Slum Stories of London

detached ex libris
for my ancient
friend Laurens
Maynard

Maynard H. Smith

4/29/16 -

"'*One, two, three, and 'eave!*' *and away she flies through the air.*"—Page 12.

Neighbors of Ours

SLUM STORIES OF LONDON

BY

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NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1895

THE MERSHON COMPANY PRESS,
RAHWAY, N. J.

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SLUM STORIES.

CHAPTER I.

Old Parky.

 E used to call 'im Victoria Park, or just Parky for short, 'cos 'e was real fond of the country, was Tom Brier. 'E was bigger nor what I was, as was likely, bein' older; but some'ow 'e'd took a wonderful fancy for me, through me givin' nuts to 'is next youngest sister, as was a natural, and was called by some the Innercent and by others the Imbercyle, just accordin' to their ways of lookin' at 'er, whether agreeable or not. And when you'd give 'er a nut, she'd cop 'old on it with both 'ands, and squat on the floor, crackin' it with 'er teeth, and lookin' up at yer sideways that knowin', for fear as yer'd take it away again, she bein' for all the world like a barrel-organ monkey. And if she was pleased with yer for not frightenin' 'er, she'd sit and make a comfortable kind o' noise in 'er throat, as she'd learned from Parky's pigeons when they're in love. But the best way of 'avin' a game with 'er was to 'old 'er a sweet, and just as she was

reachin' out for to take it, to eat it yerself, and then 'ear 'er squeal, and go on same as a crazy cat put ready in a bag for drowndin', But the fellers durstn't treat theirselves to that game very often, 'cos of the bloodshed if old Parky found 'em tryin' it on. She couldn't talk much, couldn't the Innercent, only for sayin' " Thankyer " and 'alf a dozen common swearin' words, but she'd set hours together on the doorstep lookin' sideways up and down the street, same as if she'd been expectin' somethink to 'appen as never did 'appen, 'cos there wasn't nothink as could.

Well now, as I was sayin', through one thing or another, old Parky seemed to 'ave a kind of a takin' for me, and, me bein' still quite a bit of a chap, 'e once asked me to go along all night with 'im to Putney 'Eath so as to get the blackberries early Sunday mornin' afore the other fellers could put in for 'em. And a fine 'andkerchief full we brought 'ome, for all their bein' mostly green for fear of us only leavin' 'em for other fellers to pick black. And we gave near all on 'em to the Innercent, and they never did 'er no sort of 'arm, through 'er bein' a natural. And it was Parky as taught me fishin' in the gravel-pit pond out on Wanstead Flats, tyin' red worms and bits o' bread to the cotton for the little fish to swaller 'ole, and then be dragged out with, 'ooks not bein' called for in the pond, 'cos it's none but the gudgeons in the big lake in the park as likes 'ooks. So I took 'old on the bottle, and as fast as Parky pulled out a new un, I kep' on pinchin' at the old uns,

for to see 'ow they was gettin' along : and when a fish pinches sorft, yer may know it aint feelin' well. And when we got 'ome, we put them in a glass case as 'e'd made with stones and grass stuck in it and two frogs to keep the water fresh, a thing as they do by breathin' bubbles through it. And them as 'adn't died on the way kep' on livin' ever such a time, bein' fed with oatmeal same as a convick. And once Parky bought a gold-fish, and put in; but it turned out too expensive through dyin' so soon.

And when we'd caught enough fish for the sport, 'e'd used to learn me swimmin' in that same pond, and for purpose of that 'e made a kind of a life-belt with some slips o' board strung together and tied roun' my stomick. But it wasn't never good for much, the water bein' no 'igher nor my middle, so the life-belt took and grated along the bottom so soon as I struck out, and never 'ad a chance of keepin' me from drowndin' as it was meant for. But Parky said the water bein' low wasn't by no means a bad thing, 'cos, bein' dry, the dead dogs was mostly left on the banks, and kep' the water clean.

And another thing as Parky did was to start a 'en-run in 'is back yard, and there 'e kep' thirty chickins as 'e nursed through the wastin's and the gapes and such things as chickins gets, 'e comin' down in the middle of the night to give 'em sarsapariller for to clean their blood, and bits o' chopped worm, as chickins like when queer, same as people in 'orspital a bit o' chopped chickin. And alongside o' the 'en-run

'e built a great dormer for pigeons, and that's the cause why the Innercent came to make them queer noises when uncommon jolly, through 'er copyin' the pigeons makin' love.

But far away the best thing as 'e ever done was the gardens in Thomas's Row, as turned round the corner from where 'e lived, and 'ad a square of garden almost as big as a room in front of each 'ouse. It came about through a neighbor seein' them chickins and askin' 'im to lend a 'and with clearin' out the rubbish from 'is own front. And in a month's time its own mother wouldn't 'ave known that garden, no more nor Patsy Inchin when 'e came back after six months in 'is uniform as a Reg'lar, and nobody wouldn't believe as it was 'im we'd used to call Zulu and Sunlight for 'is bein' always so dirty. So it got round as Parky was the man for gardens, and 'e takes 'em all on, the neighbors not begrudgin' 'im a penn'orth o' seeds 'ere and there, let alone the oyster-shells as 'e pick up and stuck round the borders, instead of rememberin' the grotter. And twelve month after, if yer'd passed and saw them scarlet-runners twinin' theirselves over sticks, and the jeannies 'angin' from the winders, and the balsoms and marigolds, with paths and walls o' shells between, and little palin's with five-barred gates painted green with white tops, paintin' bein' Parky's work, you'd 'ave said it was a respite from the cares and troubles o' life, same as my mother said as we was drivin' through the trees in Pimlico, we bein' out for father's Bean-o.

Well, one day, me bein' out o' work through 'avin' turned up the shop through nine shillin' a week not bein' good enough money, countin' in the work and all, I was just spittin' on the pavement to make a block-'ole for a game o' cricket with my little brother, 'e 'avin' nicked a ball from somewhere, and made a bat out of a bit of palin', when up comes Parky, and 'e says to me:

"What, Jacko! What price a bit of 'oppin'?"

"Ger on!" says I, "d'yer think I'm goin' to demean myself?" that bein' what old Spotter always says when 'e gets an offer of reg'lar work.

Then Parky comes and takes a 'and in the cricket, bein' a fair wonder afore the wickets, as was made of my coat and westkit with a cap on the top for bails, and by the end o' the game 'e'd fair talked me over, what with 'is 'ittin' the balls so 'ard, and bein' just appointed bin-man by the farmer, and 'avin' to get together pickers for five bins, and askin' all 'is mates together with Mrs. Sullivan and Lina, let alone the coin I might bring 'ome.

So one night we all started off together, ridin' in the train from London Bridge, some on us singin', and the girls shriekin' out same as usual, and everybody cursin', barrin' only not the kids as was set to go to sleep under the seats thick as jam, and the Innercent as slep' on Parky's knee. So we got to Marden Station just afore mornin', and was chucked out same as into a cold bath, the women fair tearin' at each other over

their baskets and bits of things through feelin' unwonted and afraid for what they might lose. But Parky gets 'is gang together like a dog drivin' beasts up Aldgate, and off we set along a road and through fields thick covered over with mist. And through climbin' up a bit of a 'ill, we could see the tops o' the trees stickin' out, and the mist layin' flat all round like water. And at whiles a great cow as 'ad stopped out in the field all the bloomin' night to eat, 'ud come mouchin' out to 'ave a look at us, and 'ide itself in the mist again. And to show as we weren't frightened for nothink we started singin' the chorus of "Sailin', sailin', over the boundin' main." But Parky, 'e was all right, bein' in the country, and 'e said it some'ow come into 'is mind as this must be like Wales.

"Ger along wi' yer Wales!" says Mrs. Sullivan. "It puts me in mind o' that land."

And when Mrs. Sullivan starts talking o' that land, it's time to 'old 'er, she meanin' to say Ireland, as she was took away from at eleven months, so as she didn't never see much of 'er native 'ome.

But the Innercent said nothink, only kep' 'old on Parky's 'and, runnin' just be'ind of 'im like a dog to a string.

So we come to Manor Farm, and got showed where we was to live. Two families was put in a bell tent, and one in a gypsy tent, and the rest on us in a reg'lar 'op'-'ouse room cut across the middle with two 'urdles. So Parky puts old Seabrook and 'is missus with their two or three kids and Mrs. Sullivan and Lina on the one

side, and on the other 'e puts me and three other fellers and 'isself and the Innercent, as we was agreed shouldn't connt, through bein' only a natural. And old Seabrook, as 'ad served 'is time in Injer and killed Zulus with 'is naked 'and, 'e calls 'is side the married quarters; and Mrs. Sullivan said everythink was as proper as you could wish, for all 'er not aimin' at settin' 'erself up for a judge.

So, 'avin' settled us in, and divided the straw for us to lay on, Parky was all over the place, lightin' the fire of sticks, and makin' the corffee, and fryin' the bits of 'addock, and dealin' out the bread, and showin' us 'ow to make ourselves comfortable, same as a fust-class carriage, And old Seabrook was set to dig what he called a "broad-arrer kitchen," same as the Zulus used to cook the dead and wounded after the battle's over.

The rest o' that day we mostly slep', and went about the country nickin' apples and lookin' for musheroons, and 'aving rare games with the cows and the other people as lived in them parts. But next day we went down into the 'op-fields, and Parky gets his five bins, and 'is 'ook to cut the ropes at the top o' the poles, and 'is iron dog as don't want no meat, to pull up the poles from the bottom, and 'is knife to chop off the stems of the 'ops against the ground. So we start pickin' for dear life, the women more especial bein' ready for bloodshed if they see another woman gettin' along quicker nor what they was. Three times in the day round came the measurer to measure out the bins into

what's called pokes, as was then took off to the oasts to dry, and 'is little boy standin' by with a book and writin' down the number o' bushels in each bin, so as to reckon up the pay at the week's end, together with the subs as they'll give yer out every other night accordin' as wanted, knockin' 'em off from what you've earned. But it was grand to 'ear Mrs. Sullivan's talk when the measurer was comin' to 'er bin, and the things she offered to do for 'im if only 'e'd fill her measures short, and make more bushels of 'em. We couldn't 'elp but laugh each time to 'ear 'er, for all Mrs. Seabrook sayin' it wasn't decent of a woman to say such things. And when 'e'd measured 'ers up the same as the others and gone away, "Mary," she'd say, "there's an onmerciful one!" And then she'd call him a barstud all up the field, 'e takin' no more notice nor if she'd been a fly. And next she'd lay down under the bin, and take her solemn oath she'd never do no more work but go straight back to Ireland, and die 'appy. And next minute she'd be pickin' again, and keepin' us all laughin' at what she said o' the man and 'is mother and gran'mothers right away back to kingdom come, makin' out each a bit worse nor what the other was.

But Lina, as was sittin' next to her, only laughed and went on pickin' without ever stoppin', exceptin' only now and then for takin' a look at Parky, as always 'elped in their bin when he wasn't wanted for binman. And sometimes she'd put 'er 'and down close agen 'is, quite independent, and I'd see old Parky turn

like fire and go off and pull up more poles, as if the devil 'ad copped hold on the further end of 'em. But 'e always came back again, and when the lollyman made 'is rounds Parky 'ud buy a 'a'porth o' lollies to give to the Innercent, so as keep 'er pickin' steady, and 'e always made the offer of some of 'em to Lina too.

And that's 'ow we went along all day and every day till six o'clock, when they blowed us off with a 'orn; we pickin' for life and death all the time, barrin' only when it came on to rain, or a picker give us a 'oliday by gettin' 'imself buried in the churchyard. And if we copped anybody pickin' at one of them times there was fine old murder; same with Sundays, as was set by for the women to wash our bits of things in, the men mostly keepin' on asleep.

So it was all right for two or three weeks, and all on us was gettin' to 'ave quite a fancy for Parky, more especial the ladies, through 'is bein' so perlite and 'andy besides; till one evenin' just as it was comin' on dark, and we'd lighted up a rare old fire in front of our 'uts with the paper tracks as the parson and 'is wife kep' on bringin' round nigh on every day, and very useful they came in. So we all 'ad our teas, and was settin' round the fire sayin' nothink, 'cos there aint much to say in the country. And old Seabrook asks if nobody wouldn't give us a song or dance to pass the time, and Lina got up straight, and started a kind of a dancin' round the fire. Two of the fellers struck up some sort of a music, one doin' the tune and the other the vampin' or fillin' in.

And there Lina was, with nothink much on er' to speak of but her mother's old black skirt, tied roun' the middle with a string to make a body, and sleeves put on near the top with pieces of crimson plush. And whiles she was dancin' bits of 'er skin kep' 'lookin' through, most unusual, she bein' all red beside by reason of the fire-light. But over our 'eads the sky was turnin' itself into night with a few stars comin' out, and 'er 'air kep' wavin' about like a red flag flyin' against it. I've seed the Sheenies step-dancin' in the Lane, and I've seed the Sisters Toddles skirtin' at the Cambridge, but I never see dancin' as was a patch on Lina's that night. It wasn't to be called a jig nor yet a step nor nothink o' that, but she seemed to be kind of actin' at somethink, and it looked to me like the actin' of makin' love and gettin' love made to you, only for its not bein' much like the love-makin' yer mostly sees in cimeterry gardens and such. All on us kep' settin' round with our mouths open, but not sayin' a word; only for the Innercent, as 'ad gone away at the first, she never bein' able to abide the sight of Lina. She didn't know for why. And through watchin' of the dancin' old Mother Sullivan kep' on gettin' more and more excited. And last of all she ups and starts throwin' 'er arms and legs about, same as if she was dancin' too. But seein' as she stood in the way of us lookin' on, old Seabrook lays 'old on 'er, and pulls 'er down quiet, and 'e says:

"That's where it is with you females. Yer never know when yer've started fadin', and it's

time to stop yer little ways. Ye're well enough whiles yer lasts. But that's where it is: yer fade, for all it not bein' through no fault o' yer own."

"Gorblime!" says Lina, stoppin' 'er dancin', and turnin' on 'im sharp, "'oo are you aimin' at kiddin' with yer talk about fadin'? Females indeed! 'Aven't yer never 'eard tell of a male fadin'? Go and look at yerself, you misbegotten barstud of a Zulu squaw. And if that don't please yer, go and———"

Then on a sudden 'e ups to give 'er one for 'erself, but she dodges under, and sets down close agen Parky, as cool as an unemployed. And we all set laughin' fit to bust ourselves. But afore we'd got the laugh fair out of our mouths, one of the chaps comes runnin' up shoutin':

"Parky, Parky! They's a-drowndin' of yer Innercent! Drowndin' of 'er, down by the pond there!"

You lay, Parky up and run, and me and the rest after, all barrin' the old uns. And Lina, she come runnin' with us, for all 'er never 'aving any likin' for the Innercent, no more nor for earth-worms, as made 'er sick. None on us 'adn't been out into the dark before, for fear we should get frightened, but now we ran down to where the next fires kep' throwin' up a great patch of light agen the sky. It was close next the water-wheel, and layin' in front o' the wheel was a great big pond, black as 'ell, only for the fire-light shinin' red round its edges. So when we come up, we found a crowd of young fellers

all shoutin' and laughin'. And in the middle of 'em they 'ad 'old on the Innercent, some of 'em by 'er body and some by 'er 'ead and legs and arms. And they kep' swingin' of 'er up and down, just preparin' for to cast 'er off. And by the fire I could see 'er face between 'em at whiles. She'd given over bitin' and spittin' by then, and was just layin' still lookin' up at 'em, same as a 'orse when 'e's fell down in the street, and 'as got to be knacked, and they takes 'is 'arness off, and brings a bandage for 'is eyes, and you may know what's up from the uncommon size of the crowd standin' round to enjoy the sight,

So me and Parky and the rest off with our belts, and go for the fellers with the buckle end, doin' good practice. But it was too late by then, for them as 'ad 'old on 'er calls out, "One, two, three, and 'eave!" and away she flies through the air with her 'ands and legs stretched out, and plumps down souse into the water, as was black as 'ell, only cold beside. And all the fellers cheered and cursed and laughed, sayin' as they'd teach 'er to be an Imbercyle. But me and Parky give over markin' 'em with our belts, and get into the water, 'e jumpin' in and swimmin', and me feelin' along more cautiously by reason of the mud. And we could catch sight on 'er by bits bein' washed down to the end of the pond, and then back into shore by the run of the stream. And at last Parky cops 'old on 'er back 'air, as is what drownded people likes best to be saved by, and me walkin' nigh up to my neck, we

drags 'er in between us. And us crawlin' out all wet and slimy with mud, some of the fellers starts laughin', but they mostly stand sayin' nothink, more especial as some of the women 'ad come up and kep' on callin' out, "Poor dear thing!" and "Bless 'er 'eart!"

Then Parky takes 'er under one arm, and I under the other, and we pull 'er up the field till she begins comin' to with a kind of gurglin'. So we stop, and the fellers followin' be'ind seein' as she wasn't really no corpse, they all start booin' again, and crowdin' in upon us most shameful, till old Seabrook comes bringin' up what 'e calls 'is support to the retirin' line, and cops one on 'em a good un on the mug, so as you could hear the crack of it at both fires. That rather knocked the stuffin' out of 'em, so we got let alone after that, and took the Innercent's clothes off, and put on 'er a cleanish sack, makin' a 'ole in the bottom for 'er 'ead to come through, and we set 'er by the fire to warm alongside of 'er clothes. And she soon turned almost as rational minded as was usual, only for 'er clingin' on to Parky and chatterin' same as a monkey when you go to offer 'im a nut, and it turns out full of mustard.

In the middle o' that there night I was woke by a kind of a movin' in the straw, and I 'ear Parky's voice sayin':

"Lina—Lina—I wants to say good-by to yer. I'm goin' away."

"Goin' away?" says she, speakin' very sleepy. "What's that for? You go to sleep!"

"No," 'e says; "I'm goin' away. I can't

be stoppin' 'ere with the Innercent no longer; and it's near as bad in London, 'er growin' up and all. And work's slack, and us fair crowded at 'ome, and another comin'. No, I'm goin' away and takin' 'er along with me to live in the country, as is a kind o' place she seems more to belong to by rights."

"Yer never goin' to leave us, Parky?" says she.

"Yus, but I am," he says, very quiet; "we're goin' to take to the road, the Innercent and me, and get along by doin' jobs o' paintin'. Yer see paintin' 's a thing as all 'ouses wants, same as a man wants trousers. And likely in time we'll get to Wales or places such as Scotland, and live by sportin'; there bein' always plenty to eat what with rabbits and stags, so they tell me. And if that don't work, there's the sea, as is big enough for two, I make no doubt. So I'm afeard for nothink."

"But yer never goin' to leave us, Parky?" says she.

"Yus," he says, "that's just about it. And I want yer to give the six fat fowls to mother to sell, and take the chickens yerself, to sell or eat, as most suitable. And the pigeons, bein' no good to nobody, can go to Jacko there. And the 'oppin' money as is left over from my subs yer can put on to yer mother's. That's all. So good-by, Lina."

"Oh, mercy!" she says, 'alfway laughin' and cryin'; "don't yer get talkin' like makin' yer will!"

"Good-by to yer, Lina," 'e says again; and I

'ear 'im movin' the 'urdle a bit, very quiet. And when next 'e says anythink I knowed 'e'd got 'is 'ead, and p'r'aps more of 'im, well through into the married quarters. And after a bit Lina says:

"No, Parky, I'm not a-goin' to any more. I dunno for why not, seein' as it seems right enough for you to kiss me. O Parky! yer thinks I don't like yer? Blast yer, I do. I almost loves yer, Parky. If I didn't like yer so, I'd do it and think nothink of it after. But now it makes it almost too bad for bearin'."

"O Lina!" 'e says, "yer'll never see me no more to kiss either way, likin' or not likin'."

"Don't yer be sayin' that," she says, "or I'll 'ave to."

With that they stop talkin' and I went off to sleep again, seein' as the smell of dead 'ops was strong all over the fields, same as over the Boro', and it makes yer sleep fine.

Next mornin' I wakes up and looks roun' and see as Parky and the Innercent was both on 'em gone. So I up and take the pail and go down to the pond for water, feelin' about as miserable as my little brother when father was took to the 'orspital for breakin' 'is leg, and 'e started cryin' all night cos father never came 'ome to bed. And when I got down to the pond, the bank by the water was all tramped down where they'd 'eaved in the Innercent the night before, but the water was runnin' same as ever, bar for the sun shinin' on it. So I filled the pail, and went back to the 'uts, and at the door Lina

comes out laughin' and 'oldin' out 'er 'ands, and she says :

"What, Jacko ! let's have a bit of a wash in the pail !"

"Ger on," says I ; "it's for the corffee."

"O Jacko !" she says, "I some'ow feel as I could do with a bit of a wash this mornin', just to wash the night off."

So I puts down the pail, and she kneels and ducks 'er face in, and lathers all over 'er neck and shoulders with a bit o' soap as she kep' in 'er pocket, so as they fair shone in the sun. Then she starts dryin' 'erself with a bit of sackin', and I goes and gets another pail o' water for the corffee. And on me comin' back, she was combin' out 'er 'air over 'er eyes, and lookin' up at me through it with a bit of a smile as none other girls 'aven't got.

So we all 'as breakfast, and uncommon beastly it was through Parky not bein' there to make it. And nothink was talked but about Parky and the Innercent doin' a Guy like that and goin' away. And Mrs. Sullivan was in a fair rise about it, sayin' as 'e'd took us all in and she'd give 'im what for, if ever she came on 'is track again.

"And as for trapeezin' about the country with that there bloomin' Imbercyle," she says, "it's only a mercy 'e's got 'er, seein' as she'll be worser for 'im nor any corpse to go with, same as the bloke down 'ere last year ; 'im as 'is sister died in a cart with blood-spittin', but it was the joltin' of the cart as finished 'er, and 'e went on drivin' with 'er all about the fields

blubberin' and askin' of everybody what 'e was to do with a corpse, 'e not bein' used to 'avin' one, and there aint no good in 'avin' a corpse neither, unless yer can give it decent burial; and there aint no good in 'avin' an imbercyle at no price, let alone me losin' a pair of 'ands at my bin through 'is breachin' 'is contrack."

"Yer may well say that, Mrs. Sullivan," says old Mother Seabrook, "and no wonder yer thinks evil on them as cares about imbercyles, when there's girls as they might be carin' for, and them not imbercyles by any manner but somethink of the opposite, no matter for what they look like."

And with that she looks at Lina and then round at all on us, as much as to say, "Yer can't kid me. What do *you* think?" But Lina says nothink, only she keeps starin' at Mrs. Seabrook so innercent, same as you'd stare at a copper when 'e's almost nicked you snakin' somethink.

