's side on that very straw mattress, she stretched out her arms to embrace her, and to ask her the question with which she had greeted her for the last three months of her life.

"Be yer werry tired, mother?"

But then the empty place, the straw where the weary form was no longer lying, brought back remembrance; her mother was not there—her mother was gone. She was resting in her quiet grave, and could never help, or succour, or protect her more.

But then again her thoughts were broken. There were rude noises outside, a frightened cry from Scamp at the foot of the bed, the cellar door was violently opened, two men scrambled down the ladder, and with many oaths and curses began tossing about the wretched furniture, and calling loudly for the missing dog.

Where was he? Not on Flo's bed, which they unmercifully raked about, unheeding her moans of pain; not anywhere apparently. Vowing vengeance on *whoever* had stolen the dawg, the men departed at last.

Then again all was silence, and in a few moments a cowed-looking and decidedly sooty animal might, had any light been there to see, have been observed descending from the chimney where he had lain *perdu*.

Of the life-preserving qualities Scamp possessed a large share, as doubtless before this his story proves.

Perhaps his cur mother had put him up to a wrinkle or two in his babyhood; at any rate, fully determined was he to meet no violent end, to live out his appointed time, and very clever were the expedients he used to promote this worthy object.

Now he shook himself as free as he could of the encumbrances he had met with in the smoky, sooty chimney, and again approached Flo's side.

She laid her hand on his head, praised him a little for the talent he had shown in again escaping from Maxey, and the

dreadful fate to which Maxey meant to consign him; then the two lay quiet and silent.

A child and a dog!

Could any one have looked in on them that night they would have said that in all the great city no two could be more utterly alone and forsaken.

That individual, whoever he might have been, would have gone away with a wrong impression—they were not so.

Any creature that retains hope, any creature that retains faith, which is better, than hope, cannot be really desolate.

The dog had all the large, though unconscious faith of his kind in his Creator. It had never occurred to him to murmur at his fate, to wish for himself the better and more silken lives that some dogs live. To live at all was a blessed thing, to love at all a more blessed thing—he lived and he loved—he was perfectly happy.

And the child—for the first time she knew of and had faith in a Divine Father, she had heard of some one who loved her, and who would make all things right for her. She thought of this love, she pondered over it, she was neither desolate nor unhappy. God and God's Son loved her, and loved Dick—they knew all about her and Dick; and some day their Father would send for them both and give them a home in His House in Heaven.

Flo had at all times a vivid imagination, since her earliest days it had been her dear delight to have day dreams, to build castles in the air. No well-dressed or happy-looking child ever crossed her path that she did not suppose herself that child, that she did not go through in fancy that child's delightful life. What wardrobes had Flo in imagination, what gay trinkets adorned her brow, her arms, her neck!

What a lovely house she lived in, what heaps of shillings and sovereigns she possessed! Now and then, in her moments of most daring flight, she had even a handle to her name, and people addressed her as "Lady Flo." But all the time, while happy in these dreams, she had always known them to be but dreams. She was only Flo, working as a translator of old boots and shoes, down in a dark cellar—she had no fine dresses, no pretty ornaments, no money, she was hungry and cold, and generally miserable, and as far as she could possibly see there was never any chance of her being anything else.

She generally came down from her high imaginings to this stern reality, with a great burst of tears, only one sad thought comforting her, to be alive at all she could never be worse than she was, she could never sink any lower.

She was mistaken.

Last night, lying all alone and waiting for Dick's trial, lying hour after hour hoping and longing for sleep to visit her, and hoping and longing in vain, she had proved that she was mistaken. Lower depths of sorrow and desolation could be reached, and she had reached them. Through no fault of hers, the stern hand of the law was stretched out to grasp her one treasure, to take her brother away.

Dick had broken a promise sealed on dying lips—Dick was a thief. Henceforth and for ever the brand of the prison would be on him.

When, their punishment over, he and Jenks were free once again, nothing now, no power, or art, or persuasion, on her part could keep those two apart. Together they would plunge into deeper and more daring crime, and come eventually to the bad and miserable end her mother had so often described to her. It was plain that she and Dick must separate.

When the boys were released from prison, it was plain that she and they could not live together as of old. The honest could not live with the dishonest. Her mother had often told her that, had often warned her to be sure, happen what might, to choose honest companions. So Flo knew that unless *she* too broke her word to mother, they must part—Dick and she must part. And yet how much she loved him—how much her mother had loved him!

He was not grave like her; he had never carried an old head on young shoulders; he was the merriest, brightest, funniest boy in the world—one of those throw-all-care-to-the-winds little fellows, who invariably give pleasure even in the darkest and most shady homes. His elastic spirits never flagged, his gay heart never despaired, he whistled over his driest crusts, he turned somersaults over his supperless hours—he had for many a day been the light of two pairs of eyes. True, he had often been idle, and lately had left the brunt of the daily labour, if not all of it, to Flo. But the mother heart of the little sister, who was in reality younger than himself, accepted all this as a necessity.

Was he not a boy? and was it not one of the first laws of nature that all girls should work and all boys should play?

But now Dick must work with the hard labour the law accords to its prisoners. That bright little face must look out behind a prisoner's mask, he must be confined in the dark cell, he must be chained to the whipping-post, he must be half-starved on bread and water. Out of prison he was half his time without the former of these necessities of life, and at his age he would not be subjected to hard labour.

But Flo knew nothing of these distinctions, and all the terrible stories she had ever heard of prisoners she imagined as happening to Dick now. So the night before the trial had been one long misery to the sensitive, affectionate child.

Now the trial was over, now Dick was really consigned to prison, or to what seemed to Flo like prison. With their eyes they had said good-bye to each other, he from the prisoners' dock, she from her place in the witnesses' box. The parting was over, and she was lying alone in her dark cellar, on her straw pallet, bruised, hurt, faint, but strange to say no longer unhappy, strange to say happier than she had ever been in her life before.

She had often heard of bright things—she had often imagined bright things, but now for the first time she heard of a

bright thing for her.

She was not always to be in pain, she had heard to-day of a place with no pain; she was not always to be hungry, poor, and in rags—she had heard to-day of food enough and to spare, of white dresses, of a home more beautiful than the Queen's home, of a good time coming to her who had always, always, all her life had bad times.

And Dick, though he was a thief, might share in the good time, and so might Jenks.

Our Saviour gave of His good times to thieves, and sinners, and poor people, if only they wanted them, and of course they had only to hear of them to want them.

"May I come down, Flo?" called out Janey's voice at this juncture, at the cellar door. "Father 'ave beat me hawful; may I come down and set by yer a bit?"

The lame girl was sobbing loudly, and without waiting for Flo's reply she scrambled down the ladder and threw herself on the bed by the child's side.

"There now," she said, panting out her passionate words, "'ee 'ave me hall black and blue, and my lame leg 'urt worse nor hever; and I wish 'ee wor in prison, I do; and I wish I wor dead, I do."

"Oh! Janey," said Flo, with a great gasp of longing, "*wouldn't* it be nice to be dead?"

This corroboration of her desire startled Janey into quiet, and into a subdued—

"*What*, Flo Darrell?"

"To be dead, Janey, and 'avin' a good time?"

"Well," said Janey, recovering herself with a laugh, "wen I'm down haltogether in the dumps, as I wor a minute ago, I wishes fur it, but most times I 'ates the bear thought o' it—ugh!"

"That's cause yer doesn't know, Janey, no more nor I did till to-day. Plenty of wittles, plenty of clothes, plenty of pretty things, plenty of love, all in the good time as we poor folks have arter we are dead."

Janey gave her companion an angry push.

"There now, ef yer ain't more than hagriwating, a comin' on me wid yer old game of s'posin', and me fairly clemmed wid the 'unger. There's no good time fur me, nor never will be, I reckon," and she again lifted up her voice and wept.

"There's Our—Father—chart—'eaven," began Flo, but Janey stopped her.

"I don't want 'im—one father's too much fur me." Flo was silent—she would tell no more of her sweet message to unbelieving ears.

After a time she spoke in a different tone.

"Janey?"

"Well?"

"I'd like fur to 'ear the Glory song."

Janey had a good voice, and desired nothing better than to listen to herself. She complied readily.

"'I'm glad I hever saw the day, Sing glory, glory, glory, When first I larned to read and pray, Sing glory, glory, glory.'

"Why, Flo! my 'eart alive! Flo, 'ere's Scamp."

"Sing it again," murmured Flo.

And Janey did sing it again, and again, and yet again, until the dark cellar seemed to grow full of it, and to be lit up and brightened by it, and to its music the sick and weary child went to sleep.

Chapter Twelve.

I was An Hungered and Ye Gave Me Meat.

All through the night Flo had visions of bright, and clean, and lovely things. She dreamt that she had left the cellar for ever, that all the musty, ragged boots and shoes were mended, and paid for, and gone, and that instead of earning her bread in that hard and wretched way, God had come and placed her in a beautiful room, looking out on green fields, such as mother had told her of, and given her pure white dresses to make for the angels.

And God looked so kind, and so like what she had imagined her own father to look like, that she had ventured to ask Him what had become of Dick, and God had told her that He Himself was taking care of Dick, and He Himself had placed him in a good school, and all would be well with him. And she thought she sat by the open window and made the angels dresses, and was, oh! so very, very happy; and Scamp lay at her feet, and was also happy; and Mrs Jenks was in the room, ready whenever she liked to tell her more about God, and she too was happy.

Yes, they all were happy, with a happiness Flo had never conceived possible hitherto, and she felt that it was not the nice room, nor the lovely view, nor the pleasant occupation that made her happy, but just because God was near. At last the morning came, and she awoke to find that it all was only a dream.

She was still in the cellar, she must get up as usual, she must work as usual at her old thankless work, the work that barely kept starvation from the door. She felt very faint and hungry, but she remembered that she had two shillings of the money she had earned on the Derby Day locked away in the box where she usually kept mother's old bonnet. She would get up at once and buy some breakfast for herself and Scamp. She called the dog and told him what she was about to do, and, to judge from the way he wagged his tail and rubbed his head against her hands, he understood her, and was pleased with her intention. Nay, more, to hurry her movements, he placed himself under the ladder, mounted a few rungs, came down again, and finally darted from the ladder to her, and from her to the ladder, uttering short impatient barks.

What ailed Flo? She was hungry, very hungry, but how slowly she rose from her bed. She removed her head from the pillow, she steadied herself on her elbow—how strange, and weak, and giddy she felt. She lay down again, it was only a passing weakness; then once more she tried, back came that overpowering sense of sickness and giddiness. Well, it *should* not conquer her this time; happen what might, she *must* get up. She tried to put her right foot to the ground, but a great, sharp cry of agony brought Scamp to her side in consternation, and brought also beads of pain to her brow.

No, hungry as she was, she could not walk, by no possible means could she even stand.

She lay perfectly still for a moment or two, suffering so intensely that every breath was an agony. At last this passed, and she was able to realise her position a little. In truth it was not a pleasant one.

Even the night before, she had been in great need, she had longed much for a drink, her pain had brought on intense thirst, she had meant to ask Janey to put a cup, and a jug of cold water, by her side before she left, but the sweetness of Janey's song had caused her to fall asleep before she had made known her request, and the lame girl had gone away unconscious that anything was the matter with her. It was highly probable that she might not pay Flo a visit for days; unless her father gave her another beating, or some quite unexpected event occurred, the chances were that she would not come.

And now Flo needed meat and drink, and nursing, as she had never needed them in all her life before. Though pale and delicate-looking, she had hitherto been possessed of a certain wiry strength, which those little withered city children, with every one of health's necessaries apparently denied them, in some strange way seem to have.

She had never gone through severe pain before; and never, with all her privations, had she known the hunger and thirst which now tormented her.

Scamp, seeing that she had changed her mind about going out, fixed on her one or two reproachful glances, and then in a very discontented manner resigned himself to his fate, and to a few more hours' sleep.

And Flo lay and wondered what was going to become of her. She was very ill, she knew. She was alternately hot and then cold, she was alternately tortured by pangs of the most acute hunger, and then deadly sickness seemed to make the bare thought of food insupportable.

She wondered what was to be her fate. Was she to lie there, a little more sick, a little more weak, a little more hungry and thirsty, in a little more pain, until at last she died, as mother had died? Well, what then?

Only last night she had thought dying a good thing, the best thing. It was bidding good-bye to all that now troubled her, it was beginning at once the good time God had put by so carefully for little outcast children like her. If only it would come at once, this kind, beautiful Death—if only she had not to walk the dark bit of road between now and then, between now and the blessed moment when God would take her in His arms to Heaven.

But Flo had been too long with the poor, with the very, very poor, had seen too many such die, not to know well that dying was often a very long business, a business so long, and so sad, that, though the dying were suffering just as much as she now suffered, yet many weary hours, sometimes many weary days, had to be passed before relief and succour came to them; before kind Death came and took away all their sorrows and gave them rest, and sleep, and a good time. And this long period of waiting, even though the end was such brightness, felt very terrible to the lonely child. Then, suddenly, words Mrs Jenks had said to her yesterday came into her head.

"When you want food, or anything else very bad, and you don't know how to get it, then is the time to ask God for it. All you have to do is to say up your want, whatever it be, in as few, and small, and simple words as you like, and though you speaks down in your dark cellar, God will hear you up in Heaven, and if 'tis any way possible He'll give you what you want."

Flo remembered these words of Mrs Jenks' now with great and sudden gladness. If ever a time of need and sore want had come to any one it had come to her now.

What a good thing to have a Father like God to tell it all to, what a wonderful thing that He could hear her, without her having to get up to go to Him.

Her ideas of God were misty, very misty, she had not the least conception where Heaven was, or what it was, she only knew there *was* a God, there *was* a Heaven—a God for her, a Heaven for her; and with all her ignorance, many of the gifted, and mighty, and learned of the earth do not know as much. Now for the first time she would pray. She thought of no difficulty in making her petition known to God.

No more hard to tell Him of a want than it was, when her mother lived, to tell her of a desire or longing that possessed her.

"Please, I wants fur Janey or somebody to come to the cellar afore long," she said; "I wants a sup of water werry bad, and somethink to eat. And there is two shillings stored away in mother's old bonnet-box. Janey'd buy lots of wittles wid it. She'd be glad to come, 'cause I'd pay 'er, and I'm werry faint like. You'd 'ave to fetch 'er, please, God, 'cause she's not at 'ome, but away to the paper factory—but you that is real kind won't mind that."

Then Flo lay still and listened, and waited.

She had made her request, and now the answer would come any moment.

Any instant Janey's quick step and the sound of her crutch might be heard outside, and she would look in with her surprised face, to say that notwithstanding her employer's anger she had been fetched away by God Himself, and meant to wait on Flo all day.

And then Flo pictured how quickly she would send Janey out, and how eagerly and willingly, with a whole bright shilling in her greedy little hand, Janey would go; and how she would commission her to buy two large mutton bones for Scamp, and a jug of cold, cold water, and a hice—for Flo felt more thirsty than hungry now—for herself.

For half-an-hour she lay very patient, straining her ears to catch Janey's expected footstep; but when that time, and more than that time passed, and every footfall still went by on the other side, she grew first fretful, then anxious, then doubtful. She had never prayed before, but Mrs Jenks had told her that assuredly when she did pray an answer would come.