But the rest of our time 'oppin' was crule bad, what with the rain comin' on, and some o' the kids dyin' through eatin' too many apples, and Mrs. Seabrook turnin' nasty by reason of 'er man 'elpin' Mrs. Sullivan at 'er bin, and Mrs. Sullivan tellin' 'im she wasn't faded so much as she looked, not yet. So Lina and her was turned out o' the married quarters, and put to sleep in a gipsy tent by theirselves. And Parky bein' gone, there wasn't nobody to keep order nor smooth things down a bit. So we was all real glad when the last field was done, and the women 'ad took their rush for the last

'op-pole, and the fellers as ducked the Innercent 'ad made a Guy and labelled it the Imbercyle, and burned it, as is the proper thing to do when the 'opping's over, and we all got safe back to good old London—all on us but Parky, as never come 'ome no more, and the Innercent, as didn't count, bein' only a natural.

CHAPTER II.

An Aristocrat of Labor.

N me gettin' 'ome from the pickin' I 'anded over nineteen and thruppence to my mother, that bein' my share out from the bin, after payin' what old Seabrook called my mess bill by subs for what we'd 'ad to eat durin' the time. So for the next fortnight I was 'appy enough, eight shillin' a week bein' what my mother was chargin' me at that time for my keep and all—fellers mostly gettin' charged ten. But through bein' still out o' work, acourse I got more miserable every day, what with fallin' be'ind in my payments again, and me not able to stand the fellers as stood me to anythink. But one mornin' I got up feelin' a bit better, and then I called to mind as it was a Sunday, and that was why, 'cos on Sundays everybody kind o' looks out o' work, so yer feel yerself same as other people through not seein' 'em runnin' about and drivin' carts and carryin' things, whiles you go 'angin' round in no 'urry at all, and the time goes by slow as a funeral "in this style twenty pound." So it bein' a Sunday, we all stopped in bed till late, thinkin' about gettin' up, and then we 'as our breakfasts. And my father

'ad give my little brother a penny to buy 'isself an egg, same as 'e mostly does Sundays, when work's pretty fair. So my mother boils it, and cuts it in 'alf between me and my little brother. And then I thinks to myself I'd take a bit of a walk in the Road, and see life. But just as I was passin' by Millennium Buildin's I 'ear somebody spit down at me, and lookin' up I see old Father Bateman, as is mostly called Spotter, 'oldin' 'is 'ead out of a winder and laughin'.

"What, Jacko!" 'e says, speakin' in a voice like a 'busman's, as is what 'e always likes to be mistook for, by reason of their knowledge of 'orseflesh. "I betted myself I wouldn't 'it yer, and I didn't neither. What are yer after, runnin' about on a blessed Sunday same as any 'eathen? Never you break the Sabbath-day, my son. That's a thing as I never did; nor no other day o' the week neither, no more nor I could 'elp for."

"Cheese it, Spotter!" says I. "What price a Salvation bonnet and a tambourine?" For 'e loves to be treated same as one of us lads, does old Spotter.

"You just come up 'ere a minute," 'e says, "whiles I put on my dress close, and I don't mind if I walk with yer as fer as Lime'ouse."

'Is room was just as small as ever I see one, a reg'lar one-and-sixer, and dear at a shillin'. Bar the bed and an old box where 'e kep' 'is cup and saucer and sugar and off shirt and towel and blackin'-brush and extry socks, there wasn't nothink in it but a big black picture on

the wall, showin' an old man in a green coat, with a gun in one 'and and a dead bird in the other, and 'e starin' at it as if 'e was fair astonished at 'isself for 'avin' 'it that bird, and 'alf thought it was shammin' dead to 'ave a game with 'im. And runnin' all round was a big frame with flourishes. Solid gold it 'ad been at one time, but now, same as Sister Mary's canary, it 'ad started comin' through the dye.

"Do me the honor to take the box-seat, me boy," says old Spotter, slammin' down the lid o' the chest for me to sit on. "And you're quite right in admirin' that portrait. It's a family portrait, sir. It's a work of Art. It's a hair-loom, is that picture. That portrait, sir, is a representation of my own gran'father, as 'e lived in the county of Devon, we bein' all on us what's called a county family, as is a sort o' thing you bloomin' Londoners 'll never know the value of. Eh, 'e was a rare sportsman was my gran'father! much the same as me. 'E shot over 'is covers with the best of 'em, goin' shares in 'em with a lord, as took the day-shootin', gran'father takin' the night—same as them two lodgers in the play did with their bedroom. So it was what's called a Dual Control, as is seldom an 'armonious basis, my son, either for sport or domestic establishments, as I 'ad used to tell my old missus. And at the end of it they came to some triflin' little dispute about the game-birds, and the law took up the lord's side, as was but 'uman nature and law beside. So my father and me come to London sooner nor put up with such things. But afore we started

father got that there portrait painted for a memorial by a young drawer in the village, same as made the sign of the Golden Dragon by mixin' up the chief parts of crocodiles, lions, bats, and such—that bein' 'is genus, as yer'll see if yer look close at that bird, as combines the qualities of a pheasant and a partridge, so as yer can't rightly tell which it is; showin' as my gran'father was about equal good at 'ittin' both. My father 'e paid five poun' down for that family portrait, gold frame and cost of colorin' thrown in. Yer may wonder I aint sold it afore this, seein' as five poun' is a sportin' kind o' sum, and pictures gainin' by age and turnin' meller, as they tells me, same as men. Well, I often wonder at myself too; but the truth is, I've got a decent respeck. That's what it is, my boy, a decent respeck. And then I likes to set and think what a fair old scramble there 'll be for it when I'm gorne. There's my eldest daughter as is pledged to 'elp me with the rent, she'll be wantin' it. And there's my youngest, as I'm goin' to see now, as is usual about Sunday dinner time—she'll be wantin' it too. And if I was in 'eaven, I couldn't wish for better sport nor watchin' 'em fight it out. But for stayin' power I'd lay all my money on the youngest."

With that we started out, and old Spotter pulls 'isself together, and steps down the middle of the pavement same as if the road was 'is private front garden. And us goin' along, I see all the drivers lift up their whip-'andles square from the shoulder at 'im, and all the

sellers says: "What chur, Spotter? What's the odds this mornin'?" And the women kep' callin' out: "'Ullo, Bluebeard!" and all on 'em laughed.

"It seems yer've got a rare lot o' mates, any'ow," says I.

"Yus," 'e says, "I own to a tidy bowin' acquaintance. It comes of 'avin' been a kind o' public character in my day; and my day aint over yet, don't think it. I'm still a marked man in Stepney, let alone 'Oxton. Yer see, my son, I've always 'ad a likin' for a bit o' pleasure and a bit o' sport. No 'arm in that, I should 'ope, sein' as we was all born 'uman bein's, same as lambs and puppies, playin' about, and enjyin' of ourselves as Nature shows us 'ow. There is them as likes to work till they drops, same as anybody doin' time; but I wasn't never one o' them sort. I'm for a pleasin' variety: fust a little sport, then a little work, and then a little sport again. That's what I call life, and that's cause why I've been a casual all my time. 'Yus, I'm a casual to my bleedin' 'eart; and I say a casual ought to be a casual, and I say a casual ought to be a man, and not a bloomin' 'og! I'm a casual, that's what I am; and I own to lovin' 'orse-racin' and scrappin' and the Bow runnin'-ground. I'm what them newspapers calls one o' the Aristocracy o' Labor, that's what I am; same as the other Aristocracy, only for doin' labor now and again."

So we walked down the pavement proud as publicans, me feeling' myself quite big through

seemin' some'ow to go 'alves with old Spotter's glory, by reason of keepin' company with 'im. And as we go along, 'e marks the points of every livin' thing as passed, more especial 'orses and females. 'E'd notice every 'bus-'orse as went by and every cab-'orse and dray, and 'e'd put 'is 'ead on one side, and screw up 'is eye, and bite at a bit 'o straw in 'is mouth, just the same as if that 'orse was goin' to start off for the Derby next minute. Only of tram-'orses 'e took no account, seein' as 'e said, yer might as well put a locomotive between the traces; and yer may know that, 'cos they don't need to wear blinkers, and soon get the look 'o sheep.

"Yer see, sonny," 'e says, "as to 'orses I knows exact where each one's weak and strong point lays, and what 'e thinks on it 'isself—or 'erself, if she 'appen to be born a mare. And I knows what's going on inside of 'em, 'cos in a sort of a manner I kind o' loves them all, as if I was their father. Same with women."

And it was much the same with dogs too. 'E'd whistle to every kind o' dog, and squeak at it like a puppy, to make it prick up its ears. And 'e'd tell yer what kind its father must 'ave been, and what kind its mother and its gran'-fathers and gran'mothers, same as on the ground-plan of the Queen's gran'fathers and gran'mothers 'ung up on the wall at school. And if 'e saw a bird 'angin' out in a little cage in front of a winder, as is good for birds by reason o' their likin' for fresh air, 'e'd tell yer what kind it was—lark or linnet or finch,—and what it was made for by nature; whether for

singin'-matches or only for chirpin'-matches, and whether it 'ud sing best blind or with its eyes left in, and what odds 'e'd be prepared to lay on its winnin'. And 'e watched the pigeons flyin' round, and picked out them as 'ud do a mile a minute on their way 'ome, for all you startin' 'em right away from Southend. And 'e took and showed me the place on a cock's leg where the spur 'ad used to grow in old days when cock-fightin' was a gen'leman's sport, same as pigeon shootin' now. And 'e said the sight of it put 'im in mind of a blank cartridge, and we might as well arm our soldiers with blank cartridges as leave our cocks defenseless against their natural enemies.

But us comin' near on Lime'ouse, 'e some'ow seemed to get kind o' silent, and at the turnin' up Salmon's Lane 'e stop' talkin' altogether, and in place of walkin' bold down the middle o' the path, 'e kep' edgin' along by the wall. Next 'e leads me down a nice quiet street, and stops afore a clean door, with a plate on it as said : "Arthur Milwood, Esq."

"The odds is pretty nigh three to one agen a peaceable dinner to-day, let alone any," 'e says, 'alf to 'isself, "seein' as she didn't fly out at me last week, nor yet the week before, not to speak on."

Then 'e turns to me and says :

"Jacko, my boy, it's bad enough when yer 'as children, as my old missus 'ad used to say, she 'avin' seven and buryin' no more nor five. But when yer children 'as you, it's almost past bearin."

With that 'e knocks very quiet at the door with a lot of little knocks runnin', showin' as 'e knowed they'd got the 'ole 'ouse. And a little kid in a clean white pinafore comes and opens, and before anybody couldn't speak, we 'ear a voice screamin' out from the back-kitchin :

"Johnnie, if that's yer gran'father come for 'is dinner, see as 'e wipes 'is boots and don't come bringin' 'is dirt into my front 'all."

"All right, my dear; I'm old enough to see after myself, thank yer kindly," says old Spotter, wipin' 'is boots very careful on the mat and 'issin' a bit, same as if 'e'd been rubbin' down a 'orse in a stable. Then 'e takes a little green apple from his trousey pocket, and gives it to the kid. But where 'e'd nicked that apple from, or 'ow 'e'd kep' from eatin' of it 'isself, is one 'o the things there aint no gettin' to the bottom of.

Then we goes straight into the parlor, as 'ad a pianner opposite the door, and a lookin'-glass over the mantel, and marble vases under glass shades with red and yeller fruit stuck in 'em, and a table with an album in the middle and other books all round like spokes on a wheel, and a lot of 'orse'air chairs, and a fine flowery carpet, and two pictures covered over with yeller gauze to keep the flies off, and other things almost as good as in a shop. So old Spotter sets down in the middle of one of them chairs quite easy, only for keepin' 'is feet as much off the carpet as might be. And the kid keeps starin' at 'im, and gnawin' at 'is apple. And we all kep' sayin' nothink, same as waiting for the doctor at the 'orspital.

After a bit in comes the lady very 'ot from the fire. And she cops 'old on the kid, and says:

"'Oo told yer to bring yer gran'father into the drorin'-room, as yer knows very well we always gets our dinners in the kitchin the days as 'e come 'ere, for fear of what 'e may likely 'ave brought with 'im from them Buildin's. Now just you take and set 'im in the middle o' the white boards, as gives yer a chance o' catchin' whatever may be. Buildin's indeed! Yer never know what comes out o' Buildin's. It's a wonder of yer aunt to go on payin' the rent for 'im in such places as e' lives in. But acourse when yer lives on gratitude, and never turns a penny for yerself from week-end to week-end, yer can't be purtikler."

Old Spotter gets up and goes to the door, tryin' to whistle somethink. But all on a sudden the lady catches sight o' me for the first time, and she screams out: "Oh, my Gord, what's that?" same as if I'd been one o' them livin' things she'd been speakin' about.

"'E's only a young friend o' mine, Annie, dear," says old Spotter, speakin' very gentle, "as give me 'is company down the road, and I made free to ask 'im in."

"Johnnie," says she, "just you open the door for this person, and I only wonder *at* yer gran'father not knowin' 'is place better nor to bring all 'is pauper friends into the 'ome of 'is own flesh and blood, as tries 'ard to keep themselves respectable."

"Madam," says old Spotter, comin' up next

to me, "this 'ere young man's under the pertection of my 'orspitality. I'm acquaint with the laws of 'orspitality, 'avin' had 'em written on my 'eart afore I was born. And if yer turns 'im from yer doors, yer turns away yer old father too. 'Ave yer no respeck for yer own father, as give yer a good mother, and brought yer up to what yer are, and married yer more nor comfortable through gettin' yer 'usband, as now is, a rare bargain over that same cob as 'e still drives all around with 'is samples o' cigars and tobaccer, and 'e as civil-spoken and decent an 'usband as ever came 'ome to tea, and me yer own father as never grudged yer bit or sup no matter where 'e cadged it, and you bein' always a rare child to take all yer could get?"

By this old Spotter was fair started, and kep' gettin' 'igher and 'igher, and the lady redder and redder. But she made as if she took no notice, just tellin' Johnnie not to do whatever 'e was doin', and rubbin' at the bits of furniture and the door-'andles with 'er apron. And I was tryin' to slip out at the door and get away, more especial as I never meant to come, but the old man 'ad such a clutch on my arm I couldn't move.

So there we stood, same as when a narrer street's blocked, and neither side won't rein back, but the carmen set cursin' at each other, and waitin' for the copper to come. And at last the 'usband comes mouchin' down the stairs, 'e not lookin' like a copper, but 'avin' a green and gold smokin'-cap on and worked slippers, same as any West-end gen'leman; 'e

bein' a fattish, sorft-lookin' bloke with big black whiskers, same as them as talk at public meetin's and such. And 'e asks what's all the row about, and why a respectable 'ouse'older as was drivin' round all week can't 'ave 'his pipe in peace of a Sunday mornin'? And if not, what was the good of bein' a respectable 'ouse-'older, and payin' the rates?

"It's all along o' that father-in-law of yers," she says, "and 'is bringin' 'is gutter acquaintance into my 'ouse without with yer leave nor by yer leave, as is enough to corrupt that blessed child o' mine, let alone what 'e may bring with 'im by way of fevers and other things."

"Oh, well," he says, "for Gord's sake let's 'ave a little peace on a Sunday. Why can't yer give the old man 'is dinner, and get shut on 'im. Like enough 'e's 'ungry, bein' so poor and all."

"That's like you, Mr. Milwood," she says, "takin' the bread out o' my child's mouth to give to any misbeknown pauper as breaks in upon yer peace. Peace, indeed! What's the good of us 'avin' a 'ouse of our own if we can't speak a bit of our mind in peace? We might just as well go back to Buildin's. But I s'pose it aint my 'ouse nor yet my victuals, 'ard as I works to keep 'em clean and cooked for yer, and if yer likes to demean yerself by askin' the off-scourin's of the streets to set at table with my child, it's no affair o' mine."

"Please, ma'am," I says, seein' as things was kind o' calmin' down, "I aint no off-scourin'

nor yet no pauper, and I never asked for no dinner, me not bein' 'ungry through 'avin' 'ad eggs to my breakfast."

I guessed that 'ud kind of knock 'er, and so it did. But she only looked me up and down, first at my bust boot and then at my bust trousey-knees, and then at my collar, as was nothink but a bit of blue 'an'kerchief through me bein' out o' work. Then she starts off into the kitchen, saying nothink but "Eggs, indeed!"

"Maybe me and my mate 'ad best be off," says old Spotter, kind of sighin' easy. "She don't seem very sweet this mornin', and I'm not one to force my company, no more than to desert my pals, knowin' the laws of 'orspitality."

"Oh, no! you stop, as yer 'ere," said the gen'leman. "You just stop and make a good dinner, and the boy can set and look on. There's a bit of boiled pork as we've got."

I kep' my eye on old Spotter, and could see 'im half turn to the door and then turn back again, bein' drawn by the smell of the meat and the onions and greens, as was very persuadin' to an empty stomick. At last he says:

"Well, it's full early yet, and the boy'll 'ave time to get back to 'is dinner at 'ome. S'pose we go in and 'ave a bit of a set down."

It wasn't no manner of use for me to be sayin' I'd as leave go 'ome straight off. Old Spotter took 'is dyin' oath 'e wouldn't let 'isself be beat on the post, and knowin' the laws of 'orspitality, was goin' to act accordin'.

"I stands by you, Jacko," say 'e, "and you must stand by me, as is only right."

And it seemed to me he was kind o' frightened at stoppin' there without me, and that's the cause why 'e'd asked me to come from the fust. So rather nor me lose 'im 'is dinner, I went along with 'em into the kitchen, as was all scrubbed and washed, and the dish-covers and grate polished up till they fair shone, like the fire-engine, when it's lying at 'ome in the station.

So I set down with my back to the table, makin' as if I wasn't there. And nothink much was said, only that at the start the lady passes the remark: "I've kep' some cold mutton over for fear yer father-in-law should come to dinner to-day, and them as lives on other people's gratitude can't afford to play no games with their insides."

The rest of the time she kep' makin' no end of a set-out with 'er kid, temptin' 'im with bits o' things, and pattin' 'is back when 'e choked, and wonderin' if 'e didn't look a bit pale to-day, and if 'is poor dear little nut wasn't too 'ot. From start to finish it was: "And didn't the poor darlin' like it then?" or, "'Ere's a bit o' somethink nice for the dear child," and all manner of silly baby's talk. And the only notice she took of the rest on us was to go on cos the kid 'ad been at a school-treat the day before, and 'adn't 'ad no flowers give 'im to bring 'ome same as the others.

"It's always the same way with my child," she says; "'e's risin' four now, and the fust

Chris'mas tree as 'e ever went to, when we was living further up the Road, 'e never got nothink. And the second Chris'mas tree 'e only brought 'ome an orange, and they two a penny. Cause why, the Reverent Barnett 'e always did 'ave a spite agen that child, 'e did."

And she drank a rare lot of porter so as to be good for the little baby as kep' on asleep upstairs, and at the finish she put down a Lord Mayor's plateful of scraps and gravy for the cat, sayin' as she knew what it was for 'er to want it through 'avin' three kittens to nurse.

Dinner bein' over, old Spotter jumps up and says; "Now, Jacko, we'll be goin' 'ome. 'There's no place like 'ome,' as the song says, and thank Gord there aint, as I used to say to my old missus, to encourage 'er like."

"Johnnie," says the lady straight off, "you run upstairs this minute, and don't you stop listenin' to yer gran'father's loose talk."

"And now, Mr. Milwood," she goes on, "if yer father-in-law's quite finished with 'is eatin' and speakin', you may open the door to 'im; only mind as yer don't scrape the new paint nor yet spoil the 'all paper with the 'andle."

"Jacko, my son," says old Spotter, us bein' fairly in the street, "let's go back by the 'Igh-way. There won't be nobody to take notice on us there, it bein' so full o' people this time on a Sunday, and them mostly sailors, as comes and goes and doesn't know nothink of yer private misfortunes; and that's why everybody likes 'em, same as the swallers. But females is like pigeons: send 'em as far as yer like, they've

always got one eye kep' on yer back-door, and they never forgets one bloomin' mark on it. Now men like me and you, we always forgets. It's only decent."

A bit further on 'e says again : " Jacko, when I come out o' that there 'ouse, I feel as yer'd feel if yer dropped to drivin' a tram-car after drivin' a four-in-'and. I've know'd that woman from a baby, she bein' my daughter and all, but I don't know now what it is as 'er clo's cover. It aint no woman's flesh, that's sure. Why, each Sunday as ever is, about this time I take my dyin' oath as I'll never go there again, but when the next Sunday comes—— O Jacko, my son, an empty belly's a tryin' thing to argue to all week-days and go to bed with every night. It's more tantalizin' nor what any female is, tantalizin' as they all on 'em be."

" Jacko," 'e says again, " I was brought up proper to foller the tex' as says, ' Be 'appy and yer 'll be good.' But it don't pay in the long run. If yer rides that tex', my son, yer 'll get beat on the 'ome reach. I aint 'appy now, let alone bein' good, as 'ad ought to be the natural consequence. I've been a classy casual all my time, Jacko, but the glory of casuals is vanishin' like a bloomin' 'alf-pint. Take a feller same as you : 'e gets up of a mornin' ; 'e 'as 'is bread-and-butter waitin' for 'im, cos 'is mother or wife 'as got up fust. Then 'e's got 'is work afore 'im ; 'e knows where to go, and 'e goes. Now take me : there aint no call in partikler for me to get up at all ; there aint no bread-and-butter waitin' for me, nor no work to think

on and curse at, nor no place to go to. It don't make no sort o' diff'rence which way I goes, 'ere or there" (and 'e swep' 'is arm all round the sky of the 'Ighway). "I just 'angs about lookin' for a job, and when I stands watchin' the fellers pullin' at the ropes or carryin' bails or loadin' up a 'old, strike me, Jacko! there's somethink in my arms fair sets up achin' for the work, same as in a sucklin' mother's breasts when she 'ears 'er baby callin' for 'er. And then, me settin' idly by, maybe an old mate treats me to somethink, and so it goes on, the drink actin' powerful on an empty belly. And to pass the time away, I starts bettin' agen myself on the barges as goes along, or I plays the old game of settin' two worms on a flag-stone, and layin' which 'll wriggle itself off it fust. But there aint no real business in such things. And as to 'orses and such, I still 'as my fancy, and many's the man as comes to take my advice in layin' a sportsmanlike tanner. But as to me myself—why, what's the good of 'avin' an opinion, if yer aint prepared to back it?

"Sometimes, Jacko," 'e goes on, "I thinks of makin' application to some sort o' charity to find me work or else fill my belly. But it wouldn't be no manner o' good, me not bein' a deservin' case. No, I'm not a deservin' case, thank Gord! My daughter there—now, she's a deservin' case: that's what she is.

"And sometimes I think, when it comes to the worst, as I'll just start off and take a walk down to Devon, where I lived when I was a

boy same as you, and my family name is looked on with respeck. The Work'us there, as we 'ad used to call the Bastyle, stood on an 'ill lookin' miles over the sea, and there was a big garden and a wall all round. And once a week the old folks is let out, and goes cadgin' round for drinks and tobaccer and such. And many's the time I've give 'em nuts or bits o' peppermint or whatever came. And maybe now the lads 'ud do the same by me, besides throwin' stones at me from be'ind 'edges, as was rare sport too, just to 'ear the old uns swear. And what with me tellin' stories of the races I've seen, and the fights, and the shootin', and what with playin' cards with the Manager, and givin' 'im sportin' tips, and sayin' sugary little things to the Matron same as females like, I shouldn't wonder if I made that Work'us 'um.

"But whether I dies or goes to the Bastyle fust, one thing's a cert, Jacko, and that's as you shall 'ave the family portrait to yerself, cos you've showed a decent respeck, and I'm all the 'appier for 'avin' stood out on yer be'alf. As I was sayin' there 'll be a fair old scramble for that portrait when I goes, but you shall 'ave it, Jacko, you shall, on my word, even if I've got to make my dyin' will and testament to-morrer. I'm uncommon proud o' that portrait, my son, me 'avin' always 'ad a deal o' family pride, thank Gord!"

With that I left 'im and ran 'ome just in time to cut in for the end o' dinner, as is mostly late on Sundays to save tea. And in the evenin' I ask my father, as 'ad used to do a bit of

carvin' and gildin' afore 'e took to fittin' reg'lar, 'ow much 'e'd give for old Spotter's family portrait.

"Well," 'e says, "I wouldn't give nothink for the family, nor nothink for the portrait, but I shouldn't mind advancin' two-and-nine on the frame, just to cut up small."

CHAPTER III.

The "St. George" of Rochester.

FORE that week was well out, I got took on for a job as packer in the City, and every mornin' I was up almost as soon as light, and ridin' along the Road in a workman's car, same as if I'd kep' a private gig. So I put in two hours' work till breakfast, and mostly got 'ome again to tea by six or 'alf past, 'avin' an hour off in the middle for my dinner at a cook-shop.

One evenin' we'd all done our teas and was feelin' very comfortable, what with father 'avin' got a good job too for fittin' some chapel or ware'ouse or somethink o' that down in Bow, as 'ud keep 'im goin' pretty steady through winter in all weathers, the brickwork bein' finished off. And I wus thinkin' to myself whether I'd get some fellers to come round with me and be chippin' young Duffy, or pluck up 'eart to go and pass the time of evenin' to Lina Sullivan, she bein' one o' them as likes yer best when yer 'appy. But on a sudden there comes a knockin' at the door, and little Susan Moore sticks 'er 'ead in and says in a kind o' voice like sayin' poetry at school:

"If yer please, father's gone and 'ad another

stroke, and wants to see Mr. Britton very purtikler."

"That's a bad job," says my father; "at that rate I reckon it's about all over with old Timmo. 'E'll snuff it, sure as I'm alive. All right, my dear, I'll come along this minute. Just set yourself down, and take a cup o' tea."

Old Timmo 'ad fell on 'is back in ladin' a lighter the spring afore, and been queer all down one side ever since, for all 'is being able to move about and carry things, but not to manage 'is lighter no more. So father tells me to come along, 'e always likin' me to see all the sights as might be, and old Timmo bein' famous as the strongest man in our parts or p'r'aps on the water anywheres, let alone 'is 'avin won the Doggett coat and badge the very same day as 'e was twenty-one. And there's some as say 'e could 'ave beat old 'Iggins 'isself, as is called the ex-champion sculler of England, only that their ages wasn't arranged right for 'em to make a match of it, through 'Iggins bein' older. And father says it's often the same way with gettin' married, seein' as there'd be a rare lot of different marriages, if only the parties 'ad started more level when they was fust born.

Timmo 'ad a 'ouse all to 'isself and family in Pennington Street close along by the Dock, 'e bein' always in good work up to the time of 'is accident, through bein' able to do as much as any two. So we knocked, and Mrs. Moore came to the door, and seein' us she started cryin' and carryin' on most terrible. Stout and red she was, 'avin' a lot o' children, for all not

bein' old yet. So my father pushes past 'er, tellin' er as p'r'aps things 'ud be better soon.

"And they couldn't be worse," she says, "cos, if they was, we'd any'ow 'ave 'is club-money to draw and live on."

Gettin' upstairs, we find old Timmo lyin' on 'is bed quite still, with a decent brown blanket over 'im, and a candle burnin'; and the doctor 'ad took and stuck a Bible or somethink o' that under 'is 'ead to prop it up. And one of 'is arms was layin' out over the blanket bare from the shoulder, and oh, my soul! it was just like the front leg of a cart-'orse, barrin' the extry finish about the 'and. But 'is gray eyes seemed kind o' bigger nor usual, and 'is nose and tuft o' beard more peaky, 'is 'ole face some'ow pale, for all its bein' dark brown as a bit o' seasoned wood—a deal darker nor what 'is 'air was, that bein' yellerish and burnt near white at the roots by the sun.

"What, Timmo!" says my father quite cheerful.

"What, George!" 'e answers, and says no more, 'e bein' always slow of speech. But that evenin' 'e'd been turnin' over what 'e 'ad to say so as to run straight on when once started, only not knowin' where to start.

"Gone aground again?" says my father.

"Not me!" 'e says, "I aint one to go aground, but it's like as when a barge gets run into by a steamer through no fault of 'ern. Yes, yer may 'oist the green flag over me now, same as over a wreck in the tideway."

"Don't yer be sayin' that, Timmo," says my

father, and cops 'old on 'is 'and, and makes as if 'e was only feelin' at 'is pulse goin'.

"Well, cheer up, mate," says Timmo, "that's neither 'ere nor there. What I wants is to give yer a kind of a message to take, if so be I peg out this time. Yer see it's all along of my Doggett badge, as I won fair thirty year gone, me bein' now turned of fifty."

With that 'e looks at the badge, as was 'angin' up opposite over the fireplace, and shinin' in the candle-light, the silver 'orse on it showin' quite plain.

"I s'pose my missus aint anywheres near?" 'e whispers. "Well, that's all right. Me and you bein' men, we understands one another, bnt they women understands nothink about it, bein' females, bar one as understood, and it's 'er I'm goin' to speak about—'er and my Doggett badge, them's the two ropes I've got to 'old by.

"Yer mightn't think it, mate," 'e went on, "but once on a time I was in love with a woman."

"Ger on!" says my father, "once on a time indeed! With all the females 'untin' up and down after yer all yer life, and you married three times as I 'ear say, and a fine lot 'o children beside! Once in love, ger on! Men like me and you is always in love, more *or* less, just accordin'."

"Now ye're talkin' same as any female yerself, mate," he says. "The kind o' love yer mean's the common kind, as is quite right and proper in its place, but it aint the kind as I

mean. And I wasn't talkin' o' none o' my three wives neither, for all I've no word agen them, and they wasn't none of 'em bad-lookin' to start with. But it's a different kind o' woman as I'm speakin' on."

"That's as it may be," says my father; "and it might so 'appen as I've been in love myself same as you, for all your coat and badge."

"Now keep yer 'air on, mate," he says, "and we'll go back to that same badge, as is the thing I was wantin' to speak about.

"Yer see," he says, "it came about all along of one day some thirteen or fourteen year after I'd won it. I'd worked myself up bit by bit from bein' lighterman's boy to bein' a certificated lighterman; and then, through always 'avin proper pride of myself, I took to the sailin' line, fust as boy, then as mate, and last of all as captain. And just about the time I'm a-goin' to tell on, I'd been captain two year gone, sailin' the barge as was then called the *Deborah Jane*, 'ailin' from Rochester, for all 'er voyage bein' from Maidstone to the West Kent Wharf close agen London Bridge, or to the 'Onduras Wharf agen Blackfriars, if so 'appen we was carryin' 'ay. And seein' as I was sailin' for a good firm and was makin' from thirty shillin' to two pound reg'lar, and at whiles five bob extry, I'd married 'er as was my fust wife, a Maidstone girl. But she died shortly before the time I'm speakin' on in her first confinement, as females will, through no fault o' mine. So I was feelin' very independent, and a bit lonesome at the same time, through 'avin' nobody waitin' for me when the

Deborah Jane put in 'ome, as was mostly on Sunday afternoon. But I never missed 'er much on board, 'avin' the same two mates as before, and she never 'avin' made the voyage with me through females mostly not suitin' when yer urgent. And my business on the back voyage was always urgent, almost as urgent as steam, as is the urgentest thing there is.

"Well, as I was sayin', it was that Saturday afternoon, about this time or earlier in September, the flood runnin' up till 'alf after five, and the water all jumpin' about like a shoal of fish under the sun, and a draught from the west fair callin' for the sails to start. I'd just finished ladin' up with a cargo of sugar and currents and bacon and cheese and soap and that, enough to wash and fill the bellies of 'alf the villages in Kent, seein' as the *Deborah Jane*, as then was, took down eighty-five ton in 'er 'old as easy as me or you 'ud take down a quart. And we'd just drifted across to Tennant's Wharf to take on an extry sack of flour, and was puttin' the gear straight, ready to 'eave up and cast away at the turn o' the flood, and there was a line of 'eads watchin' us from the bridge, same as mostly stands watchin', no matter if there aint nothink to watch. And on a sudden one of 'em comes down round by the steps, and stands leanin' agen a post by the Old Swan pier, close by where we was layin' along the wharf. O Christ! it's fifteen year agone or more, but there she was standin' in flesh and blood with some-

think of a white dress on and a kind of bluish cloak, so as yer might almost 'ave took 'er for a 'orspital nurse. So she stands lookin' at me, and now and again I gets a sideways look at 'er in settin' up the gear. And each time as I looks, I says to myself, 'She's *all* right,' I says.

"Now it so 'appens I'm one o' them as can't abear to see a female by 'erself and me not speak to 'er. It's kind of unperlite not to speak, and she takes it as such. 'Oh!' she says to 'erself, any female does, 'so I aint good-lookin' enough to be spoke to, aint I?' and that makes 'er wild. So just as we'd cast off, and was swingin' slow round by the pier-end, the water bein' at the slack, I got up close agen the side, and looks up at 'er, and says quite gentle: 'Eh, Miss' (I was goin' to say 'My Dear,' but some-'ow I stuck in 'Miss' instead). 'Eh, Miss,' I says, 'it's I wish as you was comin' down the water with me, I do.'

"'I *am* comin',' she says, and steps down on the gunwale as cool as gettin' into a penny bus. I just put one arm round 'er to 'old 'er safe, and next moment we'd swung out into the stream, and down under the bridge. And I could 'ear the crowd on top a-laughin' and shoutin' after me, and sayin' 'What chur, Timmo!' 'You just bring back my old woman,' and passin' undecent remarks, and singin' bits about 'Nancy Lee,' as was all the go in them days. But I feels 'er under this 'ere arm, she so thin and light, and I looks down on 'er and fair laughs with wonder; and

she looks up at me with a kind o' look o' what a pigeon feels, as gets safe off after bein' let out o' the trap at a shootin', and is missed by the outsiders as well. But as to me bein' surprised—well, if the statue of Queen Victorier on Temple Bar 'ad walked into my barge, I couldn't 'ave been more surprised, let alone pleased. And my two mates kep' standin' and starin' at us, and they left settin' up the gear, and we just let the *Deborah Jane* drift, worse nor any common lighter, till on a sudden a big steamer as was makin' up for the Pool started whistlin' and 'ootin' at us fit to wake a churchful of people; so I gets out the long sweep and slues 'er round just in time. And would you believe it? that lady cops 'old on the sweep alongside o' me, and pulls for 'er life. Eh, she was always a rare plucked one and no mistake, and that quick and ready! Then I gets a lot of old canvas, and 'eaps it up agen the tiller for 'er to lay on. So she lays down, and keeps lookin' sometimes at me and sometimes at the sun, as still 'ad about an hour or more to go.

"So we sets up the gear at last, and swing out the foot o' the mains'l on a pole, bein' afore the wind, and up with the spinnaker, cos the draught was almost too light to make the fores'l bulge. And I loops up a bit of a reef in the mains'l, so as to let me see what might be comin' in the way, and settles myself at the tiller, just to show the lady how the *Deborah Jane*, as then was, could move. And the draught freshenin', we fair walked past the

other barges, top-s'ld as well as stumpies, mind you, just the same as if they was layin' at anchor. Eh, we was urgent in my old barge! almost as urgent as what steam is. But all the time we three mates says nothink at all, we thinkin' only of one thing, and the lady was layin' in 'er blue and white, same as a patch o' sky set on the deck.

"Oh, my soul! she was a reg'lar beauty, was that woman. Some'ow from first to last she always put me in mind of my spinnaker. P'r'aps it was through the spinnaker being so light and kind o' dainty, it bein' made to catch any breath of draught as might be, and left clean and white, not smeared over with ocher and oil same as the other sails, as is all red and brown and 'eavy. And then she'd bend and curve this way and that, for all the world like the spinnaker when the wind's 'avin' a bit of a game with it, for all 'er bein' as tough as a steel-wire stay. And mind you, it's always the spinnaker as snaps the top-mast, through bracin' it for'ard like a whip. And I've never see the man, little or big, but that woman could 'a' done just whatever she 'ad a mind to with 'im. And that's what sometimes makes me think as 'im as 'ad got 'old on 'er afore must 'ave died sudden, or somethink o' that. For she wasn't the sort as we men gets sick on, as is natural with most females, but she was always after somethink new; and all on a sudden, when nobody wasn't lookin' for it, she'd come round and say or do somethink more takin' and more sweeter nor all what

she'd said or done before. No, mate; once a man 'ad got 'old on 'er 'e wasn't likely to give 'er up, unless forced to—not 'im, not me anyways. I'd as soon as 'ave give up the water, as is equally uncertain and enticin'.

"Well, as I was sayin', we travel down past Woolwich, not sayin' much, but sailin' most urgent, as is usual afore the wind, with the leeboards 'auled up close, and the mizen swingin' with the rudder, and 'elpin' to pull us round the tacks by the Isle o' Dogs, and the iron loops and chains rattling along the 'orses, main and fore, accordin' as the sails swung over from side to side. But when we got into the long straight reach by Barkin' Level, seein' as the sun was almost down, and the evenin' closin' in cold, I give over the tiller to the mate, and went up to the lady where she was layin' starin' up at the sky, as 'ad a few stars comin' out. And I ask her if she'd fancy a drink o' tea. So she ups and comes down the bit of ladder into the cabin aft, as natural as might be, me goin' fust and slidin' the shutters in front o' the berths, so as they looked same as the other cupboards all round, where I kep' the coal and eatables and cookin' things and an extry set of trouseys and guernsey agen the wet. Then I lights a bit of a fire and makes a drop of tea, and I cuts the bread, and I says:

"'I ask yer pardon, mum——'

"'Don't call me mum, please,' she says, cuttin' in as quick as anythink.

"'As yer please, miss,' I says, 'but I thought maybe as mum showed more respeck, me not

knowin' which yer might be, as 'ow should I? But, askin' yer pardon, miss, do yer take butter to yer bread?'

"'A little, please,' she says.

"'I wasn't after askin' the quantity, little *or* much,' I says, 'but just whether or no yer takes it.'

"And it's my belief it was just that little bit of extry perliteness on my part in the matter of margarine as fust made 'er start takin' a kind o' fancy to me. But the mate always stuck out as she must 'ave 'eard from the crowd as I'd won the Doggett, and that set her lookin' at me. And I wasn't a bad-lookin' bloke in them days, nor never 'ave been. And as to them clurks and such like as was alongside of 'er lookin' at me—why, I could 'ave eat any three on 'em at once, and felt no fuller.

"Then I bring out what best I 'ad with me, laid up agen Sunday's dinner—tinned salmon, and bacon, and a bit of cold beef, and 'alf a Dutch cheese—and I give 'er the choice of just anything she fancied, me 'aving fust set it all out nice on bits o' newspaper. So when she'd finished 'er tea, and 'ad asked me all manner of easy questions about the barge and the water and the names o' things, I says to 'er:

"'I'm not after drivin' of yer away, miss, and should dearly love for you to stop, I should. But we shan't lay up till nigh on midnight, and if yer wants to go ashore, I'll put yer out at Green'ithe or at Gravesend, askin' yer pardon all the same.'

"Now, mate, you'll be thinkin' me a born

fool for offerin' such a thing, me 'avin' 'er there in the cabin along of me, and no escape. And I more nor 'alf thought myself a fool too, but some'ow she'd got somethink about 'er different from other females, and it wasn't no good you thinkin' o' makin' love to 'er agen 'er will. It wasn't never no good at all. And I see smart enough as she wasn't willin' at that time.

"But when she 'eard me talk about puttin' 'er ashore, she stood up sudden, and came over to me, and for the first time—eh, mate, but it wasn't the last by no manner—she put 'er 'ands on top o' mine, and they was as sorft and light yer scarce felt 'em, same as the feelin' of water on a warm day. And she looks up into my face, as was a way she 'ad, and oh, lord! when she did that, I misdoubt if even a female could 'ave said no to 'er, let alone a man of cast-iron, such as I wasn't by no means. And she begs and entreats of me to let 'er stop aboard, and not to send her back to London all alone.

"'Look,' she says, kind of layin' 'old on me, 'you can't refuse what a woman asks. I'll live on the deck or wherever there's room. I'll be your servant. I'll do the cookin' and washin' for you. I'll look after the ship, and make it all nice. Only don't turn me away.'

"And so she went on, or words to that effeck. And it's awesome to think what that woman, bein' a lady born, must have suffered afore she could bring 'erself to speak like that to a common waterman same as me, for all me bein' captain of the barge. But bein' always terrible fond o' females, and not likin' to see

none of 'em in distress, I just took on me to treat 'er same as you'd treat other females. So I smooths 'er down, and says :

" ' There, there, my dear, you shall stay with me till yerself gives the word to go. I'm big enough to purtect yer, I should 'ope, and there aint none as I knows on to say a word agen it, now as 'er as was my wife is gorne, for all this bein' no place for the likes of you.'

" Then I 'eard 'er give a kind of sob, but it wasn't with cryin', she not bein' much given to the like o' that. It was just the kind of deep breath as a man gives when 'e nicks 'is boat away from under a big steamer's bows, and 'e lays easy on 'is sculls a minute, and the steamer goes swishin' past through the water.

" Then I went on deck, and settin' on the main-'orse I tell the crew as the lady wanted to stop along of us a bit, and what I reckoned was the likely reasons for that. And the mate, as always aimed at a bit of argufyin', for all not bein' over partikler 'isself—it was 'im as afterward went off with my second wife, so as she died of 'is treatment of 'er—'e said 'e wasn't sure if it was just the right thing to do, to keep a female on board without yer bein' married to 'er, and for 'is part 'e'd never see a lady or gen'leman as was good for much ; but for the rest 'e raised no objection. And the boy says if *I* wouldn't purtect the lady, blind 'im ! 'e'd purtect 'er 'isself.

" Just then the lady comes up out o' the cabin 'erself, and I tells 'er the name of Charlie and the name of Ben.

"'And might I make so bold as ask what you'd like us to call you, miss?' I says.

"'Oh, it doesn't matter!' she answers. 'Are we a long way from London now?'

"'Yus,' I says, 'we're past Erith, and makin' up to Purfleet. By daytime you'd soon see the Tilbury 'otel standin' up in the distance, and it's just past there as we'll lay up till nigh on six to-morrer mornin'.'

"'Erith?' she says, 'that's a pretty name. You can call me Erith.'

"And that's the name she sticks in my poor 'ead under.

"By the time we laid up, me and the boy 'ad made the aft cabin pretty tidy for 'er; clearin' out my berth and puttin' in clean beddin', as was always supplied us by the firm, same as teapots and kettles, most generous. And we'd agreed that for the time bein' I was to 'ave one o' the berths for'ard, till we see 'ow things lay. So the boy was set to sleep in front of the fire, and me and the mate in the berths on each side. But after we'd cast anchor, I couldn't 'elp but just 'ave another look down into my own cabin; and standin' still and listenin' I could 'ear by the sound of 'er breathin' as she was sleepin' better nor a corpse. And by what I could reckon, for all me never askin', no bloomin' corpse 'ad ever been through worse nor what she 'ad, nor 'ad got a better right to sleep at the end on it.

"Next day, and next, and so on week after week, she still seemed best part asleep, as if she couldn't never 'ave enough of restin', for

all 'er bein' always so obligin' and perlite. And from the fust start off she took on 'er to do the bit o' cookin' and washin' and such as that, same as any common female, so as she wouldn't never let us so much as light a fire or boil a kettle for ourselves, she likin' to picture 'erself as earnin' 'er own livin', for all it wasn't exackly true in the actual value of 'er work. But none on us wouldn't 'ave give 'er up for twice the cost of 'er keep, and me not if yer'd give me the command of an iron-clad flagship. And that was the quietest autumn-time as ever I call to mind, neither rains nor fog. And often and often, as we was just droppin' up or down with the tide and a gentle draught, all sails set, I've stood at the tiller in the early mornin', and seen the sky and the water all turnin' white with the daylight, and maybe a bit of a mist just risin' off the river, and the *Warspite* and *Arethusa* trainin' ships lookin big above it, and a gull or two flappin' round to see what they could get, and the sea-birds callin' and pipin' from the mud along the banks; and I've 'eard little sounds of movin' in the cabin under my feet, and I've knowed in myself as she was gettin' up, and washin' 'erself, and lightin' the fire for our breakfasts. And then I've seen the blue smoke comin' out of the little chimbley. And after that she'd slide back the 'atch, and put 'er 'ead out, so smilin' and clean, for all the world to match the mornin'. But the rest o' the time when she wasn't workin', as she liked to call it, she was mostly layin' aft on the canvas, and at such times I always took the tiller myself, so as

to be ready near 'er if wanted. And for the up journeys I mostly tried to get a cargo of 'ay, and put 'er on top of it for 'er to lay on, and then, if so be we fouled a buoy, or a lighter came in to us, or we drew up 'ard agen the wharf, she'd never feel nothink but a soft kind o' jolt, as is the advantage of 'ay to lay on. And after a bit I sold up my little 'ouse, at Maidstone, and brought a few bits o' things, more especial female clothing, aboard. And so I'd got no other 'ome but the barge, and with 'er there I 'adn't no need to think o' none else. And about Christmas-time she started cuttin' and sewin' all day long at little bits of things, as she stowed in the spare berth o' the cabin. But all the time she kep' 'erself uncommon quiet, barrin' sometimes of a frosty night I'd 'ear 'er come on deck, and lookin' out I'd see 'er walkin' up and down, up and down, with nothink but the stars and the river-lights to see, and p'r'aps a great furnace flarin' away in the dark with a mouth like 'ell-fire. But some'ow she always got kind of uneasy and unrestin' as soon as ever we put up to London Bridge, and as long as we lay alongside the wharf she kep' 'erself in the cabin till the evenin'.