Well, she had prayed, she had spoken to God very distinctly, and told Him exactly what she wanted, but no answer came. He was to fetch Janey to her, and no Janey arrived. She had not made a hard request of Him,—she had only begged that a little child, as poor as herself, should come and give her a cup of cold water,—but the child never appeared, and Flo's parched lips were still unmoistened. How strange of Mrs Jenks to tell her God would hear and answer prayer—not a bit of it. At least He would not hear little prayers like hers. Very likely He was too busy listening to the Queen's prayers, and to the great people's prayers. The great, rich people always had the best of everything, why should they not have the best of God's time too?

Or, perhaps—and this was a worse and darker thought—perhaps there was no God; perhaps all Mrs Jenks' talk of yesterday had been just a pretty fable—perhaps wicked Mrs Jenks had been deceiving her all the time! The more Flo considered, the more did she believe this probable.

After all, it was very unlikely that she should have lived so long and never, until yesterday, have heard anything of God and heaven, very unlikely that her mother should have lived her much longer life without knowing of these things! If there was a good time coming, was it likely that her mother should have lived and died without ever hearing of it? Slowly and reluctantly Flo gave up the hope that had brightened and rendered endurable the last four-and-twenty hours. She had no Father in heaven, there was no God! Great sobs broke from the poor little thing, a great agony of grief seemed to rend her very life in two.

She cried her heart out, then again sank into uneasy slumber. All through the long hours of that burning summer day the child lay, now sleeping fitfully, now starting in feverish fright and expectancy. At last, as evening came on, and the air, cooler elsewhere, seemed to grow hotter and hotter in this wretched spot, she started upright, suffering more intense pangs of hunger than she had hitherto known. Be her agony what it might, she must crawl, though on her knees, to the cupboard, where she knew a very old and mouldy crust still was. She rolled herself round off the straw, and then managed to move about two or three feet on the damp floor. But further movement of any description was impossible; the agony of her injured foot was greater than the agony of her hunger; she must stay still—by no possible means could she even get back to her wretched bed. She was past all reasoning or any power of consecutive thought now; she was alive to nothing but her intense bodily suffering. Every nerve ached, every limb burned; her lips were black and parched, her tongue withered in her mouth; what words she uttered in her half-unconsciousness, could hardly be distinguished.

In a much milder degree, it is true, Scamp had also spent an uneasy day—Scamp too had tried to sleep off his great hunger. It was at its height now, as he crouched by Flo's side on the floor. During the time of his captivity he had been well fed, he had left behind him a large platter of broken meat; since Flo had set him free neither bite nor sup had passed his lips. Hungry in the morning, without doubt he was ravenously hungry now, and being of the genus designated "knowing," saw clearly that the time had come for him to set his wits to work. As a rule he partook of Flo's spirit, and was, in truth, an honest dog; but he had a clause in his code of morals which taught him that when no man gave to him, then it would be right for him to help himself.

He had proved the necessity of this rule once or twice in his adventurous life, and had further proved himself a clever and accomplished thief.

He had some butchers' shops in his mind's eye now, some tempting butchers' shops, that he had cunningly noticed when returning home with Flo yesterday.

From those butchers' stalls hung pork chops, and mutton chops, ready cut, all prepared to be received into his capacious jaws. A leisurely walk down the street, a little daring, a sudden spring, and the prize would be his.

Should he go and satisfy this terrible hunger, and feel comfortable once more? Why did he not go? why did he not at once go?

Why? because he had a heart,—not a human heart, which often, notwithstanding all that is said about it, is cold, and

callous, and indifferent enough, but a great faithful dog's heart. With considerable disquietude he had watched Flo all day. Not for nothing had she lain so still, not for nothing had such piercing moans come from her lips, not for nothing did she look so pale, and drawn, and suffering now. Drooping his ears, bending his head, and frowning deeply, he reflected, in dog-fashion, how Flo too had tasted no meat and drank no water that day.

She too was hungry and in a worse plight than him—it was his bounden duty to provide her with food. What should he bring her? A bone?

Bones were delicious, but strange to say neither Flo, nor Dick, nor Jenks ever ate them!

A nice pork or mutton chop: how good they were—too good for a hungry dog to think about patiently, as he reflected that a chop, if he could get it, would be only supper, and not too large a supper, for one.

No, he must give up that butcher's meat in which his spirit delighted and attack the bread shops.

A loaf of bread would satisfy them both!

Rising to his feet, and bestowing on Flo one or two looks of intense intelligence, looks which said as plainly as possible, "I have not an idea of deserting you, I am going for our supper," he started off.

Up the ladder with nimble steps he went, and then, by a succession of cunning dives, along the street, until he came to the butchers' stalls.

Here his demeanour totally changed, he no longer looked timid and cowed: the curish element very prominent when, with his tail between his legs, he had scuttled up Duncan Street, now had vanished; he walked along the centre of the road soberly and calmly, a meditative look in his eyes, like a dog that has just partaken of a good dinner, and is out for a constitutional: not one glance did he cast at the tempting morsels, so near and yet so far.

A baker's cart turned the corner—this was what Scamp wanted, and expected. He joined the cart unknown to the baker's boy, he walked demurely behind, to all appearance guarding the tempting, freshly-baked loaves. His eye was on them and yet not on them.

To the passers-by he looked like a very faithful, good kind of dog, who would fasten his teeth into the leg of any one who attempted to appropriate his master's property.

More than one little hungry street *gamin*, on thieving intent, wished him anything but well as he passed.

The cart stopped at several doors, the bread was delivered, but still no opportunity of securing a supper for himself and Flo arose.

Scamp's lucky star was, however, in the ascendant.

At number 14, Q— Street, Jerry, the baker's boy, had brought Mrs Simpson's little bill, and evinced to that worthy woman a very righteous desire to have it settled.

Mrs Simpson, whose wishes differed from Jerry's, thought mercy, not justice, should be exercised in the matter of bills owing *from* herself, when owing *to* herself the case was different. In the dispute that ensued, Jerry stepped into the house.

Here was Scamp's golden opportunity.

Did he lose it? Not he. Half a moment later he might have been seen at his old game of diving and scuttling, his tail again tucked under his legs, a hangdog look on his face, but victorious for all that, for Jerry's brownest and most crusty loaf was between his teeth.

Woe to any one who attempted to dispossess Scamp of that loaf; his blood would have been up then, and serious battle would have ensued.

In safety he bore it through the perilous road, down the ladder into the cellar, and panting and delighted, looking like one who had done a good deed, which indeed he had, he laid the bread under Flo's nose.

The smell of the good food came sweetly to the nostrils of the starving child, it roused her from the stupor into which she had been sinking, she opened her eyes, and stretched out her hot little hand to clutch at it eagerly. The dog crouched at her side, his lips watering, his teeth aching to set themselves once more into its crisp brown crust.



“God sent me, little Darrell,” said the woman bending over her . . .
“Then there be a God after all,” said Flo. A. 124.

Just then footsteps stopped in reality at the cellar door, footsteps that had no idea of going away, footsteps that meant to come right in and find out about everything.

For a moment Flo’s heart stood still, then gave a great cry of joy, for little Mrs Jenks stood by her side.

“Who sent you?” asked the trembling child.

“God sent me, little Darrell,” said the woman, bending over her with, oh! such a tender, loving face.

“Then there be a God, after all,” said Flo, and in her weakness and gladness she fainted away.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Bed God Lent to Flo.

Yes, there was a God for Flo—a God and a Father.

For some wise and loving reason, all of which she should know some day, He had tested her very sorely, but in her hour of extremest and darkest need He sent her great and unexpected succour, and that night Flo left the gloomy and wretched cellar in Duncan Street, never to return to it. She was unconscious of this herself, and consequently gave the miserable place no farewell looks.

From that long swoon into which she sank she awoke with reason quite gone, so was unaware of anything that happened to her.

She knew nothing of that drive in the cab, her head pillowed on Mrs Jenks’ breast; nothing of that snowy little bed in Mrs Jenks’ room where they laid her; nothing of the kind face of the doctor as he bent over her; nothing of anything but the hard battle with fever and pain, the hard and fierce conflict with death she had got to fight. For a week the doctor and Mrs Jenks both thought that she must die, and during all that time she had never one gleam of reason, never one instant’s interval from severe pain. At the end of that time the crisis came, as it always does, in sleep. She fell asleep one evening moaning with all the exhaustion caused by fever and suffering, but the faithful little woman who sat by her side marked how by degrees her moans grew less, then ceased; her breathing came slower, deeper, calmer.

She was sleeping a refreshing, healing sleep.

Late that night Flo awoke.

Very slowly her eyes, the light of consciousness once more in them, travelled round the apartment. The last thing she remembered was lying very ill and very hungry on the damp cellar floor, the dog's faithful face close to her, and a loaf of bread within reach of her starving lips. Where was she now?

In a pure, white, delicious bed, in a room that might have been a little room out of heaven, so lovely did it look in her eyes. Perhaps she was dead and was in heaven, and God had made her lie down and go to sleep and get rested before she did anything else.

Well, she had not had enough sleep yet, she was dreadfully, dreadfully tired still. She turned her weary head a very little—a dog was lying on the hearth-rug; a dog with the head, and back, and eyes of Scamp, and those eyes were watching her now lazily, but still intently. And seated farther away was Mrs Jenks, darning a boy's sock, while a boy's jacket lay on her lap.

The sight of the little woman's pale face brought back further and older memories to Flo, and she knew that this little room was not part of heaven, but was just Mrs Jenks' beautiful little earthly room.

How had she got here? however had she got here from that cellar where she had lain so ill and unable to move?

Perhaps after eating that bread that Scamp had brought her she had got much stronger, and had remembered, as in a kind of dream, her appointment with Mrs Jenks, and still in a dream, had got up and gone to her, and perhaps when she reached her room she had got very faint again and tired, and Mrs Jenks had put her into her little bed, to rest for a bit. But how long she must have stayed, and how at home Scamp looked! It was night now, quite night, and Mrs Jenks must want to lie down in her own nice pleasant bed; tired and weak as she was, she must go away.

"Please, mum," she said faintly, and her voice sounded to herself thin, and weak, and miles off. In an instant the little pale woman was bending over her. "Did you speak to me, darling?"

"Please, mum," said Flo, "ef you was to 'old me werry tight fur a bit, I'll get up, mum."

"Not a bit of you," said Mrs Jenks, smiling at her, "you'll not get up to-night, nor to-morrow neither. But you're better, ain't you, dearie?"

"Yes, mum, but we mustn't stay no later, we must be orf, Scamp and me. 'Tis werry late indeed, mum."

"Well, so it be," said Mrs Jenks, "'tis near twelve o'clock, and wot you 'as got to do is not to stir, but to drink this, and then go to sleep."

"Ain't this yer bed, mum?" asked Flo, when she had taken something very refreshing out of a china mug which Mrs Jenks held to her lips; "ain't this yer bed as I'm a lyin' in, mum?"

"It is, and it isn't," replied Mrs Jenks. "It ain't just that exactly now, fur God wanted the loan of it from me, fur a few nights, fur one of His sick little ones."

"And am I keepin' the little 'un out o' it, mum?"

"Why no, Flo Darrell, you can hardly be doing that, for you are the very child God wants it fur. He has given me the nursing of you for a bit, and now you have got to speak no more, but to go to sleep." Flo did not sleep at once, but she asked no further questions; she lay very still, a delicious languor of body stealing over her, a sense of protection and repose wrapping her soul in an elysium of joy. There was a God after all, and this God had heard her cry. While she was lying in such deep despair, doubting Him so sorely, He was busy about her, not fetching Janey, who could do so little, but going for Mrs Jenks, who was capable, and kind, and clever. He had given Mrs Jenks full directions about her, had desired her to nurse and take care of her.

She need have no longer any compunction in lying in that soft bed, in receiving all that tender and novel treatment. God meant her to have it—it was all right. When to-morrow, or the day after, she was quite well and rested again she would try and find out more about God, and thank Him in person, if she could, for His great kindness to her, and ever after the memory of that kindness would be something to cheer and help her in her cellar-life.

How much she should like to see God! She felt that God must be beautiful.

Before her confused and dreamy eyes the angels in their white dresses kept moving up and down, and as they moved they sang "Glory, glory, glory."

And Flo knew they were surrounding God, and she tried to catch a glimpse of God Himself through their shining wings. She was half asleep when she saw them, she was soon wholly asleep; she lay in a dreamless, unbroken slumber all night. And this was the beginning of her recovery, and of her knowledge of God. When the doctor came the next day he said she was better, but though the fever had left her, she had still very much pain to suffer. In her fall she had given her foot a most severe sprain, and though the swelling and first agony were gone, yet it often ached, without a moment's intermission, all day and all night. Then her fever had turned to rheumatic, and those little thin bones would feel for many a day the long lie they had had on the damp cellar floor. But Flo's soul was so happy that her body was very brave to bear this severe pain; such a flood of love and gratitude was lighting up her heart, that had the ceaseless aching been worse she would have borne it with patient smiles and uncomplaining lips. For day after day, by little and little, as she was able to bear it, Mrs Jenks told her what she herself called the Story of God.

She began with Adam and Eve, and explained to her what God had done for them; she described that lovely Garden of Eden until Flo with her vivid imagination saw the whole scene; she told how the devil came and tempted Eve, and how Eve fell, and in her fall, dishonesty, and sin, and misery, all came into the world. And because sin was in the

world—and sin could not remain unpunished—Adam and Eve must die, and their children must die, and all men must die. And then she further explained to the listening child how, though they were sinners, the good God still cared for them, and for their children, and for all the people that should come after them; and because He so loved the world He sent His only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

And because little Mrs Jenks loved God and Christ with all the strength of her nature in return, she told the story of the birth of Jesus, of His life, of His death, so tenderly and so solemnly, that the child wept, and only the knowledge that His sufferings were now over, that He was happy now, and that He loved her, could stay her tears. What could she give Him in return? Why, all He asked for, all He needed.

Lying there on Mrs Jenks' little white bed which God had lent her, she offered up to the Father, to the Son, and to the Spirit, the love and obedience of her whole heart and life for time and for eternity.

Chapter Fourteen.

The Best Robe.

It took Flo a long time to get well, but when the autumn came, and the fierce summer heat had passed away, she began to pick up strength, to leave her little white bed, to hobble on her lame foot across the floor, to sit on the crimson hearth-rug and fondle Scamp; and after pondering on the fact for many days, and communicating her feelings on the subject to the dog in Mrs Jenks' absence, she felt that, painful as it would be to them both, they must now once more go out into the world. They must say good-bye to this bright little room and its much-loved inmate, and face once more the old days of poverty and privation.

Not that they ever would be quite the old days back again.

However cold she now was, however hungry she now was, she had a hope which would charm away the hunger and cold, she had a strong Friend who in her hour of extreme need would come again, as He had come once, to her succour.

But must they both go out into the world again?

This question perplexed her very often. That Scamp should love quarters where beef and mutton bones were at least *sometimes* tasted, where his bed was warm, and his life easy, was not to be wondered at. Under his present gentle treatment he was growing into quite a handsome dog, a dog that really did credit to his friends. His ribs no longer stuck out in their former ungainly manner, his coat was thick and good, his eyes bright. Of course he liked the comfortable feelings which accompanied these outward signs of prosperity: still he was not the dog to desert his mistress in her need; and cheerfully, and without a murmur, would he have followed her through hunger and privation, to the world's end.