"Well, it might be about Easter-time or somethink earlier, she had a baby born on the barge—not a convenient kind o' place for such things to 'appen in, but I brought off a doctor from Rochester. And if it 'ad been a female, we'd 'ave called it Deborah Jane; but through its bein' a boy, there didn't seem nothink necessary to call it. So we called it all manner, and

out of all its names one kind o' name some'ow seemed to stick best, and we mostly spoke of it as Lucky, 'bloomin' little Lucky,' and suchlike silliness, as pleases females. But the real wonder was to see the fuss as Erith made over it so soon as she was better again, always dressin' and undressin', and washin' and 'uggin' at it, and takin' such care as if it was goin' to be the only one baby in the world, and people was to take a fresh start from it, same as from Adam.

"'Just look at 'is sweet little body,' she'd say, and with that she'd undress it again, and spread it out naked on'er lap, and kiss it all over by inches. And the mate said she made more to do with it nor the ordinary cos she'd paid 'igher for the gettin' it. But I some'ow think she'd got a kind o' notion as 'avin' 'ad the baby some'ow put 'er up on a level same as other women. After all them pains and the strangeness of 'avin' that bit o' live stuff to feed and fend for, all the rest, whatever it was as 'ad gone before, didn't seem much to matter, it bein' all kind o' sunk in the kid. And it was two things mostly as made me think so: fust cos when we put into London, she didn't never 'ide away in the cabin any more, but just fetched up the baby, and sat on deck, nursin' it and lookin' up at the bridge quite calm, as if nobody could say nothink at 'er now. And second, she came to look on me quite different. Before that, I might just as well 'ave been a saint or an angel or a parson from the way she treated me, makin' scarce no difference for me

bein' there or not. But now she seemed to find out as I wasn't never any such-like person, but somethink quite different. And she grew kind o' shyer, and yet more sweeter, than before. It makes me squirm to think on it now; it do indeed!

"It took a long time comin' on between us, —long on 'er side, is what I mean. Yer see, livin' on a barge aint at all the same thing as livin' on shore and goin' out to work. Yer've mostly always got time on a barge, and there aint no call to 'urry about sayin' anythink, more especial when the two of yer's livin' together on it, and to-morrer goes by much the same as to-day, only for the matter of the wind blowin' or not blowin'. So we went on without no change till the middle of the winter after the baby was born, and it was bitter cold with a frost as turned the river into great blocks of ice, joltin' up and down with the tide alongside of us as we sailed. One night we 'ad laid up for the evenin', and gone to bed with great fires blazin' in both cabins. But some'ow I couldn't get no sleep for thinkin' on 'er, she bein' so near and all. So I creeps out and along the deck, just to see if she and the kid was gettin' on all right, And I found 'er settin' in front of 'er fire as if waitin' for me. So I just puts these two arms round 'er, knowin' it wasn't no good for me speakin', and she ups and kind o' folds 'er 'ands round at the back of my 'ead—there's no other woman ever knew such a thing to do as that—and kissed me on my mouth.

"And all that night, till the flood began to run again, we 'eard the great blocks of ice scrapin' and strikin' with dull thuds agen the sides of our cabin close to where our 'eads was layin'. I've mostly been 'appy enough all my time, till this 'ere sickness took 'old on me, and at times I've been extraordinar' 'appy, as after winnin' the Doggett, and now and again with my mates or with females. But that night when I 'eard the flood comin' in, and went on deck, and 'auled up, and trimmed the gear, and felt the old barge startin' to move through the water, shovin' away the blocks of ice same as me shovin' through a crowd, and I knowed as she was just under my feet layin' still and thinkin' o' me, that time was worth all the rest o' my good times put together. And almost afore we'd made Woolwich, the fog came on that thick, we was tied up there two days and two nights, and nothink movin' on the water, barrin' p'r'aps a steamer feelin' 'er way from one light to another, and bellowin' all the time like the devil tryin' to catch us two under the dark, and 'e not able. And when at last the fog fell down on the water, same as soot round an unswep' chimbley, the days 'adn't seemed no more nor one night, for all me bein' so urgent, and losin' money beside.

"Well, mate, that's the one part o' what I got to say, and that's 'ow I came to be in love quite different to the ordinar'. And that's 'er as was the only female I ever came across to understand them things. I used to think it was p'r'aps only through 'er bein' a lady born,

but I've set eyes on a deal o' ladies since that time, and 'ave quite give up that notion. I've sometimes seed one of our own females as I've thought might 'ave well risen to it, but what with workin' and cleanin', and not gettin' proper things to eat, and marryin' so soon, and 'avin' such a lot o' children, they mostly all on 'em don't some'ow do it, and it aint no good pertendin', for all I've liked 'em well enough, and they me, same as all females. And I needn't be tellin' you, mate, as I meant quite honorable by Erith, and was just dyin' to marry 'er and make 'er an honest woman, same as other wives. But some'ow or another she wouldn't 'ear no word on it, I never knowed for why. Like enough she was stopped by somethink of 'er past times, she never tellin' of 'em, nor me never askin', out of a kind o' respeck. Married or not, I always thought on 'er as if we was makin' love, and that's 'ow I thinks on 'er still. It wasn't only 'er keepin' the place so tight and clean, and doin' the cookin', and 'elpin' to swill down the deck after our teas to stop the planks from partin' in dry weather, and 'er likin' to see the dirty water runnin' out at the slits under the bulwarks. And it wasn't only 'er paintin' at the barge, for all she was a rare 'and at paintin', and covered over the 'atches and the tiller and rudder and the wooden casin' to the chimbley with red and white and green and all manner. Why, she even painted the sprete white at the ends and green in the middle. And she made me get the name of the barge changed from the *Deborah Jane* to the *St.*

George. And she painted a picture in white o' that there feller on the tops'l—a queer lookin' bloke 'e was, with scales of armor same as a crocodile, and a serpent's 'ead in one 'and and a long sword in the other, reachin' right out o' the tops'l altogether. Eh, and a rare lot o' chippin' I got over that picture, through folks not understandin' of it, and callin' it an eel-catcher, or Old Nick, or the Grand Old Man, or anythink else 'andy. But, as I was sayin', it wasn't all that, but the kind o' way she 'ad o' lovin' me as made the difference. So as if she'd took no care with the look o' the vessel at all, nor so much as boiled a kettle, I'd 'ave loved 'er just exackly the same by reason of the way she 'ad of lovin' me. Why, I've sometimes felt my blood workin' up and down same as the pistons on the *Jumna*, when I've been after some job ashore, and was puttin' off to the barge agen in my little dingey, me knowin' well what was waitin' for me in our bit of a cabin. And at times, if things was runnin' slack up the river, we'd get sent out for another kind o' cargo, and 'ud 'ave to make round to Ipswich or maybe as far as Dover, and then she'd start workin' the tiller accordin' as I kep' tellin' 'er, and me managin' the gear, as might be. And if so 'appen a bit o' wind got up, and we was beatin' up agen it, close-'auled with the lee-boards down, and the water lappin' all over the deck above yer ankles, she'd lay 'old on the tiller along of me, and laugh and sing, and talk all manner o' things of what us two could do together. For, as I was sayin', she was a rare

plucked un, she was ; and it's my belief she just loved runnin' into danger almost as much as she loved me, and for the same kind o' reasons.

"But yer may be sure I got a rare chippin' from all my mates on the water at the first start off. In my own crew the man turned kind o' surly, and didn't do 'is work what yer'd call proper again. But the boy made up for it, 'e workin' just double, and bringin' 'er water to wash with and everythink she could dream o' wantin', and mindin' little Lucky for 'er whiles she was busy at the cookin' and that. And some'ow or other the story of us spread all down the river, and we sailin' past the other barges, my old mates 'ud 'oller out to me, wantin' to know 'ow Grace Darlin' was, or what price I'd take for the Piccadilly Belle. And if so 'appen she'd 'ung up bits of 'er underclothin' and little Lucky's to dry on a line after washin', they'd call out: 'What, Timmo! Is them yer new Doggett coat and badge?' But they dursn't say much, by reason of their knowin' I could break their bloomin' bones as soon as look at 'em. And Erith she only laughed, and told 'em she was quite willin' for 'em to 'ave 'er, only they'd got to catch us fust, and then to settle it up with 'er man, meanin' me. And afore a year was out, the river was fair mad in love with 'er, and they'd used to watch for the white St. George on the tops'l coming up be'ind 'em, and then stand all o' the one side, and say, 'Good-mornin',' and all manner o' things, mostly decent, as we went by.

"But with their females it wasn't the same thing, acourse not, and they soon enough found out as the way to 'urt 'er laid through the little lad. So they'd 'oller out, 'Ullo, Timmo! and 'ow's that little barstud of yourn gettin' along?' or 'Bought any more second-'and kids up the spank, Timmo?' or 'What price the little backstairs Dook?' And I couldn't do nothink agen them, barrin' by callin' of 'em undecent names, me never bein' any 'and at breakin' the jaws of females, nor yet carin' to give 'em what for, through fear of me doin' 'em some injury. And some'ow Erith she didn't show no pluck agen 'em either, but took the kid in 'er lap and said nothink, like as if she'd lost 'er spirit. Eh, but there was one thing she could always give 'em points over: for she grew to be a rarer beauty every day, turnin' a kind o' thin varnished brown on 'er face and arms with the sun and rain and wind, the rest of 'er remainin' as before.

"So we went on sailin' with the tides, up and down, for nigh on two year, and never a word between us, cos she didn't never make game of me, but only of them others, and she was always findin' out somethink new to say or do, each time sweeter nor before, as I've told. And she'd used to tell me we was so fond of each other through 'avin' been lovers a long time back, afore we was born, when everythink was different, and perhaps I'd been a king. That's as it may be, and I'm not sayin' nothink in regard to it, either 'ere nor there. But I only know as I don't feel much like a king now.

"Yer see, it was all too nice to last, same as everythink else. Even trouble don't last, worse luck; for it's worst when it's kind of 'alf over. And since them days it's never been more nor 'alf over with me. And as for a kind o' joy as was in me them two year, it took and fair melted away into nothink, like the ice from a Norway ship when the wind's blowin'. And wind, mind you, is much worse for ice nor what the sun is, and many's the lighter-ful of ice as I've took out o' Lime'ouse Basin in my time. So I ought to know.

"It came with little Lucky afore 'e was born, and it went with 'im when 'e went, and that was about the very 'eat of August, and ragin' 'ot it was. We'd just been unladin' a cargo of 'ay as usual at 'Onduras Wharf, and 'ad dropped down with the ebb, and fetched up alongside a lot o' lighters just below Southwark Bridge, so as to stand ready to take on our down-cargo next mornin'. And the tide was beginnin' to run almighty 'ard, and was 'issin and bubblin' and foamin' agen the bows o' them lighters as they lay, with a swallerin' kind o' noise most terrible to 'ear ever since that day. And me and the crew was just settlin' the gear, and clearin' off the bits of 'ay, throwin' 'em into the water, so as to be straight agen supper-time comin'. But Erith 'ad gone below that very minute, and 'ad left the kid on deck for us to keep an eye on, 'e bein' able to waddle about pretty smart, and as artful as any young nipper in the streets. And by reason of the 'eat, she'd put 'im on

nothink only a little shirt striped pink and white, and 'e kep' on pullin' of it up, and pattin' 'is little belly, and laughin' like mad, bein' pleased not to 'ave on nothink beside, and callin' 'imself 'is mother's only son and all manner o' silliness she kep' learnin' 'im.

"On a sudden I 'ears Erith callin' to me, and me goin' aft she says: 'I was only wonderin' if I'd go on lovin' you if you tied me to the burnin' stake.' When we wasn't doin' nothink, she'd often go sayin' queer kind o' things like that, just to see what I'd say for answer. But afore I could think to say anythink, I looks up and see a great empty lighter driftin' down right on the top on us, and the boy on it pullin' like 'ell at 'is long sweep, but makin' no way, not enough to clear us. So I runs fore, and gets out the fender ready, and next second she comes full end on into us, and was away again, 'er stern swingin' round into mid-stream, and me thinkin' no 'arm done, bein' well used to such. But just as the jolt passed off with a sort o' shiver, I see a kind o' pink flash fall into the water right under the bows of them lighters layin' at anchor on our port. Eh, yer may well suppose what it was! The little lad 'ad crep' for'ard, and was throwin' a bit of 'ay into the water, same as 'e'd seen us doin', 'e bein' always that artful. And the whiles 'e was throwin', the jolt came, and it's my belief 'e went down with the bit of 'ay still stickin' in 'is little 'and. Afore you could speak I was down under them lighters', gropin' along over the mud at the bottom of the river, where things looks white and green. And

twice I swallered water so as to keep me down longer, a thing as a man mayn't do more nor once with any safety; and then I made a grab at somethink floatin' 'alf-way up and racin' over the ground with me and the tide, same as if somethink was drivin' us all on from be'ind. But it wasn't nothink, only 'is little white cap as 'is mother 'ad made for 'im agen the sun. Then I forced myself to come to the top, for all me feelin' very sleepy and kind of satisfied to stop below. I was far away from the lighters and our barge by then, but I went on swimmin' and lookin' about, not darin' to go back without 'er little lad. I went under London Bridge and down through the Pool, the people all cheerin' at me, they not knowin' for why. But I knowed it wasn't no manner of good further. And at last a perlice boat with two black-beetles and a water-rat, as we calls the Thames perlice and a sergeant, they pick me up, and take me back to the *St. George* as now is. And I gets aboard, and goes straight up to Erith where she was standin', and I 'olds out the little white cap to 'er, all drippin' wet, both me and it. And it was the same as she'd just done makin' to keep the sun off 'is little 'ead. But 'is little 'ead was now bein' rolled over and over with the tide along the bottom o' the river somewheres past the Tower, and cool enough, to be sure—our little Lucky boy.

"And that evenin' and night we lay just driftin' up and down with the ebb and flood. And as soon as it was dark, she took all the lanterns and fixed 'em in the bows, and stood

peerin' over into the water, never movin' nor sayin' nothink. And next mornin' we was late with the cargo, and that was the beginnin' of trouble 'twix' me and the firm. And so it went on for a fortnight or more. Instead of layin' up when we'd made our journey, we'd keep on movin' about with the tide, day and night the same, me and the boy just doin' whatsomever she told us to, and not sayin' much among ourselves nor to 'er, through bein' kind o' scared at the way she kep' seekin' and seekin'. Many a night when I've dropped straight asleep 'oldin' the tiller, me bein' so tired, and she still leanin' over the bows and never movin', I've woke up almost afore it was light, and found us laid up along shore at low water, and she wadin' about in the slimy, black mud with 'er legs bare and 'er skirts pinned up round 'er waist, she goin' from one lump in the mud to another, and turnin' of it over ever so gentle with 'er 'ands, never usin' a 'ook or a pole to it, but just pullin' it out and rubbin' the mud off to see what it might be. And p'r'aps it 'ud be a keg, or a bit of cargo, or an old iron pot, or a big drowned dog with the 'air rottin' off it; but it wasn't never the thing as she was lookin' for.

"But when a fortnight or three weeks was gone, she just gave up, and we went on sailin' same as usual, she doin' the cookin' and washin' and everythink as before, but keepin' one eye on the water through it all. And if anythink came floatin', she'd give it such a lookin' at as give us all a turn, she makin' as if she was thinkin' on some'ut else all the time. And now

and again I'd 'ear 'er down in the cabin sayin' over to 'erself all the names as she'd called our Lucky boy, and all the bits of nonsenses she'd used to say to 'im. And it's my belief that no matter where she looked, wet or dry, she see 'is little body runnin' about or floatin' past.

"But the third time as we put up into London again, or maybe it was the fourth, through us losin' all count o' times, I some'ow woke up in the night, and felt as the pillow was wet. So I puts my 'and on 'er face, and feels the tears runnin' out at 'er eyes, but she never givin' a sound nor yet a sob. George, old man, you just be careful in yer dealin's with females as cry after that manner. They're the best to love yer, George: that's neither 'ere nor there, and there aint no denyin' it. But there's always somethink terrible about 'em, same as with a wild beast, or maybe a more fearsomer kind o' spirit, for all I'm not denyin' as to love you there aint none like 'em. And feelin' me awake, she puts 'er 'ands round my 'ead, as I told yer was one on 'er ways, and kisses me, and says:

"'I've given you some sort of 'appiness since I've been with you; 'aven't I, dear?'

"And I says:

"'All the 'appiness as ever I 'ad; the rest not countin' alongside of it.'

"And if I came again as at the first,' she says, 'you'd act the same, and stand by me the same as before?'

"'Yer know as that's a nonsensical kind o' question, darlin',' I says. 'I wouldn't let

nobody take yer away from me now, not if my life depended on it.'

"Then she took and kissed my face all over, and me thinkin' she was 'appier and kind of sluin' round to 'er life again, I kissed 'er back, and then fell fast asleep, feelin' pleased and kind of easier.

"And in the mornin' she was gone, and I never set eyes on 'er agen. She must 'ave climbed out over the other barges and up on to the wharf, she bein' always active as a cat, And she'd took nothink with 'er, only for little Lucky's cap and a few bits of things, tied up, as I s'pose, in a cotton 'an'kerchief. And ever since then, when I've not been thinkin' on other kinds o' things, I been mostly puzzlin' over why she went.

"Some 'ud say as what with 'er dwellin' so much on the boy and all, she got thinkin' about 'er own people again—'er father and that. But she wasn't never the kind o' woman to take much count o' blood, barrin' her own little lad. And some 'ud say as she was scared off through always seein' the ghost of 'im in the water or asleep in the cabin. And when she'd gone I found out for myself what ghosts are, and it was partly that as drove me from the barge. And some 'ud say as she couldn't abear to think of sailin' the barge along of me till we got old, and never a child between us; for we didn't never get none of our own, worse luck. But it's my belief as there was a kind of a change in 'er nature, as came with the child and went with the child, same as the look o' the river

changes with the tide rising or fallin'. And so long as that change kep' up, she thought 'erself all right. But as soon as the child went down with the ebb, it kind o' took the daylight off everythink, and she couldn't abide no more. That's my way o' lookin' at it, for all I can't bring myself to say as she thought the daylight took off me as well.

"I didn't stop long on the barge myself neither, me not carin' for it after that, and gettin' into trouble with the firm through 'angin' about so much, waitin' for 'er to come back. So I took to the lighters again, as is no more nor so many funeral 'earses alongside the old *St. George*. But every Saturday afternoon I'd go up to the old wharf, on chance of 'er comin' for want of my 'elp. And I've scarce missed a week ever since, for all me marryin' my second wife after a year or two, as was a good enough sort o' girl too till she went off, as I was sayin', with my old mate, as 'ad rose to be captain of the *St. George* in my place. So me and 'im, we'd a bit of a row one night by reason o' that, and I broke 'im a rib or two; but, bless yer soul! it was more for the sake o' decency and what's called law-and-order nor for nothink else, me not much carin' what she did. And last I married my third, 'er as now is, and she's a good enough kind o' female too.

"And now, mate, as I was sayin', if so be I've got to go out this time, I wants to leave a kind o' message be'ind with yer. I wants yer to go every Saturday at the flood, s'posin' it should be as you can get off at the time, and to

stand about by the old wharf I spoke on, just keepin' yer eye on the *St. George*. Yer 'll know 'er from a distance through a bit of my old tops'l bein' still left on 'er with two or three foot of St. George's sword, as was painted by 'er I've been tellin' of. And if so 'appen you mark a woman keep lookin' at 'er too—tall and thin she'll be, and with a look to make you love 'er—you get up close alongside of 'er, and say 'Erith,' so as she can just 'ear it, but not as if you was meanin' to say nothink in purtikler. And if she looks round, just tell 'er about me, 'ow I kep' on waitin' for 'er till I'd got to go out, and when I'd got to go, I went bearin' 'er in mind. And, another thing, give 'er my Doggett badge, as she'd used to make shine in our cabin. It 'ud bring 'er in somethink, if needful, either melted down, or sold back again to the Fishmongers' Company, as gives such things. It's over thirty year since I won it, and p'r'aps they'd kind o' like to 'ear o' me again, seein' it was a grand race that year as I won it,"

With that my father promised, and we said good-by and good luck, and came away. And 'is wife let us out at the door, and my father said as 'e 'oped her man 'ud soon be all right. And she started cryin' like anythink, and says :

" Oh, I only wish as the Lord 'ud take 'im to 'Isself, seein' as 'e aint no further good to me, nor never will be, so the doctor says."

And when my father 'ad told it over afterward at 'ome, my mother says :

" Lord ! what fools you men make of yer-

selves with thinkin' this and that! As if the woman wasn't mighty glad to get somewheres to 'ave 'er child in quiet, and a fine strong man workin' to feed 'em both. Lovin' of 'im indeed! Ger along! Soon as she 'adn't got no more need on 'im, she's off, same as anybody else. And serve 'im right for bein' such a sorft-'ead! Now mind *you* don't get 'angin' about no wharves, lookin' after artful females! Ladies, indeed! It aint *that* word I calls 'em!"

"Well," says my father, "I'm a-goin' to do what my mate asks of me. And as to females, there aint no danger o' that, cos why, she must be nigh on our age by now—not as we're to be called old, neither."

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Simon's Baby.

 BOUT the middle o' the next November, there fell out a case of another way of dealin' with one o' them kids as p'r'aps isn't placed exackly as they ought to 'ave been. And it kep' all the women talkin' about it for nigh on three weeks.

Yer see, next door to old Spotter in them Millennium Buildin's lives the sweep as sweeps the chimbleys for the Buildin's and all our part o' Shadwell too. 'E's a quiet sort o' bloke, not interferin' with nobody, but just follerin' 'is own business, and takin' 'is fourpence a chimbley, and proud if 'e gets it. But on Sunday 'e goes to one 'o them Missions, and it's told he's been moved to preach there, and on Mile End Waste as well; 'e stickin' up for religion and that agen them as says it aint no service to the workin'-man. And Mrs. Macrae, as is a Scotty and gettin' old, for all 'ers bein' known as the cleanest 'ouse in Shadwell, she says old Simon's got the grace o' Gord in 'is face. And it may very likely be 'e 'as somethink o' that under the soot; only whenever I see 'is red lips in the middle, I always keep 'opin' 'e'll strike

up, "O dem golden slippers!" or something lively in the Minstrel line, but 'e never does.

'E's all right, but it's 'is old woman, Mrs. Simon, as my mother and Mrs. Sullivan and all the other women had a kind o' spite against, cos she was always comin' it over 'em for 'avin' such a lot of babies, she never 'avin' 'ad none. If a baby 'appened to be born among our people —and there was mostly one bein' talked on in this or that family every month let alone every week—she'd be sure to come the very next day would Mrs. Simon, and pay what she called a visit of condolence; and she'd pity the woman layin' there, and go on agen the man, if so be 'e wasn't present, and look at the baby, and 'ope it 'ud 'ave good churchyard luck, spite of all 'er fears it 'ud only grow up to turn into a devil o' some kind. And after she'd done condolin', she'd turn to the mother and the rest of 'em standin' round and messin' about with gruel and that, and she'd say: "Well, well, my dears, as I've told yer all before, I can only thank the Lord as nothink of this ever takes place in *my* family." And with that she'd go away, and leave the women cluckin' like old Parky's 'ens.