But the question was not, would he go, but should she take him? Had she, who could do so little for him, any right to take him?

Perhaps when she had him back in her cellar, that dreadful Maxey would again find him, and carry him away to fight with his bull-dogs, and his life would be sacrificed to her selfishness.

The desolate side of the picture, which represented herself in the cellar without Scamp, she resolutely turned away from, and determined that if Mrs Jenks would be willing to keep her dog, she should have him. And Mrs Jenks loved him, and had already paid the dog-tax for him, so it was very unlikely that she would refuse his society.

Flo thought about this for several nights while lying, awake in bed, and for several days when Mrs Jenks was out, and at last one evening she spoke.

"Mrs Jenks, ma'am, is you fond of Scamp?"

Mrs Jenks had just returned after a day's charing, and now, having washed up, and put away the tea-things, and made herself clean and comfortable, she was seated in her little arm-chair, a tiny roll of coloured calico in her lap, and a mysteriously small thimble in her hand. At Flo's question she patted the dog's head, and answered gently—

"Yes, dear, I loves all dumb creatures."

"Then, Mrs Jenks, may be yer'd like fur to keep Scamp?"

"Why, my child, of course you are both on a little visit with me for the present. See, Flo, I am going to teach you needlework—it is what all women should be adepts in, dear."

At another time Flo could not have resisted this appeal, but she was too intensely in earnest now to be put off her subject.

"I means, ma'am," she said, rising to her feet and speaking steadily, "I means, ma'am, wen my little wisit is hover, and you 'as back yer bed, ma'am, as God gave me the loan of—I means then, ma'am, seeing as you loves my dawg, and you'll be kind to 'im, and hall 'ee wants is no bed, but to lie on the rug, why, that you might keep my dawg."

Flo's voice shook so while renouncing Scamp, that the animal himself heard her, and got up and thrust his great awkward head between her hands. She had hard work to restrain her tears, but did so, and kept her eyes steadily

fixed on Mrs Jenks. That little woman sat silent for fully a moment, now returning Flo's gaze, now softly stroking Scamp's back—at last she spoke.

"No, Flo," she said, "I won't part you and Scamp—you love each other, and I think God means you to stay together. He has made you meet, and let you pass through a pretty sharp little bit of life in company, and I have no idea but that He sent you His dumb creature to be a comfort to you, and if that is so, I won't take him away. As long as you stay he shall stay, but when you go back to your cellar he shall go too."

Scamp, whose eyes expressed that he knew all about it, and fully believed that Mrs Jenks understood his character, looked satisfied, and licked her hand, but Flo had still an anxious frown on her face. "Ef you please, ma'am," she said, "'tis better fur me to know how much longer am I to have the loan of your bed, ma'am?"

"Why, Flo, my dear, Mrs Potter, who lent me the mattress I sleeps on, sent me down word that she must have it to-morrow morning for her niece, who is coming to live with her, so I'll want my bed, Flo, and 'tis too little for both of us." Mrs Jenks paused, but Flo was quite silent.

"Well, dear," she said cheerfully, "we'll all three lie warm and snug to-night, and we needn't meet to-morrow's troubles half way. Now come over, child, and I'll give you instruction in needlework, 'tis an hart as all women should cultivate."

Flo, still silent and speechless, went over and received the needle into her clumsy little fingers, and after a great many efforts, succeeded in threading it, and then she watched Mrs Jenks work, and went through two or three spasmodic stitches herself, and to all appearance looked a grave, diligent little girl, very much interested in her occupation. And Mrs Jenks chatted to her, and told her what a good trade needlework was, and for all it met so much abuse, and was thought so poor in a money-making way, yet still good, plain workers, not machinists, could always command their price, and what a tidy penny she had made by needlework in her day.

And to all this Flo replied in monosyllables, her head hanging, her eyes fixed on her work.

At last Mrs Jenks gave her a needle freshly threaded, and a strip of calico, and bade her seat herself on the hearth-rug and draw her needle in and out of the calico to accustom her to its use, and she herself took up a boy's jacket, and went on unpicking and opening the seams, and letting it out about an inch in all directions.

Night after night she was engaged over this work, and it always interested Flo immensely: for Mrs Jenks took such pains with it, she unpicked the seams and smoothed them out with such clever fingers, then she stitched them up again with such fine, beautiful stitching, and when that was done, she invariably ironed them over with a nice little iron, which she used for no other purpose, so that no trace of the old stitching could be seen. She had a very short time each day to devote to this work, seldom more than ten minutes, but she did it as though she delighted in it, as though it did her heart and soul good to touch that cloth, to draw those careful, beautiful stitches in and out of it. And every night, while so engaged, she told Flo the story of the Prodigal Son.

She began it this night as usual, without the little girl looking up or asking for it.

"Once there was a man who had two sons—they were all the children he had, and he held them very dear. One—the eldest—was a steady lad, willing to abide by his father, and be guided by him, but the other was a wild, poor fellow, and he thought the home very small and narrow, and the world a big place, and he thought he'd like a bit of fun, and to see foreign parts.

"So he asked his father for all the money he could spare, and his father gave him half his living. And then the poor foolish boy set off, turning his back on all the comforts of home, and thinking now he'd see life in earnest; and when he got to the far-off lands, wild companions, thieves, and such, came round him, and between them the good bit of money his father had given him melted away, and he had not a penny to call his own. Then he began to be hungry, to want sore, and no man gave to him, and no man pitied him; and then, sitting there in the far country, came back to the poor, desolate, foolish lad the thoughts of home, and the nice little house, and the father's love, and he thought if he was there again, why, he'd never be dying of hunger, for in the father's house even the servants had enough and to spare.

"And he thought, why should he not go back again? and he said to himself, 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be thy son.'

"And he got up and went back to his father. But the loving father was looking out for him, and when he saw him coming over the hill-top, he ran to meet him, and threw his arms about him; and the son said—

"'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.'

"But the father said, 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and let us make a feast and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.'"

Night after night Flo had listened to this story, always with a question at the top of her lips, but never until to-night had she courage to put it.

"Was the best robe, a jacket and trousers and little weskit, ma'am?"

"Very like," said Mrs Jenks, bending over a fresh seam she was beginning to unpick.

"But you hasn't no lad comin' back fur that 'ere jacket, ma'am?"

Mrs Jenks was silent for fully two minutes, her work had fallen from her hands, her soft, gentle eyes looked afar.

"Yes, Flo dear," she said, "I have such a lad."

"Wot's 'is name, ma'am?"

"Willie," said Mrs Jenks, "Willie's 'is name—leastways 'is home name."

"And is he a comin' back any day, ma'am? Is you a lookin' hout o' the winder fur 'im any day?"

"No, Flo, he won't come any day, he won't come fur a bit."

"Wen 'is best robe is ready, ma'am?"

"Yes; when he comes it shall be ready."

"Ow soon is 'ee like to walk in, ma'am?"

"I don't know exact," said Mrs Jenks, "but I'll look out fur him in the spring, when the little crocuses and snowdrops is out—he's very like to turn up then."

As Mrs Jenks spoke she folded the jacket and put it tidily away, and then she unbandaged Flo's foot and rubbed some strengthening liniment on it, and undressed the little girl and put her into bed, and when she had tucked her up and kissed her, and Flo hail rewarded her with a smile breaking all over her little white, thin face, something in the expression of that, face caused her to bend down again and speak suddenly.

"God has given me a message for you, child, and forgetful old woman that I am, I was near going to sleep without yer 'aving it."

"Wot's the message, mum?"

"The message is this, straight from God Himself—'Certainly I will be with thee.' Do you know what that means, my child?"

"I can part guess, ma'am."

"Ay, I dare say you can part guess, but you may as well know the whole sweet meaning of it. 'Tis this, Flo Darrell—*wherever* you be, God will be with you. Back in your cellar, dark as it is, He'll come and keep you company. If you stay with me, why He's here too. When you go to sleep His arm is under your head; when you walk abroad, He's by your side—He's with you now, and He'll be with you for ever. When you come to die He'll be with you. You need never fear for nothing, for God will be always with you. He says 'Certainly,' and His certainly, is as big, and wide, and strong as eternity, Flo Darrell."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Flo very softly, and then Mrs Jenks went and lay down on her mattress, and was presently sleeping the sweet and heavy sleep of the hard worker.

But Flo could not sleep—she lay awake, feeling the soft white sheets with her fingers, looking with her brown eyes all round the pretty room. How bright, and pure, and fresh it all looked, with the firelight flickering over the furniture, to the beauty-loving child.

She was taking farewell of it then—she must go away to-morrow; back again to their cellar the dog and she must go—away from the sunlight of this bright little home, into the homeless darkness of their Duncan Street life.

She had not expected it quite so soon, she had thought that God would give her a little more notice, a little longer time to prepare, before he asked her to return that comfortable bed to Mrs Jenks. Well, the time had come for her to do it, and she must do it with a good grace, she must not show dear Mrs Jenks even half how sorry she was.

That little woman had done so much for her, had changed and brightened her whole existence, had been specially chosen by God Himself to do all this for her, to save her life.

Not for worlds would she look as though she expected more from Mrs Jenks. She must go away to-morrow, very, very thankful, and not too sad, otherwise the little woman would feel uncomfortable about her. She resolved that in the morning she would wear quite a cheerful face, and talk brightly of all people *had* made by translating. She would walk away when the time came, as briskly as her lame foot would permit, Scamp wagging his tail, and supposing he was only going for an ordinary walk, by her side.

Then they would reach the cellar, and Janey's mother, who kept the key, would open it for them, and, perhaps Janey herself would come down and listen to all Flo's wonderful stories.

Well; these were for to-morrow, to-night she must say farewell; to-night, with eyes too sad, and heart too heavy for childish tears, she must look around at this cleanliness, this comfort, this luxury for the last time.

Flo was a poor child, the child of low people, but she had a refined nature, a true lady's heart beat in that little breast. All the finer instincts, all the cravings of a gentle and high spirit, were hers. Pretty things were a delight to her, the sound of sweet music an ecstasy. Born in another sphere, she might have been an artist, she might have been a musician, but never, under any circumstances, could she have led a common-place life.

The past six weeks, notwithstanding her anxiety and sorrow about Dick, had been one bright dream to her. The perfect neatness, the little rough, but no longer tattered, dress Mrs Jenks had made for her, the sense of repose, the lovely stories, had made the place little short of Paradise to the child.

And now by to-morrow night it would all be over, and the old dark life of poverty, hunger, and dirt would begin again.

As Flo was thinking this, and, leaning on her elbow, was looking sadly around, suddenly the verse Mrs Jenks had said good-night to her with darted like a ray of brightest sunshine into her soul.

“Certainly, I will be with thee.”

What a fool she was, to think Janey’s company necessary, to have any fear of loneliness. God would be with her.

Though unseen by her (she knew that much about God now), He would still be by her side. Was it likely, when He was down with her in the dark cellar, that He would allow her to want, or even have things very hard for her?

Or suppose He did allow her to go through privations? suppose He asked her to bear a few short, dark days for Him down here, He would give her a for-ever and for-ever of bright days, by and by.

After a time she grew weary, and her heavy lids closed, and she went to sleep, but her face was no longer sad, it was bright with the thought of God.

Chapter Fifteen.

Miss Mary.

The next morning Flo watched Mrs Jenks very narrowly, wondering and hoping much that she would show some sorrow at the thought of the coming parting. A shade, even a shade, of regret on the little woman’s face would have been pleasing to Flo; it would have given her undoubted satisfaction to know that Mrs Jenks missed her, or would be likely to miss her, ever so little. But though she watched her anxiously, no trace of what she desired was visible on the bright little woman’s features. She was up earlier than usual, and looked to Flo rather more brisk and happy than usual. She went actively about her work, singing under her breath for fear of disturbing Flo, whom she fancied was still asleep, some of the hymns she delighted in.

“Christ is my Saviour and my Friend,
My Brother and my Love,
My Head, my Hope, my Counsellor,
My Advocate above,”

sang Mrs Jenks, and while she sang she dusted, and tidied, and scrubbed the little room; and as she polished the grate, and lit the small fire, and put the kettle on for breakfast, she continued—

“Christ Jesus is the heaven of heaven;
My Christ, what shall I call?
Christ is the first, Christ is the last,
My Christ is all in all.”

No, Mrs Jenks was not sorry about anything, that was plain; there was a concealed triumph in her low notes which almost brought tears to the eyes of the listening child. Perhaps she would have sobbed aloud, and so revealed to Mrs Jenks what was passing in her mind, had not that little woman done something which took off her attention, and astonished her very much. When she had completed all her usual preparations for breakfast, she took off her old working gown, and put on her best Sunday-go-to-meeting dress.

This surprised Flo so utterly that she forgot she had been pretending to be asleep and sat up on her elbow to gaze at her.

Over the best dress she pinned a snowy kerchief, and putting on finally a clean widow’s cap, drew up the blinds and approached Flo’s side.

“I’ll just see about that poor foot now,” she said, “and then, while I am frying the herring for breakfast, you can wash and dress yourself, dearie.”

But poor Flo could not help wondering, as Mrs Jenks in her brisk clever way unbandaged her foot, and applied that pleasant strengthening lotion, who would do it for her to-morrow morning, or would she have any lotion to put. She longed to find courage to ask Mrs Jenks to allow her to take away what was left in the bottle, perhaps by the time it was finished her foot would be well.

And Flo knew perfectly, how important it was for her, unless she was utterly to starve, that that lame foot should get well. She remembered only too vividly what hard times Janey, even with a father and mother living, had to pull along with her lame foot, but she could not find courage to ask for the lotion, and Mrs Jenks, after using a sufficient quantity, corked up the remainder and put it carefully away.

“There’s an improvement here,” said the little woman, touching the injured ankle. “There’s more nerve, and strength, and firmness. You’ll be able to walk to-day.”

“I’ll try, ma’am,” said Flo.

“So you shall, and you can lean on me—I’ll bear your weight. Now get up, dearie.”

As Flo dressed herself she felt immensely comforted. It was very evident from Mrs Jenks’ words, that she intended

going with her to her cellar, she herself would take her back to her wretched home.

To do this she must give up her day's charring, so Flo knew that her going away was of some importance to the little woman, and the thought, as I have said, comforted her greatly.

She dressed herself quickly and neatly, and after kneeling, and repeating "Our Father" quite through very softly under her breath, the three—the woman, child, and dog—sat down to breakfast. It would be absurd to speak of it in any other way.

In that household Scamp ate with the others, he drew up as gravely to every meal as Mrs Jenks did herself.

His eyes were on a level with the table, and he looked so at home, so assured of his right to be there, and withal so anxious and expectant, and he had such a funny way of cocking his ears when a piece of nice fried herring was likely to go his way, that he was a constant source of mirth and pleasure to the human beings with whom he resided.

Mrs Jenks was one of the most frugal little women in the world; never a crumb was wasted in her little home, but she always managed to have something savoury for every meal, and the savoury things she bought were rendered more so by her judicious cooking. Her red herrings, for instance, just because she knew where to buy them, and how to dress them, did not taste at all like poor Flo's red herrings, cooked against the bars, and eaten with her fingers in the Duncan Street cellar.