She lives, as I was sayin', in a three-and-six room next agen old Spotter. And by reason of 'er 'usband bein' a sweep, nobody wouldn't expeck no extry cleanness, nor 'e wouldn't find none neither. The soot lays thick on everywheres—on the floor and the walls and the chairs and table. Yer might think she took and painted the ceilin' with soot, to make it kind o' match with the rest. In one corner a

great 'eap o' sacks o' soot is always layin', and there aint no other bed to see. It's mostly thought they just go to sleep on them soot-bags to save the trouble of undressing theirselves; but some make believe they get inside the bags and sleep in 'em, through soot bein' so warmin'. Anyways the room's more like the inside of a coal barge nor any ordinary dwellin'-place. And old Simon, 'e knows it's not kep' quite the same as it ought to be. And that's the cause why, there bein' no other pictures on the walls for fear of 'em 'arborin' the soot, 'e 'as stuck up over the mantel a tex' as says, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

"Yus," 'e says, as you stand readin' of it, "that's 'ow it is; them as is godly doesn't require none o' yer second-best articles, thank yer, and more's the blessin'."

And yet the other thing as drives all the women wild, is as Mrs. Simon is always talkin' 'ow clean she keeps 'erself alongside o' them, or leastways 'ow clean she would be, if 'er 'usband wasn't a sweep, same as theirs aint. Passin' down our street she'll often take a look in on my mother, as spends all 'er time, early and late, and a deal o' money beside, just in keepin' the 'ouse and us clean and mended. And findin' 'er at sweepin' or scourin', or washin' the winders same as usual, she'll up and say:

"What, Mrs. Brittor! I'm real thankful to see yer doin' a bit of a clean at last. I often wonder to myself 'ow it is you other ladies can abide to keep on livin' in such a filthy state as yer all do in London. It wasn't that way in

Margate, where I was brought up to be clean, same as decent people. And I've always kep' that lesson in mind, me bein' kind o' proud, I'm sure I dunno for why. Acourse if yours was a sweep, same as mine is, there'd be somethink of an excuse for you and the dirt. And if mine was same as yours, I wouldn't allow a speck o' nothink on the floor big enough to be took for a flea. But sweep or no sweep, I'd never suffer myself to be called dirty, if I was you. Now, there *is* sweeps as is real dirty."

That's the kind o' language as fair drives the women wild, and makes 'em laugh fit to bust if anythink 'appens to them as uses it.

It was a Saturday night in middle November, as I was sayin', and a wet fog was layin' thick over all our part, but a cold wind blowin' all the time, so as you could see the fog goin' past the gas-lamps like a dust of wet. And all night long the signals on the London and Tilbury kep' poppin' off one after another like a volley in the Volunteers. Old Simon and 'is missus was laid fast asleep, whether on top o' them soot-bags or under 'em or in 'em aint for me to say. But in the very middle o' the night she wakes up sudden with a feelin' as if she 'eard a kind o' cryin', seemin'ly just in the passage outside of their door. And natural enough, she took it for a cat. Now, if there's one thing as she's partial to, besides soot, it's cats. Same with all women as aint got no children; and it's my belief that's because the cats cryin' at night puts 'em in mind

of the babies they didn't never 'ave. And many's the cat as Mrs. Simon 'as spoiled our sport with, when we was makin' it jump off the balconies, or drivin' it up the chimbleys, or down the drains. And if so 'appen it was black, so as not to show the soot, she'd take it 'ome till it recovered its spirits, and was ready for more. So now, rather nor be disturbed by the creature's cryin', and 'avin' a kind of feelin' for it, she ups and opens the door to let it in, and calls, "Puss, puss!" she standing' just be'ind the door for the sake of decency.

But when no puss didn't come in, she puts 'er 'ead out artful, and sees a kind o' black thing layin' just in front of 'er door. And still thinkin' as it was a puss, she reaches 'er 'and down to stroke it; but feelin' clothin' and a kind o' warmth, she rummages about at it, till all on a sudden she feels, not a cat at all, but a little baby's face. And afore she rightly knowed what it was, she'd put 'er finger right into its mouth, and it closed on it, tryin' to suck. You lay, she jumped away smart enough, and shut the door to very gentle, and ran back to where old Simon lay sleepin', all of a tremble with fright and wonder, and not 'avin' the time to get wild. But the kid, through feelin' 'er finger pulled away sudden, and nothink in its mouth, only a taste o' soot—as wasn't the kind o' taste it was expectin'—starts cryin' out worser nor ever before. And Mrs. Simon, she lays there shiverin', and makin' as if she didn't 'ear it, but not goin' to sleep again by no manner.

And by and by 'er old man 'e starts stretchin' and wakes up. And 'e listens, and says :

"What's that noise o' cryin' in the room?" 'e says.

"'Taint in the room, thank Gord," she says; "cos why, it's outside."

So 'e waits a bit, and says :

"Old Spotter aint gone and got a baby, 'as 'e?"

"Yus," she says; "I'll lay that's where it is. 'E's been and brought 'ome one of 'is gran'-children. Or maybe 'e's nicked a puppy from somewhere, and is goin' to set up in the dorg-fancyin' line."

"That aint no dorg," says old Simon; "and if so 'appen it's a cat, I'll just up and let it in to please yer; this bein' no night for any livin' creature to be out in, and you so fond o' cats."

"You won't do no such thing!" she says. "I've got four o' them cats somewheres about already, and I won't take on no more till some on 'em dies. But it certingly *do* sound like a cat now, don't it? If yer was asked to-morrer, yer'd say yer thought as it was a cat; now, wouldn't yer?"

"Yus," 'e says, "that's what I'd say, seein' as it can't well be nothink else, such as a baby or that."

"So should I say," she says.

And with that 'e turns round to go to sleep again. But the kid keeps on cryin', for all it gettin' kind o' fainter each minute. And Mrs. Simon shut 'er eyes, but devil a bit could she sleep for all that.

And just as the old man was droppin' off again comfortable,

"Simon," she says, "you're one as knows all about the Lord, aint yer?"

"Well," says Simon, "maybe I don't know quite everythink yet, but please Gord I'll learn more in time, either in this world *or* another. So you go to sleep."

"'E 'as a kind of a likin' for little kids, aint 'E?" she says.

"Yus," he answers; "leastways 'E says so 'Isself, and 'E oughter know. But you go to sleep."

"And seein' 'E's got such a mighty likin' for 'em, I reckon 'E'd look after 'em smart enough, wouldn't 'E now?"

"That seems nothink but nat'ral," says 'e, "same as 'Is lookin' after sparrers, as is smaller and more on 'em."

"And s'posin' 'E kind o' took special to a kid, and aimed at lookin' after it for 'Isself, it 'ud be a deal better to let it go straight to 'Im nor to keep it slotherin' about Shadwell in the cold and wet?"

"You're right," he says, "acourse it would. 'To be with Christ, as is fer better': Paul or one o' them said so, and e' knowed as much about it as most on us. But what do yer want askin' all about kids, when we've got our own souls to mind for, and you not over-careful in that purtikler mostly?"

"Oh," she says, "I was only thinkin'. But what a mercy our kids all stopped where they was; and anyway it couldn't be no murder to

send a kid back to the Lord quick as might be, seein' 'E 'as such a fancy for 'em, as is more nor what I 'ave."

"It aint no good for us to be considerin' o' them things," says 'e, "by reason of us 'avin' no concern with kids, neither 'ere nor there."

"Yus, but we 'ave though," says she, bein' always very contrairy, "and a mighty concern too, seein' as every blessed minute you lay preachin' and parsonifyin' there, you're committin' murder agen the mortal infant as lays 'owlin' itself to death at yer very door, and you showin' neither shame nor pity, for all yer bloomin' fine talk about the Lord, and me not bein' purtikler careful mostly about my soul—me as 'ates kids worse nor bugs, but couldn't abear to lay still and 'ear a livin' creature goin' to its Maker of the cold, be it 'uman baby or kitten born of cat, and me do nothink to save it."

With that there comes a feebler kind of cryin' from outside the door, and you may bet they was both smart enough in openin' of it, and fetchin' in the black bundle, and lightin' the fire up again, and stretchin' out the kid in front of it to thaw, and warmin' up the milk as was kep' for them cats, and runnin' it down the kid's throat with a spoon; they pinchin' its nose to make it swaller, and old Mrs. Simon moppin' up its face, and 'oldin' its feet to warm agen her chest, and cursin' at it the 'ole time, till at last it goes off to sleep, and they lay it, all swaffled up in the black skirt and other rags it 'ad on, upon a soot-bag in front o' the fire, with a chair one

side and the table the other, to keep it in gear, as old Timmo 'ud say.

Well, next mornin', as was usual, old Spotter 'e comes knockin' at the door to borrer a drop of 'ot water to 'is breakfast, cos 'e couldn't spare the money to light 'is fire till evenin'. And 'e finds Mrs. Simon with the kid on 'er lap, it yellin', and she pattin' its back, and callin' it all the bad language as came most natural.

"Yus," says old Simon to 'im, "that's what the Lord's sent us. 'E alone knows for why, unless it likely was to break the stony pride of our 'earts."

"Don't yer get sayin' so much about the Lord," she says, "for all yer bein' so 'and-in-glove with 'Im. And I wonder *at* you, makin' 'Im out the same thing as the shameless slut as chucked 'er misbegotten brat at our 'eads cos she was ashamed to keep it for 'erself. The Lord, indeed! I'd like to know who's the devil, then? And as to proud 'earts, I'm proud o' my pride. Yus, I've always kep' up a proper pride, thank Gord! I'm sure I dunno for why."

Then old Simon told Spotter the story, same as I've told it you. And Spotter come up and copped 'old on the kid's 'ead, and prized its lips open by pinchin' its cheeks in, and looked at the roof of its mouth, and pulled its tongue, and felt its ankles and knees, and rubbed down its face with 'is 'and to see if its nose was nice and cool. And at last 'e says:

"No collar, no name, no muzzle, no breedin', no money in it—why, Battersea Dorgs' 'Ome's

the one thing left to do with it. Madam," 'e says, "this little dorg o' yers aint got no pedigree at all, beggin' yer pardon for sayin' so—not pedigree enough to made it die of distemper, same as most decent bred dorgs dies on. For all," he went on, "it aint no dorg at all, properly speakin', bein' nothink only a—a female. Yus, it's a female, sure enough; I sees that straight off. I'd only got to look at its eye and skin. There's no mistakin' females. There's a kind o' quality about 'em. And yer see 'ow kind she takes to me, same as all females does."

And sure enough the kid stopped yellin' the moment 'e touched it. And sure enough a female it was.

"Now that's what I call the very worst of all this cussed business," says Mrs. Simon, most despairin'. "Who'd 'ave dreamt of its bein' anythink so low as a female, and it a castaway? A London female! Why, when fust I come up from my decent 'ome in Margate, and see them females shoutin' and yellin' about the streets, and the ways they was dressed, and their carryin's on, I knelt down and prayed the Lord never to let me bring up a female child in London. And fair play to 'Im, 'E's kep' 'Is side of the contrack up to this very night as is gone. And now for 'Im to land me with a female no bigger nor my 'and! Well, we can only trust in 'Im as 'E'll take it afore another evenin's past. Look, Mr. Spotter, the little varmin's gettin' redder and redder each minute. That's like apoplexy,

now aint it? Oh, Mr. Spotter, tell me what's bad for apoplexy, and I'll do it!"

"No, madam," says 'e, "that's what's called the vitality returnin'. Where it's returnin' from aint no matter, but it's same as a bloke gettin' a drop o' somethink after a scrappin'-match. You just lay 'old on its 'ead steady, and keep strokin' of it gently down the stomick, and I'll show yer another thing."

Then 'e learns 'em 'ow to make a suckin'-bottle by runnin' a fowl's quill through the cork, and smearin' the end with sugar, same as 'e'd used to do in the country for bringin' up rabbits by 'and when their mother 'ad been shot. And as soon as 'e'd learned the creature to suck, 'e went away and told Mrs. Sullivan and my mother all about it. And they told the other women, and all that afternoon Mrs. Simon's knocker—as Lina 'ad tied up with a bit o' white rag, she not 'aving a kid glove, so as the interest-in' invalid shouldn't be disturbed, as she said—that knocker kep' on thuddin', and all our women comin' in, and standin' round, and lookin', and laughin', till the room and all the balcony outside the winder was chock-full, and yer might 'ave thought a new Prince o' Wales 'ad just got 'isself born.

Most of 'em 'ad brought their own last born as a kind of set-off agen the foundlin'. And sometimes they made as if they was talkin' to the babies, and sometimes to each other, but it was at Mrs. Simon they was really talkin' all the time. And yer might 'ave thought they 'ad come to an understandin' among theirselves,

through each of 'em as she come in passin' the remark as she'd looked round to return the visit of condolence made 'er by Mrs. Simon when she was last down with little Bill or Jane or Johnnie, as the case might be, and she was precious glad the occasion for it 'ad come at last, so as she mightn't seem ungrateful. But old Mrs. Simon she sat in the middle on a sooty chair 'oldin' the foundlin' on 'er lap, and sometimes cursin' at it, and sometimes at the women, but mostly makin' as if she never 'eard nothink.

"Eh, Mrs. Simon," says Mrs. Neligan, as was just up from 'er eleventh, "but it's an awful thing, as yer've very often told me, to bring another 'uman soul into this wicked world, and 'ave the rearin' of it."

"Yus, Mrs. Neligan," says Mrs. Turner, settlin' 'er baby down comfortable to its meals, and lookin' at it kind o' proud, "but yer forgets what Mrs. Simon always says in 'er condolin', as 'ow the sweet innercent may be spared the trouble to come by dyin' early, and gettin' quit of it all."

"Ah, and that's just what it's a-goin' to do, thank Gord! is die early," says Mrs. Simon, turnin' on 'em savage. "Look at it now! Call that a livin' child? Why' it's best part of a skellington already!"

And she 'eld it up, showin' its arms and legs, like bits o' jointed sticks.

"Lord love 'er!" says all the women.

"Blast 'er little 'eart! She's 'ungry, and no wonder on nothink only stuff like that. You 'and 'er over to me for five minutes! I'll not

begrudge 'er," says Mrs. Crips, as was oldin' a twin on each arm, same as a valentine in a shop winder.

"Nothink o' that! thankin' yer all the same," says Mrs. Simon. "This 'ere child's got to die peaceful, and not through no mixin' of its liquors, same as some people me and you knows well enough."

"I'm wonderin', Mrs. Simon, 'ow much the keep of 'er 'll cost you, seein' as yer 'll 'ave to buy all the vicuals from outside like, not the same as us," says Mrs. Turner; "and yer know what a deal o' money a child swallers, through often tellin' us about it, and 'ow it's always the children as makes a 'ome un'appy. Yus, yer've often told me that, yer 'ave, and my man settin' by; 'im as 'ud be off with Lord knows 'oo to-morrer, if it wasn't for the children always comin', for all 'e do swear awful each time."

"As to the money, Mrs. Turner, it's disgustin' the amount a child 'll eat, as yer say," Mrs. Simon answered. "But that don't exackly apply to me, cos why, there's a difference 'twix' me and you, seein' as, if this Gord-forsaken brat wasn't sure on its death this very night, I'd take and carry it to the Union this very minute. And that's what I shall do with it first thing to-morrer mornin', alive or dead. What with all it 'as spilt over outside of itself it's eat more nor two grown cats already, and not tea-time yet. If it wasn't goin' to pass away so soon, it 'ud cost me a clean tanner in milk afore it 'ad done."

"And it turnin' yer nice room upside down,

too, after this manner!" says my mother. "Why, Mrs. Simon, if yer don't mind out, yer 'll 'ave to do a bit o' cleanin' one o' these days, same as other people, or else go dirty."

"Yer'e right in thinkin' me more nor ordinary purtikler," says Mrs. Simon. "I don't know for why, but I've always been kind o' proud, and I've kep' mine as the cleanest sweep in the Tower 'Amlets, and I'm not a-goin' for to let 'im lose 'is reputation for a slobberin' abortion such as this 'ere thing."

"I'm thinkin'," says Mrs. Sullivan, "as the girl what mothered it knowed the way round when she lay it at yer door. She knowed yer was the right sort to look after it well for 'er, and give it a proper edjercation. Yus, she aimed at seein' it well took care on, she did. I shouldn't wonder, now, if she just 'ad the kid for the purpose of 'avin' it brought up so nice. She'd likely 'ave 'eard as you always was so partial to children, through not 'avin' been able to 'ave any."

"Lord ! mother," says Lina, "what ever is the use in pertendin' so ? Yer know very well as the dear sweet little baby is Mrs. Simon's very own, and she's only makin' game of us all the time. Why, it's the very image of its father, barrin' only the color, as 'll come black in due time. Oh, yus, Mrs. Simon ! I've been keepin' an eye on yer this long while past, and 'better late nor never,' is what I've kep' on sayin' to myself."

With that, Lina dodged out through the women and down the balcony, laughin', and

callin' out it was time for innercent young people such as 'er to come away. And it's my belief Mrs. Simon would 'ave 'eaved at 'er 'ead whatever else she'd 'ad in 'er 'and, only not the baby.

"Let 'er be, Mrs. Simon, let 'er be," says my mother. "A lady with a new-born oughtn't to be flusterin' of 'erself. You wait till she gets a man and children of 'er own. They'll sober 'er down a bit! Why, don't yer feel kind o' more soberer yerself since yesterday?"

"Thankin' yer kindly, Mrs. Britton," says she, "but I'm not one o' them sort as needs to be more soberer, by reason of me not 'avin' been brought up on the streets same as other females. Not as I wonder at you all takin' to the drink, you bein' fair druv to it by all the 'owlin' brats as yer get."

'Er speakin', the kid layin' on 'er lap starts splutterin' and squeakin' like a blind puppy. So she takes it up, and makes as if she was shakin' at it, but really she was tryin' to jump it about same as she'd seen other women doin' to cheer a baby up. So it gave over cryin', and 'eld out its bits of arms, and through bein' too young to 'ave learnt the ways to laugh, it kind of twisted up its face, first on one side and then on the other, till you couldn't 'ardly tell its mouth from its eyes, and its nose went clean out o' sight.

"Lord love 'er!" said all the women.

"'E'll do no such thing, if I can 'elp it," says Mrs. Simon. "Unless acourse 'E takes it, but that's a different lookout."

"Why, yer gettin' quite clever at dancin' 'er," says Mrs. Turner. "Yer 'll soon do it as well as one of us, as 'ave got a rare long start of you, through us bein' same as ordinary women. Now, I tell yer what, if you was to take a little soot-bag, and practice dandlin' of it a night or two whiles the kid's asleep, you'd soon catch the trick on it."

"I s'pose I could do it same as you or anybody else, if I 'ad the mind," says Mrs. Simon, "only it aint no manner o' good bein' so purtikler in the 'oldin' of a kid what's got to die before mornin'."

"And one more thing I'll tell yer," Mrs. Turner goes on, "and that's always to let it 'ave a free fall. I mind 'ow it was with my third, as 'll be thirteen come the twenty-second o' next July, and is now a natural in Colney 'Atch, bless 'is heart! One day I set 'im upon my very own bed with a chair agen it to keep 'im safe, whiles I ran out to buy 'im a penn'orth o' 'winkles, by reason of 'is requirin' a change of diet, and over-young for meat and such. And when I come back, e'd fell off, and got 'isself mixed up with the chair. And the doctor comes, and says: 'Mrs. Turner,' says 'e, 'yer'e a sensible woman, but it was that there chair as did the mischief.' 'Very well, sir,' I says, 'next time I'll see to it as the child gets a free fall.' And I've always kep' my word to that doctor, through not wishin' to deceive 'im. 'A free fall!' 'e says, and I've never 'ad no other natural since."

"Eh, yus, my dears!" says Mrs. Sullivan,

"they wants a deal o' carin' for and lookin' to, does little children. It's just what Mrs. Simon's told us 'erself many's the time: it's an awesome kind o' thing to be a mother. Them's yer very own words, Mrs. Simon, and yer won't be denyin' 'em now, I'm thinkin'. Well, I can only wish yer joy of it, Mrs. Simon, for all not expectin' it; and I do wish yer joy, upon my soul, same as you've often wished the rest on us."

"And all I'm wishin' now," says Mrs. Simon, "is a free fall from the top balcony for you and the kid and the 'ole bloomin' lot. And it isn't me as 'ud trouble to sweep up the mess."

"Thank yer," says my mother; "but yer always was so clean and tidy: not like some people we knows on."

With that they all up and out at the door one after another, very stiff. But in passin' by the winder along the balcony outside, my mother puts 'er 'ead to it and says:

"Three parts warm water to one part milk; no more nor less, mind that."

"Yus," says Mrs. Crips, "and if so 'appen it wants anythink more natural and inspiritin' like, mind I'll not begrudge it."

"And you just take a turn with a soot-bag," says Mrs. Turner, "and be sure you allow a free fall."

And Mrs. Sullivan says.

"Never you mind for Lina's talk, Mrs. Simon. There's none on us believes it of yer. But if so be yer wants a little company when yer'e takin' a drop o' somethink, as we mothers o' families

mostly must with the new-born, you just send round for me, as am only waitin' to oblige."

So they all went 'ome; but next day four or five of 'em come round again, cos, as my mother said, such a chance for returnin' good for evil on yer neighbor's 'ead don't come more nor once in a life-time. So they stood waitin' outside the door till they 'eard the baby give a cry. Then they nodded to each other, as much as to say, "That's all right;" and Mrs. Sullivan she busts into the room, sayin':

"Well, Mrs. Simon, and 'ow about that funeral as yer promised us?"

"That's just the very thing as I was thinkin' over to myself," says she, smotherin' up the baby in 'er apron. "And I'd take it kind if yer'd go and order the undertaker in for to-morrer."

"Oh, I'll go this very minute, aud tell 'im 'e must come at once," says Mrs. Sullivan, makin' as she was turnin' to run out at the door.

"You'll just do what I tells yer," says Mrs, Simon, "and say to-morrer 'll be time enough. A corpse is a thing as 'as no need to 'urry."

"You're right," says my mother, "but it seems a kind o' pity to keep such things litterin' about in yer nice clean room."

"I'm glad yer knows cleanliness when yer sees it, as aint every day, Mrs. Britton," says she. "But I always 'ave said as it's undecent to rush a funeral."

Just then a kind o' distant squeak came from under 'er apron.

"And besides," she went on, "the creature

aint 'ardly dead yet—not what yer might call properly dead, I mean. It's a shame of it, I know, but that aint no fault o' mine."