So it was with all her food; it was very plain, very inexpensive, but of its kind it was the best, and was so nicely served that appetites far more fastidious than Flo's would have enjoyed it.

On this morning, however, the three divided their herring and sipped their tea (Scamp had evinced quite a liking for tea) in silence, and when it was over, and Flo was wondering how soon she could break the ice and ask Mrs Jenks *when* she meant to take her to Duncan Street, she was startled by the little woman saying to her in her brisk and brightest tones—

"I wonder, child, whether I'd best trim up that old bonnet of your mother's for you to wear, or will you go with yer little head exposed to the sun?"

"The bonnet's very old, that's certain, but then 'tis something of a protection, and the sun's 'ot."

"Please, ma'am," said Flo, "I can walk werry well wid my head bare; but ef you doesn't mind I'd like to carry 'ome the bonnet, fur it was mother's Sunday best, it wor."

"Lor, child, you're not going home yet awhile, you've got to go and pay a visit with me. Here, show me the bonnet—I'll put a piece of decent brown upon it, and mend it up." Which Mrs Jenks did, and with her neat, capable fingers transformed it into by no means so grotesque-looking an object.

Then when it was tied on Flo's head they set off.

"A lady wishes to see you, Flo, and she wishes to see Scamp too," explained Mrs Jenks; and calling the dog, they went slowly out of the court.

Flo had very little time for wonder, for the lady in question lived but a few doors away, and notwithstanding her slow and painful walking she got to her house in a very few moments.

It was a tiny house, quite a scrap of a house to be found in any part of the middle of London—a house back from its neighbours, with little Gothic windows, and a great tree sheltering it. How it came to pass that no railway company, or improvement company, or company of something else, had not pounced upon it and pulled it down years ago remained a marvel; however, there it stood, and to its hall door walked Mrs Jenks, Flo, and Scamp, now.

The door was opened by a neat little parlour-maid, who grinned from ear to ear at sight of Mrs Jenks.

"Is your mistress at home, Annie?"

"That she is, ma'am, and looking out for you. You're all to come right in, she says—the dog and all."

So Flo found herself in a pretty hall, bright with Indian matting, and some fresh ferns towering up high in a great stone jar of water.

"We was in the country yesterday, ma'am, Miss Mary and me, and have brought back flowers, and them 'igh green things enough to fill a house with 'em," explained the little handmaid as she trotted on in front, down one flight of stairs and up another, until she conducted them into a long low room, rendered cool and summery by the shade of the great tree outside. This room to-day was, as Annie the servant expressed it, like a flower garden. Hydrangeas, roses, carnations, wild flowers, ferns, stood on every pedestal, filled twenty, thirty vases, some of rarest china, some of commonest delf, but cunningly hid now by all kinds of delicate foliage. It was a strange little house for the midst of the city, a strange little bower of a room, cool, sweet-scented, carrying those who knew the country miles away into its shadiest depths—a room furnished with antique old carvings and odd little black-legged spindle chairs.

On one of the walls hung a solitary picture, a water-colour framed without margin, in a broad gilt frame.

A masterpiece of art it was—of art, I say? something far beyond art—genius.

It made the effect of the charming little room complete, and not only carried one to the country, but straight away at once to the seashore. Those who saw it thought of the beech on summer evenings, of the happy days when they

were young. It was a picture of waves—waves dancing and in motion, waves with the white froth foaming on them, and the sunlight glancing on their tops. No other life in the picture, neither ship nor bird, but the waves were so replete with their own life that the salt fresh breeze seemed to blow on your face as you gazed.

The effect was so marvellous, so great and strong, that Flo and Mrs Jenks both neglected the flowers, only taking them in as accessories, and went and stood under the picture.

“Ah! there’s the sea,” said Mrs Jenks with a great sigh, and a passing cloud, not of pain, but of an old grief, on her face.

“The sea shall give up her dead,” said a young voice by her side, and turning quickly, Flo saw one of the most peculiar, and perhaps one of the most beautiful, women she had ever looked at. Was she old? The hair that circled her low forehead was snowy white. Was she young? Her voice was round, flexible, full of music, rich with all the sympathy of generous youth.

She might be thirty—forty—fifty—any age. She had a story—who hasn’t?

She had met with sorrow—who hasn’t? But she had conquered and risen above sorrow, as her pale, calm, un wrinkled face testified. She was a brave woman, a succourer of the oppressed, a friend in the house of trouble, or mourning, as the pathetic, dark grey eyes, which looked out at you from under their straight black brows, declared. Long afterwards she told Flo in half-a-dozen simple words her history.

“God took away from me all, child—father—mother—lover—home. He made me quite empty, and then left me so for a little time, to let me feel what it was like: but when I had tasted the full bitterness, He came and filled me with Himself—brim full of Himself. Then I had my mission from Him. Go feed my sheep—go feed my lambs. Is it not enough?”

“You like my picture, Mrs Jenks,” she said now, “and so does the child,” touching Flo as she spoke with the tips of her white fingers. “Come into this room and I will show you another—there.”

She led the way into a little room rendered dark, not by the great tree, but by Venetian blinds. Over the mantel-piece was another solitary picture—again a water-colour.

Some cows, four beautifully sketched, ease-loving creatures, standing with their feet in a pool of clear water: sedgy, marshy ground behind them, a few broken trees, and a ridge of low hills in the background—over all the evening sky.



“That picture,” said the lady, “is called ‘Repose.’”—A. 151.

“That picture,” said the lady, “is called ‘Repose,’—to me it is repose with stagnation; I like my waves better.”

"And yet, Miss Mary," replied the widow, "how restful and trustful the dumb creatures look! I think they read us a lesson."

"So they do, Mrs Jenks; all His works read us a lesson—but come back to my waves, I want their breezes on my face, the day is stifling."

She led the way back into the first room, and seated herself on a low chair.

"This is your little girl, and this the dog—Scamp, you call him. Why did you give him so outlandish a name? he does not deserve it, he is a good faithful dog, there is nothing scampish about him, I see that in his face."

"Yes, ma'am, he's as decent conducted and faithful a cretur as ever walked. Wot scamp he is, is only name deep, not natur deep."

"Well, that is right—What's in a name? Come here, Scamp, poor fellow, and you, little Flo, you come also; I have a great deal to say to you and your dog." The child and the dog went up and stood close to the kind face. Miss Mary put her arm round Flo, and laid one shapely white hand on Scamp's forehead.

"So God has taken away your little bed," she said to the child, "and you don't know where to sleep to-night."

"Oh! yes, mum, I does," said Flo in a cheerful voice, for she did not wish Mrs Jenks to think she missed her bed very much. "Scamp and me, we 'as a mattress in hour cellar."

Miss Mary smiled.

"Now, Flo," she said, "I really don't wish to disappoint you, but I greatly fear you are mistaken. You may have a mattress, but you have no mattress in number 7, Duncan Street, for that cellar, as well as every other cellar in the street, has been shut up by the police three weeks ago. They are none of them fit places for human beings to live in."

If Miss Mary, sitting there in her summer muslin, surrounded by every comfort, thought that Flo would rejoice in the fact that these places, unfit for any of God's creatures, were shut up, she was vastly mistaken. Dark and wretched hole of a place as number 7, Duncan Street, was, it was there her mother had died, it was there she and Dick had played, and struggled, and been honest, and happy. Poor miserable shred of a home, it was the only home she had ever possessed the only place she had a right to call her own.

Now that it was gone, the streets or the Adelphi arches stared her in the face. Veritable tears came to her eyes, and in her excitement and distress, she forgot her awe of the first lady who had ever spoken to her.

"Please, mum, ef the cellar is shut up, wot 'ave come of my little bits o' duds, my mattress, and table, and little cobbler's stool?—that little stool wor worth sixpence any day, it stood so steady on its legs. Wot 'ave come o' them, mum, and wot's to come o' Scamp and me, mum?"

"Ah!" said the lady more kindly than ever, "that is the important question, what is to become of you and Scamp? Well, my dear, God has a nice little plan all ready for you both, and what you have to do is to say yes to it."

"And I 'ave brought you here to learn all about it, Flo," said Mrs Jenks, nodding and smiling at her.

Then Miss Mary made the child seat herself on a low stool by her side, and unfolded to her a wonderful revelation. She, Flo, was no stranger to this lady. Mrs Jenks once a week worked as char-woman in this house, and had long ago told its mistress of her little charge; and Miss Mary was charmed and interested, and wanted to buy Scamp, only Mrs Jenks declared that that would break Flo's heart. So instead she had contributed something every week to the keep of the two.

Now she wished to do something more. Miss Mary Graham was not rich, and long ago every penny of her spare money had been appropriated in various charitable ways, but about a fortnight ago a singular thing had happened to her. She received through the post a cheque for a small sum with these words inside the envelope—

"To be spent on the first little homeless London child you care to devote it to."

The gift, sent anonymously, seemed to point directly to Flo, and Miss Graham resolved that she should reap the benefit.

Her plan for her was this,—she and Scamp were to live with Mrs Jenks for at least a year, and during that time Mrs Jenks was to instruct Flo in reading and writing, in fine sewing, and in all the mysteries of household work and cooking, and when Flo was old enough and strong enough, and if she turned out what they earnestly trusted she would turn out, she was to come to Miss Mary as her little servant, for Miss Mary expected that in a year or two Annie would be married and have a home of her own.

"Does this plan suit you, Flo? Are you willing when the time comes to try to be a faithful little servant to any master or mistress you may be with?" Whatever Flo's feelings may have been, her answer was a softly, a very softly spoken —

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you know how you are to learn?"

"No, ma'am; but Mrs Jenks, she knows."

"Mrs Jenks knows certainly, and so may you. You must be God's little servant first—you must begin by being God's little servant to-day, and then when the time comes you will be a good and faithful servant to whoever you are with."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Flo, a look of reverence, of love, of wonder at the care God was taking of her, stealing over her downcast face. Miss Mary saw the look, and rose from her seat well satisfied, she had found the child her Heavenly Father meant her to serve.

"But please, mum," said Flo, "does yer know about Dick?"

"Yes, my dear, I know all about your little brother. Mrs Jenks has told me Dick's story as well as yours. And I know this much, which perhaps you may not know; his stealing was a bad thing, but his being taken up and sent, not to prison, but to the good reformatory school where he now is, was the best thing that could happen to him. I have been over that school, Flo, and I know that the boys in it are treated well, and are happy. They are taught a trade, and are given a fair start in life.

"Many a boy such as Dick owes his salvation to the school he now is in.

"By the way, did you notice Annie, my little servant?"

"Yes, ma'am," and a smile came to Flo's face at the remembrance of the bright, pleasant-looking handmaiden.

"She has given me leave to tell you something, Flo; something of her own history.

"Once my dear, faithful Annie was a little London thief—a notorious little London thief. She knew of no God, she knew of nothing good—she was not even as fortunate as you and Dick were, for she had no mother to keep her right. When not quite ten years old she was concerned in a daring city robbery—she was taken up—convicted—and at last sentenced, first for a month to Wandsworth House of Correction, afterwards for four years to the girls' reformatory school at that place.

"She has often told me what happened to her on the day she arrived at this school. She went there hating every one, determined never to change her ways, to remain for ever hardened and wicked.

"The matron called her aside and spoke to her thus:

"I know what is said of you, but I do not believe half of it—*I am going to trust you.*

"Here is a five-pound note; take this note to such a shop, and bring me back four sovereigns in gold, and one in silver."

"That noble trust saved the girl. At that moment, as she herself said, all inclination for thieving utterly left her. (A fact.) From that day to this she has never touched a farthing that is not strictly her own. You see what she is now in appearance; when you know her better, you will see what she is in character—a true Christian—a noble woman. All the nobler for having met and conquered temptation."

Miss Mary paused, then added softly, "What she has become, Dick may become."

When Mrs Jenks, and Flo, and Scamp came home that morning, Flo, who after all that had happened felt sure that nothing ever *could* surprise her again, still could not help, when she entered the neat little room—her *real* home now—starting back and folding her hands in mute astonishment. The rough-looking, untidy mattress was gone, and in its place stood a tiny, bright-looking iron bedstead, on which the smallest of snowy beds was made up.

Over the bedstead, pinned against the wall, was a card with these words printed on it—

"GOD'S GIFT TO FLO."

Chapter Sixteen.

Bright Days.

And now began a happy time in a hitherto very dark little life.

All her cares, her anxieties for Dick even, swept away, Flo had stepped into a state of existence that to her was one of luxury.

The effect on many a nature, after the first burst of thankfulness was over, would have been a hardening one. The bright sunshine of prosperity, without any of the rain of affliction, would have dried up the fair soil, withered, and caused to die, the good seed.

But on Flo the effect was different; she never forgot one thing, and this memory kept all else straight within her. In counting up her mercies, she never forgot that it was God who gave them to her; and in return she gave Him, not love as a duty, but love rising free and spontaneous out of a warm, strong heart.

And He whom she loved she longed to hear more of, and Mrs Jenks, whose love for God and faith in God was as great as her own, loved to tell her of Him.

So these two, in their simple, unlearned way, held converse often together on things that the men of this world so seldom allude to, and doubtless they learned more about God than the men of this world, with all their talents and

cultivated tastes, ever attain to.

It was Mrs Jenks' simple plan to take all that the Bible said in its literal and exact meaning, and Flo and she particularly delighted in its descriptions (not imagery to them) of Heaven.

And when Mrs Jenks read to Flo out of the 21st and 22nd chapters of the Revelation, the child would raise her clear brown eyes to the autumn sky, and see with that inner sense, so strong in natures like hers, the gates of pearl and golden streets. God lived there—and many people who once were sad and sorrowful in this world, lived there—and it was the lovely happy home where she hoped she and Dick should also live some day.

"And you too, Mrs Jenks, and that poor lad of yours," she would say, laying her head caressingly on the little woman's knee.

But Mrs Jenks rather wondered why Flo never mentioned now that other Jenks, her namesake, who was wearing out his slow nine months' imprisonment in the Wandsworth House of Correction.

Once Flo had been very fond of him, and his name was on her lips twenty times a day, now she never spoke of him.

Why was this? Had she forgotten Jenks? Hardly likely.

She was such a tender, affectionate little thing, interested even in that poor prodigal lad, whose best robe would soon be as ready, and as bright, and fresh, and new, as Mrs Jenks' fingers could make it.

No, Flo had not forgotten Jenks, but she had found out a secret. Without any one telling her, she had guessed *who* the lad was who was expected back in the spring; who that jacket, and trousers, and vest were getting ready for. A certain likeness in the eyes, a certain play of the lips, had connected poor Jenks in prison with Mrs Jenks in this bright, home-like, little room. She knew they were mother and son, but as Mrs Jenks had not mentioned it herself, she would never pretend that she had discovered her secret. But Flo had one little fear—she was not quite sure that Jenks *would* come home. She knew nothing of his previous history, but in her own intercourse with him she had learned enough of his character to feel sure that the love for thieving was far more deeply engrafted into his heart than his gentle, trusting little mother had any idea of. When he was released from prison, bad companions would get round him, and he would join again in their evil ways.

He could not now harm Dick, who was safe at that good school for two or three years, but in their turn others might harm him, and the jacket and trousers might lie by unused, and the crocuses and snowdrops wither, and still Jenks might not come. He might only join in more crime, and go back again to prison, and in the end break his mother's gentle, trusting heart.

Now Flo wondered could *she* do anything to bring the prodigal home. She thought of this a great deal; she lay in her little white bed, the bed God had given her, and told God about it, and after a time a plan came into her head.

Three times a week she went to Miss Mary's pleasant house to be taught knitting by Annie, and reading and writing by that lady herself, and on one of these occasions she unfolded her idea to this kind listener, and between them they agreed that it should be carried out.

Chapter Seventeen.

Two Locks of Hair.

It was Sunday morning at Wandsworth House of Correction—a fair, late autumnal morning. The trees had on their bright, many-coloured tints, the sky above was flecked with soft, greyish-white clouds, and tender with the loveliest blue. The summer heat was over, but the summer fragrance still dwelt in the air; the summer beauty, subdued, but perhaps more lovely than when in its prime, still lingered on the fair landscape of Wandsworth common.

In the prison the walls were gleaming snowy white, but so they gleamed when the frost and snow sparkled a little whiter outside, when the hot breath of fiercest summer seemed to weigh down the air.

The symbols of the four seasons—the leafless trees, the tender, pale green trees, the drooping, heavily-laden, sheltering trees, the trees clothed in purple and gold—were unknown to those within the House of Correction.

The prisoners saw no trees from the high windows of their cells. When they walked out in that walled-in enclosure, each prisoner treading in those dreary circles five feet apart from his fellow, they saw a little withered grass, and a little sky, blue, grey, or cloudy, but no trees.

The trees are only for the free, not for men and women shut in for the punishment of their crimes.

So the seasons are felt in the temperature, but unknown to the sense of sight.

On this particular Sunday morning a warder might have been seen pacing slowly down the dismal corridor which divides the dark and light punishment cells.

He was whistling a low tune under his breath, and thinking how by and by he should be off duty, and could enjoy his Sunday dinner and go for a walk across the common with his wife and the child. He thought of his Sunday treat a great deal, as was but natural, and just a little of the prisoners, whom he apostrophised as "Poor Brutes." Not that he felt unkindly towards them—very far from that; he was, as the world goes, a humane man, but it was incomprehensible to him how men and boys, when they *were* confined in Wandsworth, did not submit to the rules of

the place, and make themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, instead of defying everything, and getting themselves shut up in those dreary dark cells.

"And this willan 'ave been in fur four days and nights now," he soliloquised, as he stopped at the door of one. "Well, I'm real glad 'is punishment is hover, though 'ee's as 'ardened a young chap as hever see daylight."

He unlocked the double doors, which, when shut, not only excluded all sound, but every ray of light, and went in.

A lad was cowering up in one corner of the wooden bedstead—a lad with a blanched face, and eyes glowing like two coals. The warder went over and laid his hand on his shoulder—he started at the touch, and shivered from head to foot with either rage or fear.

"Now then, G.2.14," in a kindly voice, "your punishment's hover for *this* time, and I 'opes you'll hact more sensible in future—you may get back to your cell."

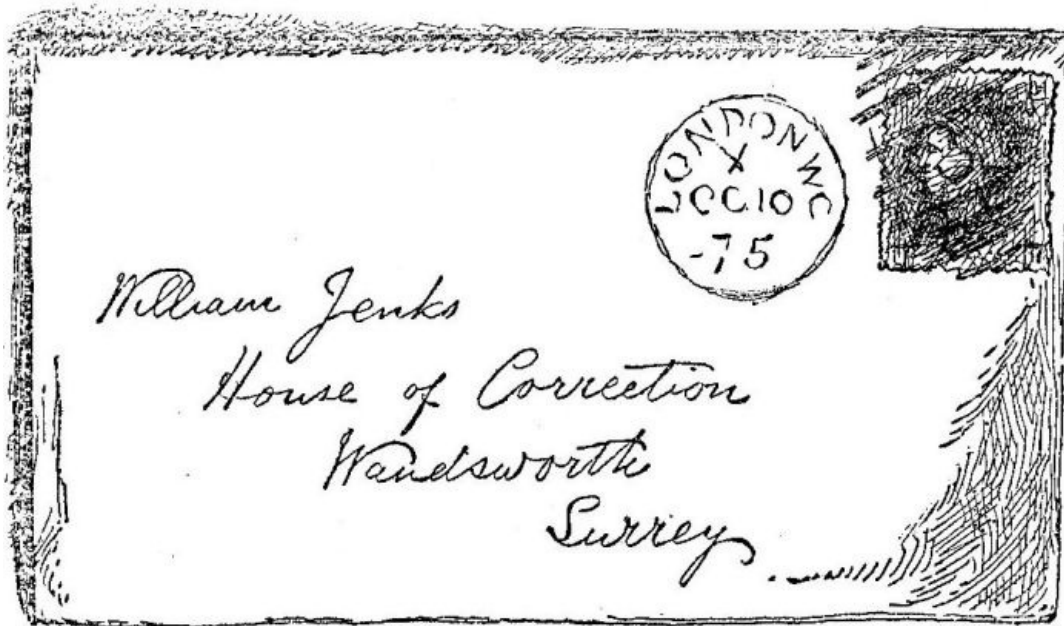
The lad staggered blindly to his feet, and the warder, catching hold of him, arranged his mask—a piece of dark grey cloth, having eyelet holes, and a tiny bit of alpaca inserted for the mouth—over his face.

On the back of his jacket were painted in white letters two inches long, H.C.W.S., which initials stood for House of Correction, Wandsworth, Surrey.

Staying his staggering steps with his strong arm, the warder conducted him back to his cell, into which he locked him.

Then the boy, with a great groan, or sigh of relief, threw up his mask, and looked about the little room. He had tasted nothing but bread and water for the last four days, and his Sunday breakfast, consisting of a pint of oatmeal gruel and six ounces of bread, stood ready for his acceptance, and by the side of the bread was—what?

Something that made him forget his great bodily hunger, and start forward with a ray of joy breaking all over his sullen face. This was what he saw.



A letter was here—a letter ready for him to open.

He had heard that once in three months the Wandsworth prisoners were allowed to write and receive letters. This rule he had heard with indifference—in all his life he had never had a letter—what matter was it to him whoever else got them.

He knew how to read and write. Long ago, when a little lad, he had learned these accomplishments—he could also decipher the writing of other people, and spelt his own name now on the little oblong packet which had found its way into his cell.

Yes, it was a *bonâ fide* letter, it had a stamp on it, and the London post-mark. It was a *bonâ fide* letter, and his letter also—a letter directed to him. He gazed at it for a moment or two, then took it up and handled it carefully, and turned it round, and examined the back of it, and held it up to the light—then he put it down, and took a turn the length of his cell.

Unless we are quite dunned by creditors, and mean never to open anything that is sent to us by the post, we have a kind of interest in that sharp double knock, and a kind of pleasure in opening our various epistles.

However many we get, our pulses *do* beat just a quarter of a shade quicker as we unfasten the envelope. There is never any saying what news the contents may announce to us; perhaps a fortune, an advantageous proposal, the birth of a new relation, the death of an old friend, that appointment we never thought to have obtained, that prize we never hoped to have won: or perhaps, the loss of that prize, the filling up by another man of that appointment. A letter may bring us any possible or impossible news, therefore at all times these little missives, with the Queen's

head on them, are interesting.

But what if we are in prison, if we have just been confined for days and nights in the dark cell, fed on bread and water, sentenced to the horrors and silence of the tomb; if bad thoughts, and hardening thoughts, and maddening thoughts, if Satan and his evil spirits, have been bearing us company? What, if we are only addressed when spoken to at all as a number, and our human name, our Christian name, is never pronounced to us; and what if we have been going through this silent punishment, this unendurable confinement, for months, and we feel that it is right and just we should be so punished, right and just that all men should forsake us, and pass us by, and forget us—and all the time, though we know that justice is dealing with us, and we ought neither to cry out nor to complain, we know and feel also, that seven devils are entering into us, and our last state will be worse, far worse than our first?

And then, when we come back from the darkness, and feel again the blessed light of day, and the pure breeze of nature—coming in through the open window of our cell—is fanning our face, and though our spirit is still burning with mad and rebellious passions, our body is grateful for the relief of God's own gifts of light and air, then we, who never before, never in our happiest days, received even a halfpenny wrapper's worth through the post, see a letter—our first letter—pure, and thick, and white, awaiting us—a little dainty parcel bearing our baptismal name, and the name, unspotted by any crime, which our father bequeathed to us, lying ready for our acceptance?

Jenks had returned to his cell after all this severe punishment as hardened and bad a lad as ever walked—sullen, disobedient, defiant. The kind of boy whom chaplains, however tender-hearted, and however skilful in their modes of dealing with other men and boys, would regard as hopeless, as past any chance of reform.

He gazed at the letter, so unexpected, so welcome. At first he was excited, agitated, then he grew calm, a look of satisfaction changed utterly the whole expression of his face.

Somebody in that great, wide, outer world had not forgotten him. He sat down and ate his breakfast with appetite and relish; he could enjoy things again; he was still William Jenks to somebody—the boy felt human once more.

But he would not open his letter at once—not he. No irreverent fingers, no hasty fingers, should tear that precious envelope asunder.

When a man only gets a letter after three months of absolute silence he is never over-hasty in perusing its contents. The sweets of anticipation are very good, and must not be too quickly got over, and when a letter is once opened its great charm is more or less gone.

But the first letter of all, the first letter received in one's entire life, and received in prison, must be made a very long pleasure indeed.

Jenks had hitherto found Sunday at Wandsworth the most unendurable day of the seven: the slow hours seemed really leaden-weighted.

On other days he had his oakum to pick, his routine of labour to get through—on this day, with the exception of chapel and meals, he had nothing whatever wherewith to wile away the long hours. True, the chaplain supplied him with books, but Jenks could not read well enough to take pleasure in reading for its own sake, and never was there a nature less studiously inclined than his.

So on Sunday he thought his darkest thoughts, and hatched his worst plots for the future, and prepared himself for the week of rebellion and punishment which invariably ensued.

But, on this Sunday all would be different, his letter would give him employment and satisfaction for many hours. He grudged the time he must spend in chapel, he wanted the whole day to hold his little missive, to gaze at the cover, to put it up to the light, to spell out the beloved direction, after a time to spell out the contents. First of all he must guess who sent it.

If it took him two hours, three hours, he must guess from whom it came.

Who could have written to him? He was popular in his way—he had too bright a manner, too merry a face, not to be that. He had a good many acquaintances, and friends and chums, lads who, with all their thieving propensities and ruffianly ways, would have shared their last crust with him, and one and all voted him a jolly good fellow.

But not one of these would write to him; he passed them over in silent contempt, at the bare possibility of their being either able or willing to write to him.

Jim Stokes, or Bob Allen, or any of those other fine daring young fellows, send him a letter! Send him too a letter looking like this, or directed like this! Why, *this* letter had a more genteel appearance than long ago the letters his sailor father had sent to his mother had worn. Was it likely that either Jim or Bob, or any of the companions of Jim or Bob, those ignorant lads who could hardly sign their names, would send him a letter like this? Had they wished it ever so much, the thing was impossible.

Could it be from Dick?

Well, that was certainly an unlikely guess. Dick, who was also in prison, able to write to another boy? He passed this thought by with a little laugh of derision.

His next idea was Flo.

He had been really in his own rough fashion fond of Flo, he had liked her pretty little face, and enjoyed in his flush and successful days bringing home dainties for her to cook for all their suppers. In spite of himself he had a respect

for Flo, and though he might have loved her better if she had been willing to learn his trade, and help him in his thieving, yet the pluck she showed in keeping honest, roused a certain undefined respect within him.

But of all the ignorant children he ever met, he often said to himself that Flo was the most ignorant. Why she knew nothing of the world, nothing whatever.

How he had laughed at her ideas of earls and dukes and marquises—at her absurd supposition that she could be the queen.

Was there ever before in the records of man, a London child so outrageously ignorant as this same little Flo? *She* write him a letter! she had probably never heard of a letter.

Besides, even if she could write, would she? What were her feelings to Jenks now, that she should show him so great a kindness? He had broken his word to her, he had converted her brother, her much-loved, bright little brother, into a thief. By means of him he had tasted prison discipline, and was branded with a dishonest stain for ever. He remembered the reproach in her eyes when she stood in the witnesses' box, and gave those funny little reluctant answers about him and Dick.

Even there too she had shown her ignorance, and proclaimed to the whole police-court that she was the greatest little simpleton that ever walked.

No, be she where she might now, poor child, it was his wildest guess of all to suppose that she could write to him.

Who wrote the letter? There was no one else left for him to guess, unless! but here his breath came quick and fast, the beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, he caught up the letter and gazed at it, a white fear stealing over him. No, thank God! He flung it down again with a gesture of intense relief—that was not *her* writing. She knew how to write, but not like that. She had not written to him. No, thank God!—he murmured this again fervently,—things were bad with him, but they had not come to such a dreadful pass as that. *She* thought him dead, drowned, come to a violent end; anyhow, done with this present life—she did *not* know that he, his honest, brave father's only son, had stood in the prisoner's dock, had slept in the dark cell, had worn the prisoner's dress, with its mask, and distinguishing brand!

The chapel-bell rang; he started up, thrust his precious unopened letter into his pocket, adjusted his mask, and walked with his fellow-prisoners in silent, grim, unbroken order into chapel.

Had any one looked beneath the mask, they would have seen, for the first time since perhaps his entrance into that prison, that the old sullen expression had left his face, that it wore a look of interest and satisfaction. He hugged his letter very close to his breast, and edged himself into the queer little nook allotted to him, from which he could just see the chaplain, and no one else. As a rule he either went to sleep in chapel, or made faces at the chaplain, or fired pellets of bread, which he kept concealed about him, at the other prisoners. On one occasion the spirit of all evil so far possessed him, that one of these, as hard as any shot, came with a resounding report on the mild nose of the then officiating chaplain, as he was fumbling for a loose sheet of his sermon, and nobody discovered that he was the offender. How often he had chuckled over this trick, over the discomfiture of the Rev. Gentleman, and the red bump which immediately arose on his most prominent feature; how often, how very often, he had longed to do it again. But to-day he had none of this feeling: if he had a thousand bread pellets ready, they might have lain quite harmless in his pocket. He was restless, however, and longed to get back to his cell, not to open his letter, he did not mean to do that until quite the evening, but to hold it in his hand, and turn it round and gaze at it; he was restless, and wished the hour and a quarter usually spent in chapel was over, and he looked around him and longed much to find somebody or something to occupy his attention, for Jenks never dreamed of joining in the prayers, or listening to the lessons.

The prison chapel is not constructed to enable the prisoners to gaze about them, and as the only individual Jenks could see was the chaplain, he fixed his eyes on him.

He did this with a little return of his old sullenness, for though he was a good man, and even Jenks admitted this, he was so tired of him. He had seen him so very, very often, in his cell and at chapel. After spending his life amid the myriad faces of London, Jenks had found the months, during which he had never gazed on any human countenance but that of his warder, the governor, chaplain, and doctor, interminably long.