"No fault o' yern it's still alive?" says 'er 'usband, as was just puttin' on a fresh kettle o' water to boil. "That's a sweet thing to say, and may the Lord forgive yer when 'E comes to reckon up the liars! And you up and down every hour o' the night, takin' it up and changin' it comfortable, and 'ushin' it off to sleep, and keepin' up the fire, and pourin' the milk down its innercent mouth till it fair ran over at the top, like ginger-beer as is up. No, it aint no fault o' yern, praise the Lord! if it dies."

"Don't yer be listenin' to the likes of 'im," says Mrs. Simon. "'E's as innercent as a babe unborn; one o' them as 'as the sense to know their proper place, and keep to it. What with 'is preachin' and 'is acquaintance with Them above, 'e 's pretty near a bloomin' spirit to start, and a fool at that."

"Mrs. Simon," says 'e, "may the Lord forgive yer ungratitude to 'Im, for it's 'Im alone as raised me to be sweep to these 'ere Buildin's. Not but what I'm as good a sweep as ever swep', and it aint me as 'ud serve the Lord just to get a kind o' start over my betters. Innercent or not, there aint no skilleder sweep nor what I am this side eternity, and it's likely enough the Lord knowed that when 'E raised me to this position. So yer must just put up with me as I am."

But the women wasn't givin' no more 'eed to what old Simon might be sayin', they standin'

all in a bunch round the kid, cluckin' at it and carryin' on.

"Lord love it!" says Mrs. Sullivan, "it's 'most twice as big as yesterday. I told yer 'ow it 'ud be, Mrs. Simon; yer 'll make a better mother nor all the rest on us, and that's what the girl as put it at yer door knowed well enough, she judgin' by somethink other nor the look o' yer."

"It's just my bloomin' luck," says Mrs. Simon. "I can't never put my 'and to nothink without doin' it too well by 'alf. Now, if the like of any o' you 'ad got 'old on it, that little reptile 'ud 'ave gone off peaceful, and no more trouble nor expense."

"You'll be for sendin' it to the Union to-day, I s'pose?" says my mother.

"Now, don't yer get tryin' to fluster me," Mrs. Simon answers. "I've always told yer it aint no good 'urryin' nature. I'm just goin' to leave it to nature, and make no fuss. There's the convulsions comin' on sure as fate afore to-morrer, so what's the good of yer 'urryin'? It's a deal easier to get the parish to 'elp a corpse than a livin' child."

"Well," says Mrs. Turner, "it' ll be a sore burden if it should live after all, both for you and yer poor dear 'usband, as is only a sweep and kind of innercent as that. But when all's said and done, I sometimes think as it aint such a bad thing as some people says to 'ave a kid runnin' about. There's many o' mine I've been fair glad to see, leastways so long as they was little."

"Any'ow," says my mother, "we've just got to take 'em *as* they come. And a kid's more pleasin' and variable nor what a cat is, and aint much more dirtier neither in the long run, not to my thinkin', Mrs. Simon, and beggin' yer pardon for settin' up agen you on the question of dirty."

"That's as it may be," says Mrs. Simon, "but there aint no manner o' doubts as a kid runs into a deal more money nor a cat."

"Oh, now," says 'er 'usband, "don't yer always keep thinkin' on the money of it. The Lord 'll pervide chimbleys enough for the sweepin', so long as we put our trust in 'Im, and sweep 'em better nor what others do. A chimbley a day at fourpence 'll keep that there baby till it's what's called weaned."

"And if need be, I'll not begrudge 'er," says Mrs. Crips.

"And if so 'appen she live to grow up," old Simon went on, "why even then three or four extra chimbleys 'ud always feed 'er, with the Lord's 'elp."

"Nay," says Mrs. Simon, 'oldin' the baby up before 'er, and watchin' it try to balance its 'ead on the end of its neck, "that there won't never live to grow up, thank Gord! There's the convulsions written on its face, and next comes teethin' with convulsions over again and all manner beside, and next the croup and the rickets, and then measles, and 'oopin' cough, and the scarlet fever, and bronchittics, and the smallpox, and likely enough consumption to wind up with. I've knowed people as died of

all them, let alone the 'appy-go-lucky kinds o' things, like wastin's and fallin' away and queer 'earts and lungs and stomicks, and all the rest o' the insides, as a power of undecent things can keep goin' on in, and you none the wiser. No, thank Gord! there's plenty yet as 'll stop me from ever bringin' up a female child—leastways in London. I'd sooner keep starvin' of it bit by bit till it died."

With that the kid opened its mouth four-square, and let a lot of milk run all down the front of Mrs. Simon's dress. And the women started laughin' and kissin' it all round. And the queerest part of all is as that kid's still alive, and bids fair to make its livin' as a young giantess in a show. And Lina says there's nothink as is likely to kill it, unless so 'appen as it dies of over-feedin'.

CHAPTER V.

Sissero's Return.

UST before that there Chris'mus time, when Mrs. Simon was kind of gettin' used to 'avin' a baby same as other mothers, and the women was turnin' up chippin' 'er about it, and was lookin' round for somethink fresh, we 'ad a rare set-out in our street by reason of somebody else turnin' up unexpected. Leastways there wasn't only one as was expectin' 'im, and she'd kep' on expectin' for three years gone, so as yer couldn't 'ardly reckon 'er as expectin' no more. She was a queer-lookin' woman with bright red 'air and a very white face, and a figure as neat and straight as Lina's own. Same as all red-'aired people, 'er name was Ginger. But after she got married 'er proper name was Mrs. Sissero, but she wasn't never called that, only by the rent-collector and such as aimed at showin' an extry respect. The rest on us used to call 'er Mrs. Kentucky, or Tennessee, or Timbuctoo, or Old Folks at 'Ome, or anythink else 'andy as 'ad connection with niggers. For the thing as made 'er famous was she'd married a nigger and couldn't never get over it.

All on us knowed all about 'er well enough,

seein' as she was Shadwell born and bred, through 'er father 'avin' been a stevedore in London Dock. And more nor that, a woman as 'as got two nigger children, risin' three and four, with woolly black 'air and a skin the color of an old boot afore it's cleaned of a Saturday, she can't 'ope to keep 'idden away same as ordinary people or rats. And all what the street didn't know for itself, my mother found out bit by bit. For she's got a rare knack of befriendin' people, 'as my mother. And there was points about Mrs. Sissero as 'ud 'old all of 'em, men and women alike, argufyin' and wonderin' this and that, till their 'eads fair buzzed with tryin' to fix the rights of it.

Through 'er father bein' a stevedore, she'd got took on in the Dock very young, so soon as ever she'd passed 'er Standards from the school. And she was mostly set to work as is good for females, more especial unpackin' mineral-water bottles, such as come over by the thousand in little steamers from Germany, where most things get made, and there's always plenty o' work through people livin' so poor. All day long them females as does the unpackin' stand down in the 'old on boards laid across rows and rows of bottles. And they keep shiftin' row after row all round 'em one by one into great baskets, as are 'auled up by a crane and shifted again into railway trucks or carts. And they call it "playin' the pianner," by reason of the rows bein' so reg'lar and their 'ands jumpin' about on 'em so quick, same as when a man's vampin' on the black and white notes, and the

singer keeps on always changin' 'is pitch. And so soon as the females 'ave done talkin' about 'oo's makin' love—and that don't often last 'em till much past breakfast—there's nothink outside their work for 'em to do but fight over the number o' baskets they've sent up, and keep chippin' their boss, as is mostly an oldish kind of man, so as 'e may know 'ow to give back their sauce in the same way, and nothink come of it. And if they've got a feelin' for their boss, or if they can't abide 'im, their way of chippin' 'im is to stand and call 'im all manner of sweet and tantalizin' words, same as they call to babies and such, enough to drive any man wild, if 'e was to believe 'em. But if they've got no feelin' about their boss one way or other, they don't say nothink at 'im, and don't get 'alf as much work done. Only this 'appens as good as never.

What part o' the world Sissero fust come into, Gord only knows. 'E wasn't one o' them thin, shiverin' niggers as crawl around in blue cotton and turbans with their knees bent, and look as if they was goin' to slip a knife into yer back, or else tell yer some almighty secret, and sometimes do a deal in raw walkin'-sticks. Nor yet he wasn't one o' them greasy niggers as mouch about, not feelin' nor sayin' nothink, bein' made suitable to the wild beasts of their native parts, as our teacher said don't so much as wink 'owever 'ard yer give 'em what for. But Sissero 'ad a mug almost as good as a white 'un to look at, only for its bein' black and shiny like a top 'at. And another thing as showed 'e

wasn't white same as us, was 'is bein' always on the laugh. No matter for what 'e was doin' or sayin', nor what sort of day it was, you'd only got to look at Sissero and e'd start laughin'. 'E seemed to 'ave a kind of 'appiness always brewin' and workin' inside of 'im, as if 'e was just a-goin' to bust with it. And my mother said it came of 'is 'avin' been so near born a lower animal, same as a monkey. But all the monkeys as ever I see, on organs and such, didn't look purtikler 'appy, but mopy, same as other grown-ups.

Any'ow, no matter for where he sprung from, Sissero 'ad come to sail on one o' them there little steamers tradin' from 'Amburg. And like most niggers as takes to the sea, 'e was a stoker, cos, bein' black, they can stand the 'eat better, same as the devil. But for all 'is bein' nothink only a stoker, the contractors would at whiles put 'im on for boss, if there wasn't nobody else 'andy, seein' as 'e was always so obligin' to the women, and they kind o' liked to 'ave 'im laughin' around, and there was more sport to be 'ad chippin' 'im, cos of 'is bein' so black, and answerin' so funny. So bit by bit 'er as I'm tellin on got to look for 'is ship comin' in and to be always kind o' waitin' for it—a thing as she's 'ad plenty of practice in since that time, and no mistake.

There aint no mortal sayin' 'ow it was she first came to take up with a nigger, she bein' very steady at the work, and not so bad to look at, and very respectable brought up, for all 'er red 'air. But in talkin' to my mother, she'd

used sometimes to tell 'ow Sissero 'ud come up out o' the stoke-'ole, when the furnace was out, and put on a clean blue shirt open down the front, showing the great muscles on 'is chest, all shiny and black as sin. And 'e was always most remarkable clean when 'e wasn't workin', either through a deal o' washin', or through the dirt not showin' on 'im same as on white flesh, and that's why it's good for slaves to be black. So when 'e'd smartened 'isself up, 'e'd come and stand be'ind 'er, and stroke 'er red 'air, and in place of callin' 'er Ginger same as the others 'e called 'er Miss Sunshine, or Miss Guinea-Gold, or Miss Butterfly's Wing. And then 'e'd stand and laugh, till she and all the rest o' the women 'ad to start laughin' to keep 'im company, and all about nothink only through feelin' so 'appy. For 'e was always just about as 'appy as a man beginnin' to get, not exackly drunk, but what yer might call a bit round the corner, and the public is gettin' to 'ave a kind o' look of Buckin'am Palace about it. And for all that, Sissero didn't scarcely ever touch nothink, but kep' 'isself as sober as Aldgate pump, 'e livin' very reg'lar on board 'is ship, and not troublin' about girls to speak of neither, barrin' only if 'e caught sight on that red 'air, no matter for 'ow fer off, there wasn't no 'oldin' 'im but 'e must run and stroke it. And any time o' day as you passed 'is ship, you'd only got to sing out, "What, Sambo!" or Jumbo, and any other enticin' word, and you'd see 'is black 'ead bob up, and 'ear 'im start laughin' as if 'e was worth five pound a week, and 'adn't never 'eard

such a good joke in all 'is life. And maybe that's one o' the causes yer liked 'im so, cos 'is laughin' made yer think yer was so precious smart.

You may be sure there was a fine set-out when it got known as Sissero and Ginger 'ad started keepin' company. They was first seen together round by the fish-market after dock-hours, and then settin' of an evenin' on the pier-'ead of Shadwell basin. And next time as ever Sissero's ship put in, they went and took a walk arm-in-arm right down the 'Ighway of a Sunday afternoon; 'e in 'is dark coat and light-blue shirt and canvas trousers, and she all in white, and nothink on 'er 'ead but 'er orange 'air, so as, if seen from the top winders, the women said she looked like a poached egg. Yer couldn't ever guess which went most wild on 'earin' it, the men or the women. But my mother said it was the men, through none on 'em likin' a nigger to get the pull of 'em, not even with Ginger, she bein' a nice enough girl beside, always uncommon quiet and obligin', just goin' about 'er business and never meddlin' with nobody. I'll grant yer she wasn't purtikler smart by way of feathers and stuffs, through 'er 'aving never been thought nothink of, and called Ginger; but some'ow she turned 'erself out neater nor the ordinary, no matter for what she 'ad on. And for all its freckles, her skin looked some'ow as smooth and well-fittin' as a drum-'ead. So all the men was wild, for all they didn't exackly want 'er to theirselves. And all the women was wild, for all they didn't exackly want the nigger neither. But likin' to

'ave 'im about, they aimed at keepin' of him unmarried, same as old Spotter says all females aims, on a kind of off-chance of goodness knows what. So in the Dock, and up and down the street, they kep' worryin' and goin' on at Ginger, askin' what price a Darky, and if she curled 'is 'air for 'im, and 'ow about that banjo. And after a deal of goin' on, they 'it upon Mrs. Simon as the proper person to carry a warnin', she bein' fond o' speakin' serious.

So Mrs. Simon meets Ginger one afternoon on 'er way 'ome from work, walkin' alone, same as mostly. And she says :

"Look 'ere, Ginger, I'm come of my own good will to present yer with a solemn warnin'. And it's me as 'as a right to speak o' warnin's, through knowin' so many women un'appy, and my own man as good as a nigger as fer as the look on 'im goes."

"Don't yer get sayin' nothink about niggers, Mrs. Simon, or maybe yer 'll wish yerself further," says Ginger, very quiet.

"I'm not a-goin' to say nothink of the sort you think for," says Mrs. Simon. "But I'll just put one question fair and straight to yer ; and you take it as my solemn warnin'. And it's this : Would yer like to see the Tower 'Amlets wake up one mornin' chock full o' little niggers ? Cos, if so, yer'e goin' about the right way to do it."

"Shut it ! " says Ginger, gettin' a bit sharper. "There aint no talk o' nothink o' that 'appenin', I should 'ope."

"Yus, yer'd hope ; that's just it," says Mrs.

Simon. "Now, mine says as 'e's read somewheres in 'is book: 'Do as yer'd be done by.' And if we was all to start doin' same by you, as you aim at doin' by us, I tell yer all London 'ud be black afore you'd 'ad time to turn round and look. So that's my solemn warnin', and I leaves it *to* yer."

"And I'm much obliged to yer for it," says Ginger, and shouts after: "And there's one thing certain, Mrs. Simon, and I'll tell it yer to yer 'ead, and that's as, black or not, my man don't come off on my face when 'e kisses me, same as yers seems to on yer face from the look of it. Cos why, I've often tried, and many's the time I'll try again, please Gord!"

So, she 'avin' no mother, Ginger ran 'ome to get 'er father's tea ready afore 'e come up from 'is work. And after that the women gave it up as a bad job, and were only waitin' to see their warnin' come true. And one fine day Ginger and Sissero just went off, and set up 'ouse together. And from that moment till 'e died, 'er father never took no more notice on 'er nor if she'd been dead and buried before 'im.

They lived in a room in Middle Shadwell with some kind of a kitchin attached, did the Sisseros. It was top-back, and three-and-six, but Ginger chose it 'erself for its bein' 'alf-way down the bit of 'ill leadin' to the river. So she could set at the winder, and look over through a gap in the fish-market right away to the entrance of the Dock, and watch the ships and barges comin' up the river beside. And she knowin' about what time Sissero's boat was

due to arrive, and makin' allowance for the set o' the tide, could mostly mark it on its way up from Lime'ouse, if so 'appen she wasn't at work in the Dock 'erself, and then run to the pier-'ead to get the fust sound of 'is laugh afore the draw-bridge swung round to let the steamer into the Dock. And then she'd off back 'ome agen to get everythink ready agen 'is comin' in 'ungry and 'appy in the evenin'. And the other men, seein' 'er always look so decent and cheerful 'urryin' up and down, started thinkin' it wouldn't 'ave been so bad to 'ave a girl like that, for all 'er red 'air, and thought to their-selves what she wouldn't 'ave done for the likes o' them, considerin' what she did for a nigger, But some o' the women, by reason o' the vessel being mostly a fortnight out and no more nor a week at 'ome, kep' throwin' it up at Ginger as she was only one part married out o' three. And Mrs. Simon told 'er she'd as leave 'ave been married to a commercial gent at Margate, as comes 'ome on Sunday evenin' and is off on Monday mornin' with 'ardly time to spit between. But Ginger only said there was two things as it's better to 'ave too little of nor too much—one was dirt, and the other was a man. And not 'avin' nothink to say agen that, Mrs. Simon only said she reckoned as Ginger 'ud soon 'ave less nor enough of one o' them things; but as to dirt, she didn't know nothink about that 'erself, through leavin' it to others to find out. And with that she cast 'er eye at my mother. But my mother took no manner o' notice, only for turnin' to talk to Ginger over

the makin' o' babies' clo's, for all the world as if Mrs. Simon didn't so much as count for a livin' woman, through never 'avin 'ad cause to make any at that time.

At first, acourse, Ginger went on with 'er work in the Dock same as usual. But that was put a stop to by 'er first baby comin'. And it was most extraordinary 'ow people started makin' up to 'er, so as to get an early look at that baby, What with runnin' backward and forward to inquire, and takin' round bits o' gruel and soup and packets o' sugar, so as to make sure of bein' let in, it 'ud 'ave come cheaper to 'ave gone to the Zoo straight off, and more to see for yer money. But as to talkin', a baby elingphant couldn't 'ave give 'em more to say, for all Mrs. Simon 'eld out there wasn't nothink to be surprised at, nor nothink as she 'adn't expected, black wool on its 'ead and all, barrin' only it made 'er feel a kind o' sinkin' when she turned up the sheets from the bottom and caught a sight of the creature's feet, and they was all darky, same as its face. And if she'd 'ad 'er choice she'd sooner 'ave mothered the devil nor anythink else with black feet. But Ginger said nothink; only so soon as she was up, she went back to work, takin' the baby with 'er, and layin' it in a 'ole she cleared out among the bottles. And so she went on a bit, till the second started comin'. And then Mrs. Simon says to my mother:

"Speakin' for myself, Mrs. Britton, I really shall 'ave to turn it up. The way these lower

classes do go on is somethink too awful to think of."

It was a girl, this second; darky, almost same as the other, but some'ow with a kind o' look o' Ginger on it. And by when it could just about move itself, there came a sort o' red shinin' all over its woolly 'air, if yer 'appened to catch it sideways agen the light. And old Spotter said the kid put 'im in mind of a mule canary. And 'e told Ginger 'e'd never seen no better cross in all 'is life. And she looked up so sweet at 'im from where she was settin', I almost thought she was goin' to kiss 'is weskit. And very likely 'e wouldn't 'ave said nothink agen it if she 'ad. O, but she was real proud o' that second baby, keepin' on askin' everybody if it wasn't almost as good as white, and whether she couldn't pass it off for an Italian, same as an organ-grinder. And whenever she see Mrs. Simon comin' along that way, she'd stick out the baby's feet from under its close, all to show 'ow white they was, for all nobody, barrin' only 'erself, couldn't make out much difference in color, not to speak on, 'twix' this new one and the fust.

When she got back to work again, through 'er not bein' able to take no more only the newborn with 'er, she left the boy in care of a neighbor, payin' 'er somethink by the day. But by the end of a week the neighbor said as she couldn't undertake 'im no longer, or else must charge the same as for three, seein' as 'e scared the other children away through bein' black, and them as wasn't frightened kep' on

prickin' at 'im with pins to see whether 'e'd bleed red or what. So Ginger just turned up 'er work and stayed at 'ome with 'er children. And when Sissero put into Dock again, she says nothink about the boy bein' made game of through bein' black, but told 'im she wasn't strong enough to go on with the work no more, seein' as she 'ad to stand up all the time; but must find out some other ways o' makin the money.

And 'e says:

"Now don't yer be troublin' yer sunny 'ead about the money, darlin'. I'll make the double on it as easy as kiss yer, and then I'll love yer twice as much—cos why, yer 'll be twice as expensive."

And with that 'e laughed till the very babies on the bed started laughin' in company.

Anybody would 'ave thought as 'e only said it of a purpose to please 'er, cos it was 'is fust evenin' at 'ome after bein' away. But the queer thing was as 'e says the very same next mornin'. And not only says, but goes right off and changes into a British Injer, where' e'd get twice the money, but be kep' at sea sometimes three months, sometimes six or more, without comin' 'ome at all. So 'e sailed away in a mighty big steamer, startin' from the Albert Dock this time, and Ginger she stopped at 'ome with what money 'e'd left, and what she could borrer in advance. And after the fust voyage 'e came back all right, and brought 'er a fine 'eap of earnin's. And she took and 'id some in the beddin' and some under a glass

ornament on the chimbley-piece. So 'e went away agen to get more, and she didn't never cry to speak on, but just went about as if 'alf the life 'ad gone out of 'er body.

Now the queer part of it all came in cos that there street 'ad a Sheeny rent-collector. And 'e was like the rest o' Sheenies in aimin' to make money without doin' no work, and unlike the rest o' Sheenies in not keepin 'isself *to* 'isself. 'E was a rare 'un to talk, more especial with women, and it's my belief 'e'd turned rent-collector, not so much for savin' 'isself doin' work, as to get carryin' on with the women on Monday mornin's, their men bein' gone out to think over startin' work again after the Sunday. 'E always wore a top-'at and a check coat with a glove on 'is left 'and, and shiny boots runnin' up to a point, same as if 'e'd got no more nor one toe. And when 'e knocked at the door, and stood there takin' off 'is 'at and 'oldin' 'is silver pen in one 'and ready to dip in the little ink-bottle tied to 'is weskit-button, no wonder as females thought at fust 'e was somebody come for the votes, like a Member o' Parliament or somethink o' that. Any'ow 'e made 'isself uncommon pleasant to Mrs. Sissero, and 'ud talk all manner to 'er darky kids, callin' 'em rosebuds and other silliness. And 'e bought a necktie as near as might be the color o' Ginger's 'air, and 'e'd used to say 'e 'oped she admired it, cos it was 'is favorite color, only 'e never couldn't get it bright enough. But at last, Sissero bein' then away on 'is fust long voyage, that Sheeny must 'ave tried on somethink as

made Ginger fair wild, for she wasn't the sort to fly out about nothink, and this is what she did. She just waited till 'e'd got downstairs after collectin 'er rent, and then she goes to the front winder in the passage, and whiles 'e was shuttin' the door and lookin' in 'is book to see what was 'is next call, she empties a bucket o' slops fair over 'is top-'at and check suit and all, she 'avin' just done scourin' out 'er rooms, and the water bein' still nicely warm and full as it could stick of soap and dirt.

Then she goes back and gives 'er children their dinners, and says not one word more about it to mortal soul. Only after that, whenever she 'ears the Sheeny comin' upstairs of a Monday mornin', she locks the door, and slips the three-and-six and 'er rent-book under it. And the Sheeny just signs the book, and dursn't do nothink else, through bein' frightened for 'is life of gettin' another duckin', and 'avin' to buy another second-'and top-'at up the Spank.

Now, any decent-minded man like my father or old Timmo would 'ave gone and broke the door in, and either got kicked out 'isself, or been asked to stop to tea, just accordin' to the state o' the woman's feelin' at the time. But that aint the Sheeny way. There aint no such man to wait as a Sheeny. That's likely the cause why, when they started out from Egyp' a long time back, it took 'em forty year to cover a bit o' ground as our teacher said any common crowd, to say nothink o' fightin' men, ought to 'ave covered in forty weeks, let alone forty days; and our teacher was a lance-corporal in the

Fust Tower 'Amlets. But the truth is, as Sheenies, not reckonin' their bein' uncommon bad at walkin' and takin' exercise, fair love to keep on waitin' and waitin', till the thing as they're aimin' at just drops into their mouths.

So that Sheeny waited, pickin' up the rent reg'lar every week, and signin' the book. And so it went on till Sissero 'ad started out on 'is second voyage, and been away three months or more. And then one Monday mornin 'e found no rent put out nor no book to sign. So 'e knocks, but nobody didn't answer. And next week it was same again ; and the week after 'e slips a notice to quit under the door, and goes away and waits. And the next Sunday night after it was dark, Mrs. Sissero comes round to my mother, carryin' one nigger child and luggin' the other along. And she says to my mother :

"Mrs. Britton, 'is ship's been in these three days, and 'im not in it, and me under notice."

"And I'm sorry in my soul to 'ear it," says my mother, "for all not 'avin no cause to be, seein' as yer can't say I didn't warn yer. It 'll be somethink black 'e's after now. For black's in the blood, and it's blood as tells, as old Spotter says."

"Mrs. Britton," she says, "yer've no cause to speak like that, you not knowin' my man same as what I does. But tell us, what shall I do ?"

"Well," says my mother, tryin' to seem cheerful, "yer might 'old out a week or two with puttin' yer things away, and by then p'r'aps 'e'll turn up."

"Put 'em away already," she says, "only for what me and the children stand up in."

And it's like enough my mother knowed that, seein' as Ginger 'ad got on a long coat down to 'er 'eels; and so soon as a woman takes to a long coat, it's sure there aint never much left underneath.

"Couldn't yer go back to work?" says my mother; "that's as good a way o' bringin' in money as any I knows."

"Gone back already," says she, "and one-and-six a day's all I can make at it, through me bein' pulled down by reason of the baby, and never rightly gettin' over it. And what with three-and-six for rent, and 'aving to buy coal by the penn'orth, and payin' the caretaker extry to mind the boy, and gettin' soap and that to clean ourselves, it's no manner o' good to make out yer can live a life worth callin' on nothink but two bob a week for yerself and two children to eat, and the baby beginnin' to 'unger after solids."

"Then yer must shift into a cheaper room," says my mother. "You'll likely get one 'ereabouts or in Buildin's for eighteenpence. Then you'd 'ave somethink over sixpence to eat for every day in the week. And that's plenty for three mouths I should 'ope, two on 'em small."

Then Ginger sat sayin' nothink for a long time, but kep' on strokin' at the baby's curly nut, and lookin' sideways to catch the kind o' red shinin' on it.

"Yus, Mrs. Britton," she says at last, "it's only nature for yer to be sayin' that. But I

can't bring myself to it. I tell yer, I'd sooner die nor do it. That's the room 'as 'e fust took me to, and that's where 'e always came back, knowin' I'd be standin' at the door and waitin' till 'e got to the top o' them stairs. And when 'e comes back again, and finds me gone, what's a man such as 'im to do? 'Ow's 'e goin' to set about findin' me, 'im as is so innercent, and all the people 'avin' a game with 'im, cos 'e aint so white as some is, and tellin' 'im as there's plenty other red-'aired girls in the world. And that's true enough, and that's the worst on it, for all there's maybe none so red as me. But 'e'd easy enough get 'old on one o' them girls, for, yer see, when a girl's been nothink but laughed at all 'er life, she'll just fall down and wuship the fust man as beats 'er, and stamps on 'er chest, and pulls 'er in 'alves, and does everythink only don't laugh at 'er. Not as mine 'as ever laid a 'and on me, 'is manner o' makin' love bein' different. No, Mrs. Britton; yer may say what yer like agen me, but I'll be burnt alive afore I leave my 'ome, and I wonder *at* yer for talkin' of it."

"Then it aint no good for me speakin' no more," says my mother, standin' up. "Only there's one thing I'd like to say, talkin' of red 'air. I've 'eard tell, for all nobody wouldn't believe it, as red 'air 'as a good sellin' price, by reason of so few of us 'avin' got it, thank the Lord! Now, I'll lay that 'air on yer 'ead reaches down to Gord knows where, and it's the one thing yer've got left as 'ud sell. Why,

it 'ud pay yer rent for a month, and by that maybe 'e'll be ashore again."

"Mrs. Britton," says Ginger, looking very white in the face, and takin' up the children to go away. "I dunno for why it was as yer 'usband fust liked *you*, but mine liked me all along o' that same red 'air o' mine. And, so 'elp me! I'd sooner sell my own soul and yers into the bargain nor part with one single inch of it for money. So it's no good for us talkin', thankin' yer all the same."

So she goes back to 'er room to keep watchin' out for 'er 'usband, as never came. And next day bein' Monday, it seems as the Sheeny collector, comin' round to serve 'er with the second notice, found the door wide open, and walked in smilin', takin' off 'is new top-at. And afore 'e comes out again, 'e'd signed the book for three-and-six received that week and all the arrears as well. And so it went on, Monday after Monday, the book gettin' signed as reg'lar as if Ginger 'ad been an army-pensioner or a lady with money of 'er own. And the rest o' the week she went about 'er work same as usual, but never laughin' nor yet answerin' back when the other women chipped 'er. Only with 'er always keepin' one eye on the river, in 'opes 'er man might come back the old way, and turnin' round to stare at every steamer as put into dock, she some'ow got to 'ave the look of a curly Newfoundland bitch as I once see with stones and things tied to 'er, and they was just goin' to 'eave 'er over the dock-bridge, and she kep' lookin' round to see if 'er old master wasn't

comin' along. So Ginger just dragged about from week to week, showin' no more spirit, only for once when Mrs. Simon met 'er comin' back from work, and says :

"I do 'ear, my dear, as yer'e uncommon partial to furreigners still. And all I says is as yer'e quite right to make no manner o' difference between 'em all. A furreigner's a furreigner, no matter whether nigger or Sheeny, and there aint no tellin' one from another, even by daytime, nor no need to."

"You dare call my man a furreigner!" says Ginger, turnin' sharp on 'er as if to break 'er jaw.

"'It me, my dear! 'it me, do 'e now," says Mrs. Simon, backin' out into the road pretty quick; "there's many a worser thing as some women we know 'as to put up with nor bein' 'it."

But at that Ginger just dropped 'er arms down like a Volunteer standin' at ease, and goes up the bit of 'ill to 'er 'ome without a word, lookin' as limp as a bit o' cotton. And so it went on maybe for six or seven month. And the darky kids kep' growin' bigger, and swellin' over with fat, and their 'air curlin' like buffaloes. And to see 'er feedin' of 'em and carryin' on, you'd 'ave thought she'd got nothink else to do all day long, more especial with the youngest, the one she liked best, as I said, through thinkin' it almost as good as white.

So she 'ad 'er book signed reg'lar, and kep' 'er room nice, and started buyin' back 'er things bit by bit. And then all on a sudden the

Sheeny left off comin', and for three weeks 'e never so much as brought the book. But on the fourth week 'e goes up again, and knocks at the door, for all it was standin' wide open to 'im, and when Ginger comes 'e says :

" Very sorry, Mrs. Sissero, but the landlord says 'e can't keep a tenant as doesn't pay rent no longer, and yer must either pay down for the month or go. So 'ere's yer notice, and I wish yer good-mornin'."

With that 'e rammed the paper into 'er 'and, took off 'is top-'at, and went downstairs. And I can picture to myself the grin as 'e 'ad on 'is face as 'e looked away from 'er, where she stood leanin' agen the wall, too dazed to say one single word. Some women would 'ave flown out at 'im, and cursed all down the street, screamin' after 'im 'ow 'e 'ad treated 'er, for all the neighbors to 'ear, But some'ow, I s'pose, Ginger felt too bad. She didn't even think of emptyin' slops over 'im same as before. There wasn't only but one thing for a woman like Ginger to do, and that was to slip a carvin'-knife into 'is oily body. But she, 'avin' none in 'er 'and, did nothink at all; only stood and stared at nothink. But the eldest darky kid runs out, and says :

" Aint the nice gen'leman comin' in to-day to set with us a bit, and show me 'is tick-tick?"

And the next week neither no nice Sheeny didn't come, nor never agen, but a stony old collector, as made no fuss, but served the notices, and put in the brokers, and sold all up, and turned Ginger and 'er babies out into the

street without makin' no remark, 'e bein' 'ardened to the job, and taking it all in the day's work, same as yer sweep out fleas. So Ginger comes to my mother agen, as is the way with most people when there aint nothink else to do, and we puts up all three on 'em for that night in front of our kitchen fire. And next mornin', me comin' into the room early to get a bit o' breakfast on my way to work, I shan't never forget 'ow queer they looked. Ginger 'ad set a darky on each side of 'er, one wrapped in 'er skirt and the other in 'er coat. And she was layin' on the 'earth-rug in the middle, covered 'alfway up with our table-cloth. And all 'er red 'air was loose and 'eaped about over the boards, and the darkies' 'eads was mixed up in it. And the sun comin' through 'oles in the winder-blind made it shine like somethink worth the 'avin'. But in the middle of it all 'er face was as pale as a dead woman's at a wake. And there was a kind o' peaceful look on it, same as on Florrie Branton when we went to see 'er in the 'orspital, and 'er leg 'ad been took off, and it was all over and done with.

Next day my mother went bail with our landlord, and got 'er one o' the top rooms in the same 'ouse with us at eighteen-pence, for all the natural rent bein' one-and-nine. So there she lived with 'er two kids, keepin' 'erself very quiet, and never stoppin' to talk beyond just answerin' with a civil word and a bit of a smile, if anybody spoke 'er kind, as wasn't often. For the women leastways used to make out as they felt

the Sheeney stickin' in their throats, and stoppin' 'em from sayin' anythink when they went to speak to 'er. And mostly all day long she was at 'er work, and often 'er own father 'ud pass 'er in the dock, and 'e not so much as look at 'er. But in the evenin', as reg'lar as the clock, the minute she'd 'ad her tea, away back she went to 'er old 'ouse, and set down on the doorstep, the very same place where she'd swilled the Sheeny, and just waited hour after hour till everybody 'ad gone to bed, and the lights in the winders 'ad been put out one by one. And nobody never raised no objection to 'er settin' there, cos they knowed she was waitin' for 'er man comin' 'ome. In summer time she used to take the two kids with 'er, and they'd play in the dust or go to sleep, as convenient to theirselves. But in winter she put 'em to bed, leavin' the door open so as my mother could listen for 'em yellin', and 'erself always went and set on that doorstep, for all the cold bein' sometimes enough to freeze 'er tight to it, like a lighter stuck up in the ice.

When she'd gone on like that for some time, acourse nobody said nothink more about it, beyond sayin' as she was goin' a bit queer. But what made us know she was real dotty was a notion she took to pay off all 'er arrears to the landlord of 'er old 'ome from the very time when the Sheeny started signin' for nothink in purtikler. And this is 'ow she set about. There was a friend of 'ers as worked at piecin' flags together for a big firm in the City, and they paid 'er fivepence for doin' each large flag, same as

a Jack or a ship's pennon, as reached across 'er room many times over. And about that time, seein' as somebody of the Royal Family was goin' to 'ave 'is dinner in the City, or somethink o' that, this friend 'ad got more work nor she could get through with. So she sublets to Ginger at thruppence a flag, stickin' to the spare twopence for the good will. And on fine nights Ginger worked at the flags on that doorstep, usin' the street lamps when the evenin's closed in too dark to see by. And she got so artful at it that the work stuck to 'er, and one way and another she put by a shillin' a week to pay off 'er arrears. So she took and left the money at the landlord's in a bit of newspaper once a month, never tellin' 'er name nor nothink beyond sayin' it was 'er arrears. And what I'd like to know is 'ow that landlord contrived to live through 'is surprise when 'e got 'em.

'Er bein' so dotty about those same arrears acourse kep' er room very bare. There wasn't nothink in it to speak on, bar only a picture of a mountain bustin' itself out with fire over the sea as 'ad been a special fancy with Sissero, cos there was somethink almighty about it. But outside that, she 'adn't got only a chair and a table. She'd so much as sold the bed, and the mattress was 'eaped in one corner on the floor, and for beddin' she mostly used them flags she was workin' at, coverin' 'em over in newspapers to keep 'em clean. And many's the time, me goin' up with 'er late to give 'er a light when she'd come in from waitin' for 'er man, I've seen the two little darkies curled up together under

a Union Jack or the flag with lions and iron railin'-tops on it, and I've thought on what our teacher 'ad used to tell us about the flag o' the Empire standin' for a sign o' purtection to all the different kinds o' people round the world; for all that a good blanket would no doubt 'ave been warmer, but not so cheap at the price. But there was always one thing as Ginger didn't never stint 'erself in, and that was food.

"It's all very well, Mrs. Britton," she'd say to my mother; "but where's the good of all as I've done, if 'e only comes 'ome and finds me turned as lean and ugly as Mrs. Simon, and 'e never one o' them as 'as a fancy for dry bones?"

So there wasn't no change to speak on for nigh on two year, barrin' only the little darkies kep' growin' bigger, and Ginger more 'appy-lookin', cos she said the longer 'er waitin' lasted, the nearer she must be to the end on it. And whether with this or somethink else, there came a look on 'er as made 'er seem kind o' different. And I've 'eard the women say as she was gettin' almost as decent-lookin' as any of 'em. And as for the men, there was plenty willin' to take 'er now, babies and all, through 'avin a kind of an interest in the way she'd been goin' on. And one on 'em, 'avin lost 'is wife some weeks earlier, makes bold to go up to 'er and offer to take 'er on till Sissero came 'ome, and then give 'er up again; or to keep 'er for good and all, if 'e didn't never come 'ome. But she just laughed, and told 'im it wasn't 'ardly worth while makin' no change for the little bit of 'er waitin' time as was left, but thankin' 'im

for 'is kindness, as she was willin' to be grateful for.

And so at the last, one Saturday night, just afore that Chris'mus-time I was tellin' on, my father was comin' 'ome from 'is Trade Union Lodge, and I'd met with 'im after watchin' the gamblin' at the end of the Stag and Bull stairs leading down to the river, and on a sudden we 'ear a noise comin' along our street more like the neighin' of a 'orse nor nothink else, and my father cops me by the arm, and says :

"Gord love us! I aint never 'eard no man but one as could make a noise same as that!"

And sure enough, there comin' down the middle o' the street was Sissero, kind o' walkin' sideways, 'avin' one arm round Ginger's neck and the other round 'er waist in front, and all the time kissin' at 'er most shameful, as if 'e couldn't never get enough of 'er, and not lookin' where 'e was walkin' to, but lookin' only in 'er face, and now and then burstin' out laughin', as I said. But Ginger she didn't laugh, nor say nothink; only walked straight on, lookin' in front of 'er almost the same as if she'd been asleep, bar sometimes she kissed 'im back so 'ard on the mouth 'e 'ad to stop 'is laughin'. And some'ow 'e'd loosened 'er red 'air, and it 'ad all fell down so as pretty nigh to cover 'em both over.

So my father stood back to let 'em pass up through our doorway, and 'e fetches the nigger one on the shoulder, and says :

"What, Sissero! 'Ere's luck!"

But Sissero took no manner o' notice, no

more nor a fly, 'e only keepin' on kissin' the woman. And she just put out one 'and, and kind o' touched my father's. And I never see 'im turn red afore nor since. So them two went to the bottom o' the stairs, and then Sissero just tightened 'is arms round 'er, and carried 'er right up to the top o the 'ouse, same as yer'd carry a little baby.

And when we went in, and told my mother, she was near on cryin', and she says:

"Lord love 'er! if I'd been 'er, I'd 'ave been willin' to wait twenty year for such a night, bar only for 'is bein' black—or even black and all."

You lay there was a rare turn-up in our front room next day, bein' Sunday, so soon as the word went round as Sissero 'ad come 'ome. And for once most people seemed to be kind of agreed to be pleased about it. Only the queer part was as for nigh on eighteen month nobody 'adn't said never a word regardin' that there Sheeny man, but now all the women started talkin' about 'im straight off, the men standin' at the door, and shakin' their 'eads, and spittin'. And some says one thing, and some another, but mostly they 'ad turned agen Ginger now 'as she was 'appy again, only for Mrs. Sullivan and one or two others stickin' out there wasn't no 'arm done, she bein' druv to it from necessity and not from 'er choice. And soon they was in a fair way to tear each other in pieces, let alone Ginger. But on a sudden Mrs. Simon up and says:

"All I've got to say is as she's a disgrace to our sex, and it's nothink but right as 'er lawful

'usband should know it. So it's me as is goin' to tell 'im, and this blessed day as ever is."

"And if yer do, my dear," says Mrs. Sullivan, "I'll just break yer jaw for yer this blessed night."

"Yus," says Lina, "and I'll just take that bloomin' little baby o' yern, and ram it in a sack along of all yer cats, and drownd the bloomin' lot."

"Go it, Lina! Good old Lina!" said the men, all laughin' and lookin' at each other. And it was likely there'd be fair bloodshed, when my mother starts sayin':

"Mrs. Simon might very well be right enough in what she says, if we was dealin' with an ordinary man same as other people. I'm not sayin' nothink about that. But the thing we've got to deal with is a nigger, and 'e bein' black makes a difference. Cos, as fer as I make out, them as is black aint by no means purtikler. And that's cause why gentlefolks sends 'em missions and such for the purpose o' makin' 'em more purtikler—same as they sends 'em at us, through thinkin' we aint purtikler enough neither. But that aint the truth, as Mrs. Simon knows very well."

So that kind o' settled it, and it was agreed as nobody shouldn't let out nothink about the Sheeny, but leave it to Ginger to speak if she wanted.

"And 'er not one to talk uncalled for, no more nor me," said Mrs. Crips.

"Well," said old Spotter, "all I can learn from this 'ere talk of Sheenies and niggers is

what I've said all along, as it's blood as tells. The nigger's a nigger, and the Sheeny's a son o' Jacob, 'im as I was learned about in my school days down in Devon. Eh, I can 'ear old Jacob sayin' to that Sheeny: 'Well done, my son! Yer'e a true child o' mine, *you* are!' And mind you, as fer as I know, Jacob was the very fust as understood the meanin' o' blood and breedin'."

With that old Simon moved to go, lookin' as fierce as was in 'im to look, and that was about the same as a sheep lookin' at a dorg. And 'e says:

"It's the Chosen People as ye're speakin' on, you just bear that in mind. And it's written they shall possess the earth, so it aint no good for you talkin'."

"Yus," says old Spotter, "and it seems like enough they will possess the earth, anyways the Tower 'Amlets. But as for bein' chosen, there aint many 'ud choose 'em agen, in these days any'ow."

So when Sissero comes down the stairs in the afternoon, just about as the lamps was bein' lighted, we all stood there ready to wish 'im luck, and shake 'ands with 'im, and give over disputin'. And 'e seemed to be runnin' over with 'appiness at every inch of 'is body, and I couldn't for the life of me tell which was whiter, 'is teeth or 'is eyes. So 'e stood there laughin' and talkin', tellin' us 'ow 'e'd got stuck up in China nigh on two year through missin' 'is ship, and then couldn't get no ship to take him off, but 'ad been forced to work on a rice plantation

and 'ad lived all the time with a Chinee girl, till at last 'e'd managed to slip off in a British Injer ship again, and so 'ad worked his passage 'ome in course o' time.

"And now there aint nothink only one bad thing in it all," 'e says, "and that's as them two child'en of ours upstairs they start 'owlin' and yellin' so soon as they set eyes on me, cos of me bein' so black. And them my very own child'en, as any bloke can see for 'isself by only lookin' at 'em—as whose else should they be, I'd like to know?"

And with that 'e starts off laughin' again, enough to bring the 'ouse down.

CHAPTER VI.

Little Scotty.

'VE told before this 'ow no woman down our way isn't a patch on Mrs. Macrae for keepin' 'erself clean. The rest don't love 'er none the better for that, and keep throwin' it up at 'er as she's got nothink to look after only one boy of a grandson, so can chuck away money on a deal of washin' and scrubbin' such as most people can't run to. But as to 'er bein' clean, all on 'em give in on that, there bein' no denyin' it. 'Erself is always dressed in black, barrin' an edgin' of widder's cap runnin' all round 'er face, and shinin' with whiteness. And the floorin' of 'er two rooms shines the same, and the ceilin's and winders and walls. 'Er place always looks just the model of a Sheeny Kosher-room in Easter-week; only old Spotter says them Sheenies aint kosher only at Passover-time. but Mrs. Macrae, she's kosher allover-time. For there's nobody livin' ever found a speck o' dirt anywheres in 'er place, not so much as a smear of mustard on the table-cloth.

Not as 'ow 'er room was to be called stylish, it 'avin' no ornaments, nor stuffed birds, nor memorial cards. And there wasn't only two

pictures—one of Christ tellin' the sea to 'old its noise, and the other of 'Im raisin up a widder's son. And there wasn't nothink else to see in the room only a big clock tickin'. And round its face was written: "This is Time. What is Eternity?" And yet, for all its bein' so bare, my mother 'ad used to say there wasn't no place so restin', and to 'ave a set down there and listen to the clock tickin' on and on without no purtikler sense was the kind o' rest she supposed some aims at gettin' by goin' to places o' worship and listenin' to the preachin'. But Mrs. Simon pertended to make out as the old woman only 'eld 'erself so clean and decent for the purpose of keepin' well in with the parsons, seein' as 'er way of making 'er money was by cleanin' two chapels, a school, and the church lookin' over the dock. But there is people as must always be sayin' somethink, and Mrs. Simon seemed some'ow to find this purtikler way of sayin' things very soothin'.

And speakin' of churches, I call to mind 'ow at one time two well-turned-out bosses—elders or somethink of that in a chapel—come and ask Mrs. Macrae 'ow she could bring 'erself to help clean a church as wasn't a chapel. And they give 'er the choice of turning up the church or gettin' the sack from the chapel. So she 'eard 'em to the end, and then she tells 'em to do as they like, seein' er conscience was clear, dirt bein' dirt, no matter for where.