He was sick of those four faces, sick of studying them so attentively, he knew every trick of feature they all possessed, and he was weary of watching them. But of all the four the face of the chaplain annoyed him most, perhaps because he had watched him so often in chapel. But to-day it might be a shade better to look at him than to gaze at the hard dead wood in front of his cell-like pew—so sullenly he raised his eyes to the spot where he expected to find him. He did so, then gave a start, and the sullenness passed away like a cloud; his lucky star was in the ascendant to-day—a stranger was in the chaplain's place, he had a fresh face to study. He had a fresh face to study, and one that even in a London crowd must have occupied his attention. A man bordering on fifty, with grey hair, a massive chin, very dark, very deeply-set eyes, and an iron frame, stood before him.

Jenks hated effeminate men, so he looked with admiration at this one, and presently, the instincts of his trade being ever uppermost, began to calculate how best he could pick his pockets, and what a dreadful grip the stranger could give his—Jenks'—throat with those great muscular hands.

Suddenly he felt a grip somewhere else, a pang of remorse going right through his hardened heart. The strange chaplain, for half an instant, had fixed his deep-set eyes on him, and immediately it began to occur to Jenks what a shameful fellow he must be to allow such a man as that to speak without listening to him.

The new face was so pleasing, that for a moment or two he made an effort to rouse himself, and even repeated "Our

Father" beneath his breath, just to feel what the sensation was like. Then old habits overcame him—he fell asleep.

He was in a sound, sweet sleep, undetected by the warder, when suddenly a movement, a breath of wind, or perhaps the profound silence which reigned for a moment through the little chapel, awoke him—awoke him thoroughly. He started upright, to find that the stranger was about to deliver his text.

This was the text:

"And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest."

The stranger's voice was low and fervent; he looked round at his congregation, taking them all in, those old sinners, and young and middle-aged sinners, who, in the common acceptation of the term, were sinners more than other men.

He looked round at them, and then he gave it to them.

In that low fervent voice of his, his body bent a little forward, he opened out to them a revelation, he poured out on them the vials of God's wrath. Not an idea had he of sparing them, he called things by their right names, and spoke of sin, such sin as theirs—drunkenness, uncleanness, thieving—as the Bible speaks of these things; and he showed them that every one of them were filthy and gone astray utterly.

When he said this—without ever raising his voice, but in such a manner, with such emphasis, that every word told home—he sketched rapidly two or three portraits for them to recognise if they would.

They were fancy portraits, but they were sketched from a thousand realities. The murderer's last night in his cell—the drunkard with the legions of devils, conjured up by delirium tremens, clustering round him—the lost woman dying out in the snow. Then, when many heads were drooping with shame and terror, he suddenly and completely changed his tone.

With infinite pity in his voice he told them that he was sorry for them, that if tears of blood could help them, he would shed them for them.

Their present lives were miserable, degraded, but no words could tell what awaited them when God arose to execute vengeance.

On every man, woman, and child, that vengeance was coming, and was fully due. It was on its road, and when it overtook them, the dark cell, the whipping-post, solitary confinement for ever, would seem as heaven in comparison.

Then he explained to them why the vengeance was so sure, the future woe so inevitable.

"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest."

Did they know that? Then let them hear it now. Every time the thief stole, every time the drunkard degraded his reason, and sank below the level of the beasts; every time the boy and girl did the thousand and one little acts of deceit which ended so shamefully; then they crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

It was Jesus of Nazareth whom they persecuted.

Would God allow such love as His Son's love to be trampled on and used slightly? No, surely. He had borne too long with them; vengeance was His, and He would repay.

When the minister had gone so far, he again changed his voice, but this time it changed to one of brightness.

He had not brought them to look at so dark a sight as their own sin and ruin without also showing them a remedy. For every one of them there was a remedy, a hiding-place from the wrath of God. Jesus, whom they persecuted, still loved them. *Still loved them!* Why, His heart was yearning over them, His pity, infinite, unfathomable, encompassing them. They were not too bad for Jesus—not a bit of it.

For such as them He died, for such as them He pleaded with His Father. If they came to Him—and nothing was easier, for He was always looking out for them—He would forgive them freely, and wash their souls in His blood, and make them ready for heaven. And while on earth He would help them to lead new lives, and walk by their sides Himself up the steep paths of virtue.

Such as they too wicked for Heaven? No, thank God. Jesus Himself led in the first thief into that holy place; and doubtless thousands such as he would yet be found around the throne of God!

There was dead silence when the preacher had finished; no eager shuffling and trooping out of chapel. The prisoners drew down their masks, and walked away in an orderly and subdued manner. No human eye could detect whether these men and women were moved by what they had heard or not. They were quieter than usual, that was all.

As for Jenks, he walked in his place with the others, and when he got to his cell, sat down soberly. His face was no longer dead and sullen, it had plenty of feeling, and excited feeling too. But the look of satisfaction he had worn when gazing at his letter was gone.

That parson had gone down straight, with his burning words, to the place where his heart used to be—had gone down, and found that same heart still there—nearly dead, it is true, but still there—and probed it to the quick.

He sat with his head buried in his hands, and began to think.

Old scenes and old memories rose up before the boy—pure scenes and holy memories. Once he had lisped texts, once he had bent his baby knees in prayer. How far off then seemed a prison cell and a criminal's life!

Hitherto, ever since he had taken to his present career, he had avoided thought, he had banished old times. He had, even in the dark cell, kept off from his mental vision certain facts and certain events.

They were coming now, and he could not keep them off. O God! how his mother used to look at him, how his father used to speak to him!

Though he was a great rough boy, a hardened young criminal, tears rolled down his cheeks at the memory of his mother's kiss. He wished that parson had not preached, he was thoroughly uncomfortable, he was afraid.

For the last year and more Jenks had made up his mind to be a thief in earnest. He called it his profession, and resolved to give up his life to it. The daring, the excitement, the false courage, the uncertainty, the hairbreadth escapes, all suited his disposition.

His prison episode had not shaken his resolve in the least. He quite determined, when the weary months of confinement were over, and he was once more free, to return to his old haunts and his old companions. He would seek them out, and expound to them the daring schemes he had concocted while in prison. Between them they would plan and execute great robberies, and never be taken—oh no. He, for one, had had his lesson, and did not need a second; happen what might, he would never again be taken. Not all the king's horses, nor all the king's men, should again lay hands on him, or come between him and his freedom.

It was nonsense to say that every thief knew what prison was, and spent the greater part of his time in prison! *He* would not be down on his luck like that! He would prosper and grow rich, and then, when rich, he might turn honest and enjoy his money.

This was his plan—all for the present life. He had never given the other life a thought. But now he did; now, for the first time, he reflected on that terrible thing for any unforgiven soul to contemplate—the wrath of God.

Some day, however successful he might be in this life, he must die, and his naked soul appear before God; and God would ask him so many things, such a piled-up account of sins he would have to lay to his charge. And his father and mother would look on and reproach him, and God would pass sentence on him—he could not escape. He had crucified the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame!

Jenks was not ignorant, like Flo and Dick, he knew of these things. The thought in his mind became intolerable. He paced up and down his cell, and hailed with pleasure the welcome interruption of his Sunday dinner.

When it was finished, he again drew out his letter, hoping and wishing that the old feeling of satisfaction would return at sight of it. But it did not. Try as he might, it did not. He endeavoured to guess who sent it, but no fresh ideas would occur to him. He thought of Flo, and he thought of his mother—he fought against the thought of his mother, and endeavoured to push it away from him. But, struggle as he might, it would come back; and at last, in desperation, he opened the letter.

It was not a long letter when opened, but had appeared thick by reason of a little parcel it contained, a little parcel, wrapped in two or three folds of silver paper. Jenks looked at the parcel as it lay on his knee, then took it up and began to unfold it. His fingers trembled, he did not know why. He threw the parcel from him and spread out the letter to read. Not very much writing in it, and what there was, was printed in large round type. Motes began to dance before his eyes, he put down the letter, and again took up the parcel. This time he opened it, unwrapping slowly fold after fold of the soft paper. Two locks of hair fell out, a grey and a brown, tied together with a thread of blue silk. They dropped from Jenks' fingers; he did not touch them. He gazed at them as they lay on the floor of his cell, the brown lock nearly hidden by the silver. A soft breeze came in and stirred them; he turned from them, gave them even a little kick away, and then, with a burning face, began to read his letter.

"Jenks,—

"I thot 'as yo'd like fur to no—yor mother 'ave furgiven yo, she nos as yo is a thif, and tho she may 'av freted a good bit at fust, she's werry cherful now—she 'av the litel jackit, and trousers, and westkit, hal redy, as yo used to war wen a litel chap. She 'av them let hout hal rond, and they'l fit yo fine. She livs in the old place—wery butiful it his, and she 'av me, flo, livin' wid 'er, and scamp to, we 'av livd yer hever sins yo and Dick was in prisin, and we both furgivs yo Jenks, wid hal our 'arts, and yor mother ses as yo is a comin' bak wen the singin' burds com, and the floers, and we'll 'av a diner fur yo, and a welcom, and lov. yer mother don't no as i is sendin' this and i 'av kut orf a bit of 'er 'air, unkonst to 'er, and a bit of mi 'air to, widch shos as we thincs of yo, and furgivs yo; and Jenks, I wrot this mi own self, miss mary shoed me 'ow, and i 'av a lot mor in mi 'art, but no words, on'y god lovs yo, yor fond litel—

"flo.

"miss mary, she put in the stops."

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest—it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

This latter part of the text came back also to the boy's memory; he bent his head over the odd little letter and saturated it with tears. He snatched up the two locks of hair and covered them with kisses.

His mother had forgiven him—his mother loved him.

She knew he was a thief, and she loved him.

How he had tried to keep this knowledge from her, how he had hoped that during these past three years she had supposed him dead! Her only son, and she a widow, dead! Far better—far, far better, than that she should believe him to be a thief!

He recalled now the last time he had seen her—he recalled, as he had never dared to do hitherto, the history of that parting. He had been wild for some time, irregular at school, and in many ways grieving his parents' hearts; and his father, before he started on that last voyage, had spoken to him, and begged him to keep steady, and had entreated him, as he loved his mother, as he loved him, his father, as he loved his God, to keep away from those bad companions who were exercising so hateful an influence on his hitherto happy, blameless life. And with tears in his eyes, the boy had promised, and then his brave sailor father had kissed him, and blessed him, and gone away never to return again. And for a time Jenks was steady and kept his word, and his mother was proud of him, and wrote accounts, brilliant, happy accounts, of him to his father at sea. But then the old temptations came back with greater force than before, and the promise to his father was broken and forgotten, and he took really to bad ways.

His mother spoke to him of idleness, of evil companions, but she never knew, he felt sure, how low he had sunk, nor at last, long before he left her house, that he was a confirmed thief. He was a confirmed thief, and a successful thief, and he grew rich on his spoils.

One evening, however, as he expressed it, his luck went against him. He had been at a penny gaff, where, as usual, he had enriched himself at the expense of his neighbours. On his way home he saw a policeman dodging him—he followed him down one street and up another. The boy's heart beat faster and faster—he had never been before a magistrate in his life, and dreaded the disgrace and exposure that would ensue. He managed to evade the policeman, and trembling, entered his home, and stole up the stairs, intending to hide in his own little bed-room. He reached it, and lay down on his bed. There was only a thin canvas partition between his tiny room and his mother's. In that room he now heard sobs, and listening more intensely, heard also a letter being read aloud. This letter brought the account of his father's death—he had died of fever on board ship, and been buried in the sea. His last message, the last thing he said before he died, was repeated in the letter.

"Tell wife, that Willie will be a comfort to her; he promised me before I went away to keep a faithful and good lad."

The boy heard so far, then, stung with a maddening sense of remorse and shame, stole out of the house as softly as he had entered it—met the policeman at the door, and delivered himself into his hands; by him he was taken to the police-station, then to prison for a day or two.

But when he was free he did not return home, he never went home again. His mother might suppose him dead, drowned, but never, never as long as she lived should she know that he was a thief. For this reason he had given himself up to the policeman; to prevent his entering that house he had met him on the threshold and delivered himself up. And his only pure pleasure during the past guilty years was the hope that his mother knew nothing of his evil ways.

But now she did know, the letter said she did know. What suffering she must have gone through! What agony and shame! He writhed at the thought.

Then a second thought came to him—she knew, and yet she forgave him—she knew, and yet she loved him.

She was preparing for his return, getting ready for him.

Now that she was acquainted with the prison in which he was wearing out his months of captivity, perhaps she would even come on the day that captivity was over, perhaps she would meet him at the prison gates, and take his hand, and lead him home to the little old home, and show him the clothes of his innocent, happy childhood, ready for him to put on, and perhaps she would kiss him—kiss the face that had been covered with the prisoner's mask—and tell him she loved him and forgave him! Would she do this, and would he go with her?

"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

Back again came the sermon and its text to his memory.

"Every time you commit a theft, or even a much smaller sin, you persecute Jesus," said the preacher.

Jenks had known about Jesus, but hitherto he had thought of Him simply as an historical character, as a very good man—now he thought of Him as a man good for him, a man who had laid down His life for him, and yet whom he persecuted.

If he went on being a thief he would persecute Jesus—*that* was plain. And little Flo had said in her letter that God loved him, God and Jesus loved him. Why, if this was so, if his mother loved him, and God loved him, and the old little bright home was open to him, and no word of reproach, but the best robe and the fatted calf waiting for him, would it be wise for him to turn away from it all? to turn back into that dark wilderness of sin, and live the uncertain, dangerous life of a thief, *perhaps* be unlucky, and end his days in a felon's cell? And when it all was over—the short life—and no life was very long—to feel his guilty soul dragged before God to receive the full vials of the wrath of Him whom he had persecuted.

He was perplexed, overcome, his head was reeling; he cast himself full length on the floor of his cell—he could think no longer—but he pressed the grey lock and the brown to his lips.

God Calls His Little Servant.

At last, carefully as they were all worked, and tedious as the job was, the jacket, vest, and trousers were finished. They were brushed, and rubbed with spirits of turpentine to remove every trace of grease, and then wrapped up carefully in a white sheet, with two pen'orth of camphor to keep off the moths, and finally they were locked up in Mrs Jenks' box along with her Sunday gown, shawl, and bonnet.

Flo watched these careful preparations with unfeigned delight. She was quite as sure now as Mrs Jenks that the lad for whom such nice things were ready would come back in the spring. Every word of the letter her patient little fingers had toiled over had gone forth with a prayer, and there was no doubt whatever in her mind that the God who had given her her bed, and taken care of her, would do great things for Jenks also.

About this time, too, there actually came to her a little letter, a funnily-printed, funnily-worded little letter from Dick himself, in which he told her that he was learning to read and write, that his first letter was to her, that he was happy and doing well, and that never, no never, never, *never* would he be a thief any more; and he ended by hoping that when the spring came, Flo would pay him a little visit!

When this letter was shown to Miss Mary and to the widow, they agreed that when the spring came this should be managed, and not only Flo, but Miss Mary herself, and the widow, and Scamp, and perhaps the widow's lad, should pay Dick a visit. And Flo pictured it all often in her mind, and was happy.

Her life was very bright just then, and in the peaceful influence of her pleasant home she was growing and improving in body and mind. She could read and write a little, she could work quite neatly, and was very tidy and clever about the various little household works that Mrs Jenks taught her; and Miss Mary smiled at her, and was pleased with her; and thought what a nice little servant she would make when Annie was married; and Flo looked forward to this time with a grave, half-wistful pleasure which was characteristic of her, never in her heart forgetting that to be a good earthly servant she must be God's servant first.

Yes, her cup of happiness was full, but it was an earthly cup, and doubtless her Heavenly Father felt He could do better for her—anyhow the end came.

It came in this way. Since Flo arrived and Mrs Jenks had quite finished making preparations for her lad's return, she had set her sharp wits to work, and discovered quite a famous receipt for getting up fine linen.

The secret of this receipt all lay in a particular kind of starch, which was so fine, pure, and excellent, so far beyond Glenfield's Starch, or anybody else's starch, that even old lace could be stiffened with it, instead of with sugar. Mrs Jenks made this starch herself, and through Miss Mary's aid she was putting by quite a nice little supply of money for Willie when he came home—money honestly earned, that could help to apprentice him to an honest trade by and by.

But there was one ingredient in the starch which was both rare and expensive, and of all places in the world, could only be got good in a certain shop in Whitechapel Road. Mrs Jenks used to buy it of a little old Jew who lived there, and as the starch was worthless without it, she generally kept a good supply in the house.

No Londoner can forget the severe cold of last winter, no poor Londoner can forget the sufferings of last winter. Snow, and frost, and hail, bitter winds, foggy days, slippery streets, every discomfort born of weather, seemed to surround the great metropolis.

On one of these days in February, Mrs Jenks came home quite early, and as she had no more charing to get through, she built up a good fire, and set to work to make a fresh supply of starch. Flo sat at one side of her and Scamp at the other, both child and dog watching her preparations with considerable interest. She had set on a large brass pan, which she always used on these occasions, and had put in the first ingredients, when, going to her cupboard, she found that very little more than a table-spoonful of the most valuable material of all was left to her.

Here was a state of affairs! She wrung her hands in dismay; all the compound, beginning to boil in the brass pan, would be lost, and several shillings' worth thrown away.

Then Flo came to the rescue. If Mrs Jenks stayed to watch what was boiling, she—Flo—would start off at once to Whitechapel Road, and be back with the necessary powder before Mrs Jenks was ready for it.

The widow looked out of the window, where silent flakes of snow were falling, and shook her head—the child was delicate, and the day—why, even the 'buses were hardly going—it could not be!

But here Flo overruled her. She reminded her of how all her life she had roughed it, in every conceivable form, and how little, with her thick boots on, she should mind a walk in the snow. As to the 'buses, she did not like them, and would a thousand times rather walk with Scamp. Accordingly, leading Scamp by his collar and chain, which Miss Mary had given him, she set off.

Mrs Jenks has often since related how she watched her walk across the court, such a trim little figure, in her brown wincey dress and scarlet flannel cloak—another gift of Miss Mary's—and how, when she came to the corner, she turned round, and, with her beautiful brown eyes full of love and brightness, kissed her hand to the widow—and how Scamp danced about, and shook the snow off his thick coat, and seemed beside himself with fun and gaiety of heart.

She did not know—God help her—she could not guess, that the child and dog were never to come back.

The snow fell thickly, the wind blew in great gusts, the day was a worse one than Flo had imagined, but she held on bravely, and Scamp trotted by her side, his fine spirits considerably sobered down, and a thick coating of snow on his back. Once or twice, it is true, he did look behind him piteously, as much as to say, "What fools we both are to leave

our comfortable fireside," but he flinched no more than his little mistress, and the two made slow but sure progress to Whitechapel Road.

They had gone a good way, when suddenly Flo remembered a famous short cut, which, if taken, would save them nearly a mile of road, and bring them out exactly opposite the Jew's shop. It led through one of the most villainous streets in London, and the child forgot that in her respectable clothes she was no longer as safe as in the old rags.

She had gone through this street before—she would try it again to-day!

She plunged in boldly. How familiar the place looked! not perhaps this place,—she had only been here but once, and that was with her mother,—but the style of this place.

The bird-fanciers' shops, the rags-and-bones' shops, the gutter children, and gutter dogs, all painfully brought back her old wretched life. Her little heart swelled with gratitude at the thought of her present home and present mercies. She looked round with pity in her eyes at the wretched creatures who shuffled, some of them drunken, some starving, some in rags, past her.

She resolved that when she was a woman she would work hard, and earn money, and help them with money, and if not with money, with tender sympathy from herself, and loving messages from her Father in heaven.

She resolved that she, too, as well as Miss Mary, would be a sister of the poor.

She was walking along as fast as she could, thinking these thoughts, when a little girl came directly in her path, and addressed her in a piteous, drawling voice.

"I'm starving, pretty missy; give me a copper, in God's name."

Flo stopped, and looked at her; the child was pale and thin, and her teeth chattered in her head. A few months ago Flo had looked like this child, and none knew better than she what starvation meant. Besides the five shillings Mrs Jenks had given her to buy the necessary powder, she had sixpence of her own in her little purse; out of this sixpence she had meant to buy a bunch of early spring flowers for her dear Miss Mary's birthday, but doubtless God meant her to give it to the starving child.

She pulled her purse out of her pocket, and drawing the sixpence from it, put it into the hands of the surprised and delighted little girl.

"God bless yer, Missy," she said in her high, shrill tones, and she held up her prize to the view of two or three men, who stood on the steps of a public-house hard by. They had watched the whole transaction, and now three of them, winking to their boon companions, followed the child and dog with stealthy footsteps.

Flo, perfectly happy, and quite unconscious of any danger, was tripping gaily along, thinking how lucky it was for her that she had remembered this short cut, and how certain she was now to have the powder back in time for Mrs Jenks, when suddenly a hand was passed roughly round her waist, while a dexterous blow in the back of her neck rendered her unconscious, and caused her to fall heavily to the ground.

The place and the hour were suitable for deeds of violence. In that evil spot the child might have been murdered without any one raising a finger in her behalf. The wicked men who had attacked her seemed to know this well, for they proceeded leisurely with their work. One secured the dog, while another divested Flo of her boots, warm cloak, and neat little hat. A third party had his hand in her pocket, had discovered the purse, and was about to draw it out, whereupon the three would have been off with their booty, when there came an interruption.

An unexpected and unlooked-for friend had appeared for Flo's relief.

This friend was the dog, Scamp. We can never speak with certainty as to the positive feelings of the dumb creatures, but it is plain that ever since Flo turned into this bad street Scamp—as the vulgar saying has it—smelt a rat. Perhaps it called up too vividly before his memory his old days with Maxey—be that as it may, from the time they entered the street he was restless and uneasy, looking behind him, and to right and left of him, every moment, and trying by all means in his power to quicken Flo's movements. But when the evil he dreaded really came he was for the first instant stunned, and incapable of action: then his perceptions seemed to quicken, he recognised a fact—a bare and dreadful fact—the child he loved with all the love of his large heart, was in danger.



In an instant all would have been over with this ruffian, had not the man's companion raised an enormous hammer and beat out the poor dog's brains. (A. 192.

As he comprehended this, every scrap of the prudent and life-preserving qualities of his cur father and mother forsook the dog, and the blue blood of some unknown ancestor, some brave, self-sacrificing Saint Bernard, flowed through all his veins: his angry spirit leaped into his eyes, and giving vent to a great howl of rage and sorrow, he wrenched his chain out of the man's hand who was trying to hold him, and springing on the first of the kneeling figures, fastened his great fangs into his throat. In an instant all would have been over with this ruffian, for Scamp had that within him then which would have prevented his ever leaving go, had not the man's companion raised an enormous sledge hammer he held in his hand, and beat out the poor animal's brains on the spot. He sank down without even a sigh at Flo's feet, and the three villains, hearing from some one that the police were coming, disappeared with their booty, leaving the unconscious child and dead dog alone.

The little crowd which had surrounded them, at tidings of the approach of the police, dispersed, and the drifting hail and snow covered the dog's wounds and lay on the child's upturned face.

Just then a fire-engine, drawn by horses at full gallop, came round the corner, and the driver, in the fast-failing light, never, until too late, perceived the objects in his path. He tried then to turn aside, but one heavy wheel passed partly over the child's body. The firemen could not stop, their duty was too pressing, but they shouted out to the tardy policemen, who at last appeared in view.

These men, after examining Flo, fetched a cab, and placing her in it, conveyed her to the London Hospital, and one, at parting, gave Scamp a kick.

"Dead! poor brute!" he said, and so they left him.

They left him, and the pure snow, falling thickly now, formed a fit covering for him, and so heavily did it lie over him in the drift into which he had fallen, that the next day he was shovelled away, a frozen mass, in its midst, and no mortal eye again saw him, nor rough mortal hand again touched him.

Thus God Himself made a shroud for His poor faithful creature, and the world, did it but know it, was the poorer by the loss of Scamp.

Chapter Nineteen.

Queen Victoria and Flo.

Flo was carried into the Buxton Ward for children.

They laid her in one of the pretty white cots, close to a little girl of three, who was not very ill, and who suspended her play with her toys to watch her.

Here for many hours she lay as one dead, and the nurses and doctors shook their heads over her—she had no broken bones, but they feared serious internal injuries.

Late in the evening, however, she opened her eyes, and after about an hour of confused wandering, consciousness and memory came fully back.

Consciousness and memory, but no pain either of mind or body. Even when they told her her dog was dead, she only smiled faintly, and said she knew 'ee'd give 'is life fur 'er! and then she said she was better, and would like to go home.

They asked her her name, and the address of her home, and she gave them both quite correctly, but when they said she had better stay until the morning, and go to sleep now, she seemed contented, and did sleep, as calmly as she had done the night before, in her own little bed, in Mrs Jenks' room.

The next morning she again told them she was better, and had no pain, but she said nothing now about going home: nor when, later in the day, Mrs Jenks, all trembling and crying, and Miss Mary, more composed, but with her eyes full of sorrow, bent over her, did she mention it.

She looked at them with that great calm on her face, which nothing again seemed ever to disturb, and told them about Scamp, and asked them if they thought she should ever see her dog again.

"I don't know wot belief to hold about the future of the dumb creatures," said little Mrs Jenks, "but ef I was you, I'd leave it to God, dearie."

"Yes," answered Flo, "I leaves heverythink to God."

And when Miss Mary heard her say this, and saw the look on her face, she gave up all hope of her little servant.

She was going to the place where *His servants shall serve Him*.

Yes, Flo was going to God.

The doctors knew it—the nurses knew it—she could not recover. What a bright lot for the little tired out London child! No more weary tasks—no more dark days—no more hunger and cold. Her friends had hoped and planned for a successful earthly life for her—God, knowing the uncertainty of all things human, planned better. He loved this fair little flower, and meant to transplant it into the heavenly garden, to bloom for ever in His presence.

But though Flo was not to recover she got better, so much better, for the time at least, that she herself thought she should get quite well; and as from the first she had suffered very little pain, she often wondered why they made a fuss about her, why Mrs Jenks seemed so upset when she came to see her, why the nurses were so gentle with her, and why even the doctors spoke to her in a lower, kinder tone than they did to the other children. She was not very ill; she had felt much, much worse when she had lain on the little bed that God had lent her—what agony she had gone through then! and now she was only weak, and her heart fluttered a good deal. There was an undefined something she felt between her and health, but soon she must be quite well.

In the pleasant Buxton Ward were at this time a great many little children, and as Flo got better and more conscious, she took an interest in them, and though it hurt her and took away her breath to talk much, yet her greatest pleasure was to whisper to God about them. There was one little baby in particular, who engrossed all her strongest feelings of compassion, and the nurses, seeing she liked to touch it, often brought it, and laid it in her cot.

Such a baby as it was! Such a lesson for all who gazed at it, of the miseries of sin, of the punishment of sin!

The child of a drunken mother, it looked, at nine months old, about the size of a small doll. Had any nourishment been ever poured down that baby's throat? Its little arms were no thicker than an ordinary person's fingers—and its face! Oh! that any of God's human creatures should wear the face of that baby!

It was an old man's face, but no man ever looked so old—it was a monkey's face, but no monkey ever looked so devoid of intelligence. All the pain of all the world seemed concentrated in its expression; all the wrinkles on every brow were furrowed on its yellow skin.

It was always crying, always suffering from some unintelligible agony. (The writer saw exactly such a baby at the Evelina Hospital a short time ago.) The nurses and doctors said it might recover, but Flo hoped otherwise, and her hope she told to God.

"Doesn't you think that it 'ud be better fur the little baby to be up there in the Gold Streets?" she said to God, every time she looked at it. And then she pictured to herself its little face growing fair and beautiful, and its anguish ceasing for ever—and she thought if she was there, what care she would take of the baby.

Perhaps she does take care of the baby, up There!

One day great news came to the London Hospital—great news, and great excitement. It was going to be highly honoured. Her gracious Majesty the Queen was coming in person to open a new wing, called The Grocers Company's Wing.

She was coming in a few days, coming to visit her East-end subjects, and in particular to visit this great Hospital.

Flo, lying on her little bed, weaker than usual, very still, with closed eyes, heard the nurses and sisters talking of the great event, their tones full of interest and excitement—they had only a short time to prepare—should they ever be ready to receive the Queen?—what wards would she visit? with a thousand other questions of considerable importance.

Flo, lying, as she did most of her time, half asleep, hardly ever heard what was going on around her, but now the word Queen—Queen—struck on her half dull ear.

What were they saying about the Queen? Who was the Queen? Had she ever seen the Queen? Then like a flash it all came back to her—that hot afternoon last summer—her ambitious little wish to be the greatest person of all, her longing for pretty sights and pretty things, the hurried walk she, Jenks, and Dick had taken to Buckingham Palace, the crowd, the sea of eager faces, the carriage with its out-riders, the flashing colour of the Life Guards! Then, all these seemed to fade away, and she saw only the principal figure in the picture—the gracious face of a lady was turned to her, kind eyes looked into hers. The remembrance of the glance the Queen had bestowed upon her had never passed from the little girl's memory. She had treasured it up, as she would a morsel of something sacred, as the first of the many bright things God had given her. Long ago, before she knew of God, she had held her small head a trifle higher, when she considered that once Royalty had condescended to look at her, and she had made it a fresh incentive to honesty and virtuous living.

A thrill of joy and anticipation ran now through her heart. How *much* she should like to see again the greatest woman in the world; if her eyes again beheld her she might get well.

Trembling and eager, she started up in bed.

"Please is the Queen coming?"

The sister who had spoken went over and stood by her side. She was surprised at the look of interest in her generally too quiet little face.

"Yes, dear," she said, "the Queen is coming to see the Hospital."

"And shall I see the Queen?"

"We are not quite sure yet what wards she will visit; if she comes here you shall see her."

"Oh!" said Flo, with a great sigh, and a lustrous light shining out of her eyes, "ef I sees the Queen I shall get well."

The sister smiled, but as she turned away she shook her head. She knew no sight of any earthly king or queen could make the child well, but she hoped much that her innocent wish might be gratified.

The next day, as Mrs Jenks was going away, Flo whispered to her—

"Ef you please, ma'am, I'd like fur you to fetch me that bit of sky blue ribbon, as you 'ave in yer box at 'ome."

"What do you want it for, dearie?"

"Oh! to tie hup my 'air with. I wants fur to look nice fur the Queen. The Queen is comin' to pay me a wisit, and then I'll get well."

"But, my child, the Queen cannot make you well."

"Oh! no, but she can pray to God. The Queen's werry 'igh up, you knows, and maybe God 'ud 'ear 'er a bit sooner than me."

"No, indeed, Flo, you wrong Him there. Your heavenly Father will hear your little humble words just as readily and just as quickly as any prayer the Queen might offer up to Him."

"Well, then, we'll both pray," said Flo, a smile breaking over her white face. "The Queen and me, we'll both pray, the two of us, to God—He'll 'ave 'er big prayer and my little prayer to look hout fur; so you'll fetch me the ribbon, ma'am dear."

Mrs Jenks did so, and from that day every afternoon Flo put it on and waited in eager expectancy to see the Queen, more and more sure that when they both—the poor little London child and the greatest woman in the world—sent up their joint petitions to Heaven, strength would return to her languid frame, and she could go back, to be a help and comfort to her dear Mrs Jenks.

At last the auspicious day arrived, a day long to be remembered by the poor of the East End. How gay the banners looked as they waved in the air, stretching across from housetop to housetop right over the streets!

At the eastern boundary of the City was a great band of coloured canvas bearing the word "Welcome." And as the Royal procession passed into Whitechapel High-street the whole thoroughfare was one bright line of Venetian masts, with streamers of flags hanging from every house, and of broad bands of red, with simple mottoes on them.

But better to the heart of the Queen of England than any words of welcome were the welcoming crowds of people. These thronged the footways, filled the shop-windows, assembled on the unrailed ledges of the house-fronts, on the pent-houses in front of the butchers' shops, and stood out upon the roofs.

Yes, this day would long be remembered by the people in the East End, and of course most of all by those in the

great Hospital which the Queen was to visit.

But here, there was also disappointment. It was discovered that in the list of wards arranged for Her Majesty to see, the Buxton Ward in the Alexandra Wing was not mentioned. More than one nurse and more than one doctor felt sorry, as they recalled the little face of the gentle, dying child, who had been waiting for so many days full of hope and longing for the visit which, it seemed, could not be paid to her.

But the day before, Flo had said to Mr Rowsell, the Deputy Chairman—

“I shall see the Queen, and then I shall get well.”

And that gentleman determined that if he could manage it her wish should be granted.

Accordingly, when the Queen had visited the “Grocers Company’s Wing,” and had named the new wards after herself and the Princess Beatrice, when she had read the address presented to her by the governors of the Hospital, had declared the new wing open, and visited the Gloucester Ward, then Flo’s little story was told to her, and she at once said she would gratify the child’s desire.

Contrary to the routine of the day, she would pay the Buxton Ward a visit.

Flo, quite sure that it was God’s wish that the great Queen of England should come to see her, was prepared, and lay in her pretty white cot, her chestnut hair tied back with blue ribbons, a slight flush on her pale cheeks, her brown eyes very bright.

It was a fair little picture, fair even to the eyes that had doubtless looked on most of the loveliest things of earth—for on the beautiful face of the dying child was printed the seal of God’s own peace.

“My darling,” said the Queen to the little girl, “I hope you will be a little better now.”

But Queen Victoria knew, and the nurses knew, and the doctors knew, and all knew, but little Flo Darrell herself, that on earth the child would never be well again.

They knew that the little pilgrim from earth to heaven, had nearly completed her journey, that already her feet—though she herself knew not of it—were in the waters of Jordan, and soon she would pass from all mortal sight, through the gates into the City.

Chapter Twenty.

Sing Glory.

“I ’ave seen the Queen,” said Flo that night to Miss Mary. “I shall get well now.”

She was lying on her back, the lustrous light, partly of fever and partly of excitement, still shining in her eyes.

“Do you want to get well very much, Flo?” asked the lady.

“Yes—fur some things.”

“What things?”

“I wants fur to help Dick wen ’ee gets hout of that prison school, and I wants fur to tidy up fur Mrs Jenks the day ’er lad comes ’ome, and I wants to do something fur you, Miss Mary.”

“To be my little servant?”

“Yes.”

“Do you remember what I said to you when first I asked you to be my servant?”

“I must be God’s servant.”

“Just so, dear child, and I believe fully you have tried to be His servant—He knows that, and He has sent you a message; but before I give it to you, I want to ask you a question—why do you suppose that having seen the Queen will make you well?”

“Oh! not *seein’* ’er—but she looked real kind-’earted, and though I didn’t ax ’er, I knows she be prayin’ to God fur me.”

“Yes, Flo, it is very likely the Queen did send up a little prayer to God for you. There are many praying for you, my child. You pray for yourself, and I pray for you, and so does Mrs Jenks, and better than all, the Lord Christ is ever interceding for you.”

“Then I’ll soon be well,” said Flo.

“Yes, you shall soon be well—but, Flo, there are two ways of getting well.”

“Two, Miss Mary?”

"Yes; there is the getting well to be ill again by and by—to suffer pain again, and sickness again—that is the earthly way."

Flo was silent.

"But," continued the lady, "there is a better way. There is a way of getting so well, that pain, and sickness, and trouble, and death, are done away with for ever—that is the heavenly way."

"Yes," whispered Flo.

"Which should you like best?"

"To be well for ever-'n-ever."

"Flo, shall I give you God's message?"

"Please."

"He says that His little servant shall get quite well—quite well in the best way—you are to go up to serve Him in heaven. God is coming to fetch you, Flo."

"To live up in the gold streets wid Himself?" asked Flo in a bright, excited manner.

"Yes, He is coming to fetch you—perhaps He may come for you to-night."

"I shall see God to-night," said Flo, and she closed her eyes and lay very still.

So white and motionless was the little face that Miss Graham thought she had fainted; but this was not so; the child was thinking. Her intellect was quite clear, her perceptions as keen as ever. She was trying to realise this wonderful news.

She should see God to-night.

It was strange that during all her illness the idea of getting well in this way had never hitherto occurred to her—she had suffered so little pain, she had been so much worse before—she had never supposed that this weakness, this breathlessness, could mean death—this sinking of that fluttering little heart, could mean that it was going to stop!

A sudden and great joy stole over her—she was going to God—He was coming Himself to fetch her—she should lie in His arms and look in His face, and be always with Him.

"Are you glad, Flo?" asked Miss Mary, who saw her smile.

"Yes."

"I have another message for you. When Dick comes out of the prison school, I am to take care of him—God wishes that."

"You will tell him about God."

"Certainly, I shall do that—and, Flo, I feel it will be all right about the widow's son."

"Yes, God'll make it right,"—then, after a pause, going back to the older memories, "I'd *like* to 'ear the Glory Song."

"What is that, darling?"

"Oh! you knows—I'm glad—I hever—"

"'Saw the day'?" finished Miss Mary.

"Yes, that's it. Poor Janey didn't know wot it meant—'tis 'bout God."

"Shall I sing it for you?"

"Yes—please."

Miss Mary did so; but when she came to the words, "I'll sing while mounting through the air To Glory, Glory, Glory," Flo stopped her.

"That's wot I'll do—sing—wile mountin'—'tis hall glory."

And then again she lay still with closed eyes.

During that night Mrs Jenks and Miss Mary watched her, as she lay gently breathing her earthly life away.

Surely there was no pain in her death—neither pain nor sorrow. A quiet passing into a better Land. An anchoring of the little soul, washed white in the Blood of the Lamb, on a Rock that could never be moved.

Just before she died she murmured something about the Queen.

"Tell 'er—ef she 'ears o' me—not to fret—I'm well—the best way—and 'tis hall glory."

So it was.

Chapter Twenty One.

The Prodigal's Return.

In the evening after Flo's funeral Mrs Jenks was seated by her bright little fire.

Nothing could ever make that fire anything but bright, nothing could ever make that room anything but clean, but the widow herself had lost her old cheery look, she shivered, and drew close to the warm blaze. This might be caused by the outside cold, for the snow lay thick on the ground, but the expression on her brow could hardly come from any change of weather, neither could it be caused by the death of Flo.

Mrs Jenks sorrowed for the child, but not rebelliously—perhaps not overmuch. Those who loved her hardly spoke of her going away as a death at all. God had come and fetched her—that was what they said.

And the child was so manifestly fit to go—so evidently unfit to pass through any more of the waves of this troublesome world, that the tender regret that was felt at her loss was swallowed up in the joy at her gain.

No, Mrs Jenks was not mourning for Flo, but all the same she was troubled, nervous, unlike in every particular her usual self, so easily startled, that a very gentle knock at her door caused her to jump to her feet.

"'Tis only me, Mrs Jenks," said Miss Mary Graham, taking off her snow-laden cloak, and sitting down on Flo's little stool at one side of the fire.

"I thought you'd feel lonely, and would like me to look in on you."

"Thank you, ma'am—yes—I'm missing the child and her dog, maybe. Anyhow, without being sorry for the blessed darling, or wishing her back, I'm very low like. If I 'ad Scamp, poor fellow, he'd keep me up. It was 'ard he should come by such a bad end."

"Oh! Mrs Jenks, it was not a bad end. It was quite a glorious closing of life for the fine old fellow—he died defending the one he loved best. And, do you know, I could not bear to have him here without her, he would miss her so, and we could never tell him how well off she is now."

"No, ma'am—that is true. He always lay close to her side, and curled up on the foot of her bed at night—and not a look nor a thought would he give me near her. And they say he hardly suffered a bit, that his death must 'ave come like a flash of lightning to him."

"Yes; a woman who saw the whole thing says he dropped dead like a stone at Flo's feet."

Miss Mary paused—then, bending forward, she touched the widow's arm.

"You are going to Wandsworth in the morning—may I come with you?"

At the word Wandsworth, Mrs Jenks' face flushed crimson, the tears, so close to her eyes, rolled down her cheeks, and she threw her apron over her head.

"Oh! Miss Mary, don't mind me, ma'am—I'm a poor weak creature, but indeed my heart misgives me sore. Suppose the lad should refuse to come back?"

"Suppose the Lord hath forgotten to be gracious?" replied Miss Mary, softly.

"Oh! no, ma'am, it ain't that. He's gracious any way, anyhow. No, Miss Mary dear, I feels your kindness, but I'll go alone. It will daunt the poor boy less if I 'ave no one beside me. Down on my bended knees, if need be, I'll beg of him to turn from 'is evil ways, and perhaps the Lord will hear me."

"Yes, Mrs Jenks, the Lord *will* hear you, and give you back your lost son."

Miss Mary went away, and the widow, having dried her eyes, sat on by the fire.

"Yes," she said after a pause. "I were a fool to misdoubt God. Don't his heavenly Father and his blessed Saviour care more fur the lad than I do?"

"'Twill be all right for 'im, and if Flo was here to-night, she'd say, sweet lamb,—

"'Mrs Jenks, ma'am, ain't you about ready to get hout that jacket, and trousers, and vest, to hair 'em, ma'am?"

"Well! I just will get 'em hout, same as if she bid me."

The widow rose, went to her trunk, unlocked it, and taking out a parcel wrapped in a snowy towel, spread its contents before the fire.

There they were—the neat, comfortable garments, smelling of lavender and camphor.

Mrs Jenks contemplated them with pride. How well grown her boy must be, to need a jacket and trousers so large as these! They would be sure to fit, she had measured his appearance so accurately in her mind's eye that sad day

when he was taken to prison!

She examined the beautiful stitching she had put into them with pride; when they were aired she took a clothes' brush, and brushed them over again—then she folded them up, and finally raised them to her lips and kissed them.

As she did this, as she pressed her lips to the collar of the jacket, in that fervent kiss of motherly love, a great sob outside the window startled her considerably. Her room was on the ground floor, and she remembered that she had forgotten that evening, in her depression and sadness of spirit, to draw down the blind.

Holding her hand to her beating heart, she approached and looked out.

She had not been mistaken in supposing she heard a sob. A lad was lying full length on his face and hands in the snow, outside her window, and she heard suppressed moans still coming from his lips.

For the sake of her own son she must be kind to all destitute creatures.

She stepped out on her threshold, and spoke in her old cheery tones.

"Come in, poor fellow, come in. Don't lie there perishing—come in, and I'll give you a cup of tea. I've just brewed some, and a good strong cup will warm you."

As she spoke she went and laid her hand on the boy's arm.

"I'm a thief," he said without stirring; "you won't let in a thief?"

Something in the hoarse, whispered tones went straight to her heart.

"Of all people on earth, those I 'ave most feeling for are poor repentant thieves," she said. "If you're one of them, you 'ave a sure welcome. Why, there!" she continued, seeing he still lay at her feet and sobbed, "I've a lad of my own, who was a thief, and 'as repented. He's in prison, but I feel he 'ave repented."

"Would you let in your own lad?" asked the figure in the snow, in still that strange muffled voice.

"Let him in!" cried the widow; "let in my own lad! What do you take me for? I'm off to his prison to-morrow, and 'ome he shall come with all the love in his mother's heart, and the prodigal son never had a better welcome than he shall have."

Then the boy in the snow got up, and stumbled into the passage, and stumbled further, into the bright little room, and turning round, fixed his eyes on the widow's face, and before she could speak, threw his arms round the widow's neck. "Mother," he said, "I'm that repentant lad."

Jenks had been let out of prison a day sooner than his mother had calculated upon.

He had come back—humbled—sorry—nay more, clothed, and in his right mind: ready to sit at the feet of that Jesus whom once he persecuted. All the story of how these things had come to pass, all the story of that sermon which had touched his heart, all the story of that simple, childish letter, of those two locks of hair, he told to his happy and rejoicing mother.

And of her it might be said, "O woman, great was thy faith; it was done unto thee even as thou wouldest."

These things happened a few months ago. How do the characters in this little story fare now?

Truly, with pleasure can it be said, that there is not a dark thing to relate about any of them.

Jenks, partly through Miss Mary's aid, and partly through his mother's savings, is apprenticed to a carpenter, and his strict honesty, his earnestness of purpose, joined to his bright and funny ways, have already made him a favourite with his master. Humanly speaking, few are likely to do better in their calling and station than he, and his dream is some day wholly to support his beloved little mother.

Pick is still at the Reformatory School, but he promises to do well, and Miss Mary promises never to cease to look after him.

Even little Janey, through this brave woman's influence, has been rescued, and picked out of the mire of sin and ignorance, and has learned something more of the true meaning of the Glory Song.

As for Miss Mary herself, she is still a sister—a true sister of the poor, going wherever sins need reproof, and misery comforting. Not joining any particular denomination, wearing no special badge, she yet goes about, as her Master left her an example, doing good—and in the last day, doubtless, many shall rise up and call her blessed.

And the widow—when her boy came home, when her boy became a Christian, she seemed to have no other earthly good thing to ask for. She is very happy, very bright, and very dear to all who know her.

Thus all are doing well.

But surely—the one in his unbroken sleep, the other in the sunshine of her Father's House—there are none we can leave so contentedly, so certain that no future evil can befall them, as the two, whom the child always spoke of as

SCAMP and I.

The End.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCAMP AND I: A STORY OF CITY BY-WAYS ***

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