"Ye see," she says, speakin' in 'er queer kind of way, "na doubt ye canna help things being

dirrty hereabout, that bein' only the visible sign o' the natural heathenness o' this people. The idolatries o' this people go to my hearrt, indeed they do. But flat Papists 'ud be none the waur for a wash, images and priests and a'. The verry idols in heathen lands are so much the waur for the dirrt that's on 'em: even as the heart o' man, which calls for a cleansin' more precious. And as concerns this church, what if I feel a sort o' lovin' kindness toward it, for the cause that it's the last sign o' God's grace the sailors tak' with 'em when they put out to their business in the deep? Nay, sirs, I'm no the woman to go whorin' after idols for the sake o' gain."

So the elders backed out, and she kep' 'er work, they knowin' well enough there wasn't such another cleaner at the money. And why she'd such a feelin' for sailors was most likely cos 'er own 'usband 'ad been drownded at sea, and then she'd come to London with 'er son, as 'ad been a fisherman too, but turned missioner, and married a Poplar girl, and was drownded within the year, preachin' to the fisherman away off Yarmouth. And so the girl, gettin' to 'ear of 'is death, was took worse over 'er baby, and left Mrs. Macrae alone in the world with nothink but the kid to bear her company, and 'e fresh to everythink.

But company or not to 'er, 'e grew up to be rare company to everybody else, did little Scotty, as 'is real name was Ben, that not standin' for Benjamin, but Benoni, as is the Scotch way of sayin' it. So soon as 'e could walk, 'is gran'-

mother sends 'im to the same school with me, but me bein' older we didn't set together, and when I'd got up to the third Standard, 'e was still at threadin' beads and goin' to sleep with the infants. But from the start there was always somethink queer about 'im, so as yer couldn't but notice it. One thing, 'e didn't never come till after religion was over, 'is gran'-mother learnin' 'im that at 'ome, she sayin' she looked at the streets Sundays and week-days, and judged our religion by its fruits, same as 'er book told 'er to. And another thing, for all 'is bein' kep' so clean and turned out decent, 'e never wore neither shoes nor stockin's, but went barefoot same as any ragged child as 'as got drinkin' at 'ome. And once 'e said to the teacher: "Yus, I'd be glad enough to wear 'em, but my gran'mother says she won't 'ave 'er own son's son brought up to wanton like a fatted calf."

With that, the teacher give a kind o' laugh, and walked away. And what did little Scotty do but give just the same kind o' laugh, and walk along be'ind 'im with 'is bare feet, doin' the same as the teacher did, givin' the same little jerks with 'is 'ead at each step. But all the time yer could see as 'e wasn't after makin' game o' the teacher, but just did it 'cos 'e couldn't 'elp it, 'e not winkin' at us, nor laughin', but after a bit just walkin' off alone without so much as lookin' round. So it came to be the reg'lar game in 'is Standard to send 'im up to clean the black-board, or 'elp stick up the pictures of objick-lesson. 'E'd do everythink the

same as the teacher was doin' it, either puttin' a pencil in 'is mouth, or stickin' a thumb in 'is weskit pocket, or just scratchin' 'is 'ead afore 'e started doin' anythink. And there the 'ole class 'ud be settin' ready to die with tryin' to 'old theirselves from laughin'. But Scotty never thought o' laughin 'isself. 'E never so much as smiled, only when 'e was imitatin' somebody, and then it wasn't 'im as was smilin', but the other party. So the thing to do, 'im gettin' a bit older, was to set 'im up in the playground to take off somebody as all on us knowed, such as the coppers in the 'Ighway or the parsons 'e'd 'eard preach. We'd only got to say the name, and 'e did the man we wanted. For all 'is bein' so little, I've see 'im look six foot 'igh and fourteen stone 'eavy, in doin' a copper tryin' to 'ide 'isself in a corner too small for 'im cos the inspector's near copped 'im shiftin' a glass on 'is beat.

But best of all was to see 'im do the Salvation Army captain, when 'is grandmother went to a big prayer-meetin' on The Waste, and asked if the tambourines and trumpets and uniforms wasn't vanities as didn't come of 'umility. And when 'e 'ad done the captain's answer, 'e'd just lift up 'is 'ead, and shake it a bit, with a kind o' sorft look in 'is eyes, same as 'is gran'mother's, and 'e'd say in 'er queer way o' speakin': "I've naught against your doctrine, Mr. Captain, if that's a godly title fur yoursel', but oh, mon, I'm sair afeard we're a' of us over worrldly!"

And 'im speakin' so, yer could pretty near see 'undreds o' little wrinkles gatherin' up

round 'is eyes, and if yer'd tied a white cap under 'is chin, yer'd 'ave 'ad 'is gran'mother 'erself standin' there. But all the time 'e 'ardly knowed 'e was takin' 'er off, let alone makin' a mock. For 'e always showed a very decent kind o' feelin' for 'er, settin' with 'er most evenin's after 'is tea, and listenin' to 'er readin' in 'er books. So 'e didn't never join no gang, nor band, nor rode be'ind trams, nor came cat-'untin', nor saw life. And nobody wouldn't 'ave thought nothink about 'im, no more nor if 'e'd been a girl, but for 'is bein' able to make us fair die with laughin' whenever 'e liked, and 'e keepin' 'is solemn little mug all the time.

And besides takin' people off, 'e was good at all manner. There wasn't nobody so smart at 'is drill, not even Ned Philips, as is now called Tentpole. Scotty was to 'ave led our squad for the competition at the Albert 'All, but old Mrs. Macrae put a stopper on it by tellin' our 'ead-master she wouldn't 'ave 'er grandson puffed up with them things as don't satisfy. So our squad only got second. And the teacher gave Scotty's form a talkin' to, sayin' it wasn't no good tryin' to do nothink if people was goin' to be so purtikler, and if we was always to be thinkin' of our souls, 'e might as well turn up teachin' altogether; and it was nothink but right to keep a good opinion of yerselves and try to go one better nor other people, if yer want to do yer duty and get on. And after school it was gran' to see Scotty give us all the talk again, pullin' 'is mustache

and drawin' in 'is back, and swellin' 'is chest out, the teacher bein' a little man but in the Volunteers, as I told before, and keepin' a good enough opinion of 'imself to get on anywheres.

And for singin' too, Scotty seemed to 'ave it born in 'im, same as a cage-bred lark as 'll start singin' some mornin' just like other larks, and flutterin' its wings up and down like a sparrer in a fit. And 'is gran'mother rather liked 'im to sing, cos 'is father and gran'father 'ad led the singin' in there own chapel. And it's certain she must 'ave been given to singin' 'erself at one time, for there wasn't nobody else could 'ave taught Scotty all the queer songs 'e knowed. And sometimes of an evenin' 'e'd start singin' in 'er room till the neigbors 'ud come and stand outside of the winder. Sentimental songs all on 'em was, about 'er lovin' Charlie and such like, and no fun in 'em; but oh, 'e could sing 'em a treat!

I call to mind the first time as we got 'im to sing what yer might call in public. It was a week after Jim Mansfield broke 'is neck by fallin' with a bail of sugar down the 'old of the *West Injer Queen*. 'Im 'avin' been buried, we got up a friendly Lead at 'is widdered mother's 'ouse to pay the funeral and rent and start 'er off again comfortable. So two on us goes to Mrs. Macrae's to ask Scotty to give us a song. And we find 'im settin' there as usual. So we tell 'im the cause why we'd come, and 'e looks at the old woman, and at last she says: "A widder, do ye say? and this 'er son, and 'e

killed in a ship? Aye, poor body! But what good 'll a' your singin' do for her?"

Then I said as she'd get the brokers in at 'er 'ome if the rent wasn't paid within the month.

"Poor body, poor body!" she keeps sayin' to 'erself. "Aye, lad, and if it's to the house o' mournin' ye must e'en go. Ye'll surrely tak' no harrm in the house o' mournin'."

It was just the classiest friendly Lead I ever was at—lots of beer and lemonade, not to speak on tobaccer and fag papers a treat. Old Oily was chairman, and a rare toff 'e looked, 'ammerin' on the table with a broken drumstick to keep order and start the singers fair. There was songs of both kinds, comic and sentimental, accordin' as 'appened to be the go at that time. I call to mind we 'ad "Charity ends at 'ome," and "That's where it are, boys," and "Only to touch 'er 'and again," and "Crown 'im King of Rats." And Patsy Conolly done a clog-dance on the table, two of 'is pals 'ummin' the tune and dronin' to make bagpipes. Then little Scotty was called on, and 'e up and sang a sentimental song about Annie Lory. It 'ad ought to 'ave come sooner, afore we got took up with comic songs, But 'e 'adn't sung no more nor the fust line and there we all was settin' and listenin', for all we mostly knowed the tune by sound, but 'adn't never 'eard singin' same as that, 'is voice seemin' to swing up and down as easy as a boat on the water. And at the end we all jump up, shoutin' and whistlin'. And the other fellers keepin' on at their noise, I goes

up to the chairman and says: "There's another song as 'e can sing, and that's 'Comin' through the Rye'—you know, it's almost a decent kind o' song, 'ardly to be called sentimental."

So Oily banged with 'is drum-stick, and says: "I will call on Mr. Scotty to oblige again with 'is world-renowned renderin' of 'Comin' through the Rye.'"

So Scotty said 'e'd 'ave a try at it, for all 'is not 'avin' sung that song since 'e was little. Now, there was nothink to laugh at, but some-'ow the 'ole lot on us bust out laughin', and for no reason at all, barrin' only 'e looked all of a minute to 'ave turned as young as a baby. But the moment 'e started singin', you'd 'ave sworn 'e'd changed 'isself into a girl about Lina's style, full of 'ankin' artful little ways, with a look this way, and a look that way, and a smile down the middle.

With that the Lead broke up, and we 'anded over the money—near on thirty shillin' there was—to Jim Mansfield's mother as a recompense for 'er son's death. And goin' 'ome with Scotty I told Mrs. Macrae what a set-out the fellers 'ad made over 'im, more especial for the "Comin' thro' the Rye." But she only says: "Aye, it's a good enough song, no doubt, and I've often detected myself back-slidin' into it. But I doubt it's over-temptin' for a young mon who should e'en be seekin' to cleanse his way."

"All right, gran," says Scotty, "but it was yourself as taught it me."

"Aye," she says, looking into the fire, "it war mysel'."

Then for a long time I 'ardly didn't see Scotty at all, me 'avin' started work, and after a bit Scotty gettin' took on for messenger, cleaner, and kind of clurk at a Seamen's 'Ome, through 'is father bein' known for 'avin' been a missioner. So 'e goes on straight enough for two or three year, till it might be the same August or thereabout when I fell out of work through turnin' up the shop. Then 'e gets down on 'is luck, through the bosses of the 'Ome startin' buildin' what's called a new wing, and askin' a Member of Parliament down to fix the foundations right, and bring in the money. So the Member of Parliament was fetched up to the door in a carriage with two 'orses and two men to mind 'em. And 'e makes a fine speech, and they start singin' 'ymns, and prayin', and 'avin' their teas. And when they'd 'ad their teas, the Member of Parliament asks to be showed over the 'Ome. So they takes 'im fust to see where the seamen was put to sleep in. And over each bed was wrote the name of some gen'leman or lord as kep' it goin', so as the seamen might call to mind their benefactors both goin' to sleep and wakin' up. And any bed not 'avin' a benefactor was ticketed with "'Umility," or "Righteousness," or some such. So the Member of Parliament chooses out the "Purity" bed, and says 'e'd like to 'ave 'is own name stuck up instead, and 'ud send 'em money to keep it goin'.

Then 'e was took to see the room where the

seamen was fed. And 'e finds a lot of 'em settin' round and laughin' and cheerin'. And on a table in the middle on 'em, with 'is back turned, 'e sees little Scotty standin' and talkin'. And sure enough 'e was makin' the Member of Parliament's speech right over again ; even the Member of Parliament could see that. With one 'and under where 'is coat tails should 'ave been, and the other beatin' time with a tea-spoon in place of eye-glasses, Scotty was goin' through that speech word for word, makin' a kind of sing-song at the end of each bit 'e'd got to say, so as to give time for thinkin' what to say next, for all the world like the Member of Parliament. 'E'd just got to talkin' about the dangers o' seamen through their bein' the pioneers and guardians of our glorious empire on which the sun don't never set, and 'e was showin' 'ow the Member of Parliament looked down on a piece of paper to read out a tex' 'e 'ad turned up in the Bible for the purpose, somethink about bringin' 'em to the 'aven where they wanted to get to.

"Ah, my dear friends," 'e was sayin', "the 'aven as they aimed after—what else did the 'Oly Spirit 'ave in 'Is mind when 'E used those words, but such a Sailors' 'Ome as this noble edifice I see before me?"

The rest o' that speech wasn't never 'eard. Next day little Scotty got the sack. 'E asked the boss why 'e didn't like 'avin' the speech made over again as near the same as might be, seein' it was worth takin' such a deal o' trouble to 'ave it made once. But the boss only said

'e'd flay 'im alive if ever 'e catched him there again. So acourse it was no manner o' good for 'im to stand arguin'.

Then for weeks and weeks Scotty was out o' work, same as other fellers, wanderin' up and down and round and round, and never gettin' a job. And each time I see 'im 'e'd got to look a bit more ashamed of 'imself for doin' nothink but eat 'is grandmother's money. And at last nobody ever see 'im at all, but there was some as said 'e went over the water of an evenin' unbeknown and 'ired a barrer, and sang to the blokes in Southwark for anythink 'e could cadge.

But one Saturday night I was takin' an evenin' walk with young Duffy down Mile End, and lookin' at the street stalls with their flarin' lamps, and the blokes aimin' at coker-nuts, and tryin' their strength with 'ammers, and listenin' to the talkers decidin' about Gord, and takin' on penny shocks of real lightnin'. And comin' opposite the Paragon, we stop to read the names o' the singers and dancers, all wrote up in red on a blue ground with circles round 'em. And there in the middle of 'em all was a board as said: "Little Scotty. The Star of the East. The Uncrowned Heir Apparent of the Serio-Comic Stage. The Baby Boanerges. His first appearance. Next Saturday."

"Blime!" says I, "if that aint our Scotty 'isself!"

"Maybe yer'e right," says Duffy. "But it's a queer go for anybody as you and me knows to start bein' famous."

We soon found out the truth on it. Some bloke 'ad gone and told the Manager about Scotty's singin' on the barrer, and the Manager 'e asked 'im up, and there was some as said 'e offered 'im just whatever 'e liked to ask. But fifteen shillin' is the biggest wage I ever 'eard of a feller gettin' for a start, and that's for work, mind you, not for dancin' and singin', as you might almost call livin' like a gen'leman. So us findin' it was really our own Scotty, we make up a party to go and 'ear 'im, Duffy takin' 'is girl, and me gettin' Lina 'erself to come. Not as I took much to myself for that, seein' as she waited to the last moment in the 'ope of Tentpole askin' 'er, but 'e never did.

Next Saturday night we got late to the doors, through Duffy takin' such a time over 'is tea, and then doin' up a lot of it in paper to 'ave a go at between the songs, or when the band should play and there wasn't no call to listen. And 'urryin' up, just outside we run into old Granny Macrae, seemin'ly kind of 'overin' about through not knowin' what to do. So bein' civil-spoken, Lina passed the time o' day with 'er, and told 'er to look smart if she wanted a seat to 'ear little Ben.

"Nay," she says, speakin' kind of wild, "the hour's no yet come. There's full time yet for Gord's handywork. It is written, in the twinklin' of an eye we shall be changed."

But Lina cops 'old on 'er arm, and says: "You come along with me, my dear, and I'll see yer righted."

At the box we find there wasn't only standin'

room left, barrin' the shillin' seats. So Duffy says 'e didn't mind goin' it whiles 'e was young, and we two each planks down our two bobs for us and the females. But Mrs. Macrae 'ad got 'old on a free-pass to a stall in 'er 'and, and she kep' lookin' fust at that and then at the ticket-man, and mutterin' to 'erself: "I'll see it done, but I doubt it shall na be with the price of 'is soul."

"Now, lady," says the ticket man, "don't stand 'ankin' there; you're not the only person in the world."

"Young mon," she says, "at this hour I almost wish I was. But would you kindly give me the right of entrance in exchange for this shilling?"

With that she tears up 'er free-pass, tellin' Duffy as the sixpence 'e offered for it 'ud be an unrighteous bargain. So we all went in together, and got the back row of the shillin' seats, 'andy for the promenade and bar. And I set next Lina as was natural, 'avin' Mrs. Macrae on the other side.

All durin' the fust part, whiles the girls kep' comin' in one after another, and singin' and dancin', and the conjurer was at his little tricks, and the gymnastic troop was spittin' and rubbin' the sweat off their 'ands, I was gettin' as close as might be up to Lina's side, and tryin' to win 'er over to talk more friendly. But some'ow she was a bit off that night, and only kep' askin' which o' the girls a man 'ud call prettiest, and if by reason of the dress or the way of doin' 'er 'air. But she knowed all the

time not one on 'em wasn't fit to die in the same street with 'erself, no matter 'ow turned out. And I never took much 'eed to the old woman, barrin' only as she didn't seem to be noticin' nothink, but kep' bendin' down over 'er 'ands on top of 'er umbereller, and kind o' talkin' to 'erself, so as the girl in front with feathers to 'er 'at turns round and tells 'er to shut 'er noise. But when a lot of darky savages, mostly women, came on, and started throwin' their legs about, and makin as if they was killin' each other, she looks up a minute, and I 'ears 'er sayin': "O Lord, Lord, it's poor women-creatures like mysel', and all bought with a price!"

The people fair loved them niggers, and roared with laughin' at 'em for lookin' like guys and makin' such queer noises. But next after them up goes Little Scotty's number on the flies. So seein' Mrs. Macrae still bendin' over 'er umbereller, Lina reaches acrost me, and says: "Cheer up, granny, there aint no cause to fear for Ben. 'E's *all* right, you lay!"

But the old woman only stooped down lower, and I 'ears 'er sayin': "It's comin', it's comin'! Oh, that one might plead for a mon with Gord!"

You should 'ave 'eard the clappin' and the stampin' when Scotty came just creepin' on to the stage. 'E was got up same as a ragged crossin'-sweep, and a deal of 'is little body kep' showin' through the 'oles. 'E 'adn't got no 'at on, and 'e was 'oldin' a bit of a broom in 'is 'and. But some'ow you could see from the very look on 'im as 'e 'adn't never used that broom barrin' for a weapon of defense, and

didn't never propose to. 'Is nose and eyes was all pinched and screwed up with cold and 'unger, and yer could tell by the way 'e kep' lookin' round 'e'd only just escaped from somethink and was still scared almost out of 'is life. But there was a kind o' smile on 'is little mug, oh, so artful!

The music 'ad been playin' very quiet and slow, and all on a sudden when nobody wasn't lookin' for it, you 'eard Scotty's voice comin' out of the music, every word of it quite plain, for all we bein' right at the back. It was a sorft kind of tune, and everybody was naturally lookin' for a sentimental kind of song. And when they found out it wasn't, that's what pleased 'em better nor anythink. This is 'ow it began:

"If yer want a bit o' quiet, destitoot o' noise or riot,
Why, yer'd best come down our alley, and I'll show yer round
For there's Neligan a-sayin' as Macarthy's self wants flayin',
And 'e's doin' business on 'im as 'll cost ten pound;
Then there's blue-eyed flaxen Lily as is knockin' Susan silly,
And there's Jemmy Green just leavin' off from stampin' on 'is wife;
And it's done so nice and tidy as to please the choicest lidy,
And if yer kep' a churchyard, why, yer'd see more life!"

All the chorus was just the last line over again, and didn't we yell it!

"And if yer kep' a churchyard, why, yer'd see more life!"

Then the music started playin' sorft agen, and I 'eard the old woman say: "It's lies, all

lies he's sayin'. He's lyin' with lyin' lips. Impute it not for sin, O Lord!"

Then she lifts up her 'er 'ead, and keeps starin' at Scotty without never movin'.

So after the music 'ad played a bit more 'e starts again :

"Oh, there aint no mountain valley 'alf so peaceful as our alley,
For all no lambs are sportin' in the shepherd's care ;
But there's all the cats a-squeakin' and all the kids a-shriekin',
And there's Betsy Jane redoocin' of 'er sister's 'air ;
Then there's Blowin' Bill a-cryin' as 'e's on the point o' dyin'
Though Bobby Connor's tryin' for to cure 'im with a knife ;
And there aint no kind o' riot, but a blissful sense o' quiet,
And if yer kep' a churchyard, why, yer'd see more life!"

Whiles we was shoutin' the chorus over again, Scotty started creepin' round the stage with 'is broom, like a starvin' cat on the prowl, gettin' quicker and quicker till 'e led up to a queer kind o' game, as if a little churchyard ghost 'ad got dancin' down that alley made up as a crossin'-sweep. And all the time the old woman kep' whisperin' to 'erself, "It's all lies he's been tellin', and look at 'is wee bit body bendin' about. To think an immortal soul should stand haverin' and fooolin' there, and the brink of eternity yawnin' at 'is very feet!"

Then there went up such a cheerin' from all on us as fair swamped the band and everythink. And Scotty kep' standin' quite still in the middle o' the stage, 'e lookin' as solemn as if 'e'd never done nothink but preach sermons all 'is life.

And quite unlooked for, we 'ear 'im startin' the next two verses in praise of 'is peaceful 'ome. Then came the dance again, and just near the endin' of it 'e vanished on a sudden, nobody couldn't tell 'ow. The music went on for a minute, and then the 'ole 'ouse went mad together, whistlin' and stampin' till the dust come up fit to choke a scavenger.

Just as we was gettin' fair wild with waitin' for 'im to come on again, in 'e walks, turned out very smart in a little blue suit, and got up for a middle-aged kind of bloke, same as might be ticket-collector on the *Royal Sovereign* runnin' to Margate or the *Clacton Belle*. And 'e struck up to a lively kind of tune:

"I've often been in love before, but never right till now,
And all the other girls I've loved just served to teach me 'ow,
For one was short, and one was fair, and one was brown and tall,
But at the sight of Annie's 'air I've clean forgot 'em all."

And then wavin' 'is 'and 'e sailed off upon the chorus:

"Oh, there was the charmin' Nannie,
And the fascinatin' Fanny,
And Jane, and black-eyed Sue,
And pretty Polly too;
And I told 'em each we'd see
'Ow eternal love could be,
But now there's only Annie,
And—she don't love me."

The big drum come down with a great thump on the word "and," and the music stopt short, Scotty sayin' "She don't love me" all to 'isself in a kind of despairin' voice, as

if drowndin' was too jolly a death for 'im. All on us laughed fit to bust, and started away into the chorus over again. Next 'e does a bit spoken, tellin' 'ow 'e won Annie over into comin' 'oliday-makin' with 'im one day on 'Ampstead 'Eath, and there they meet Nannie and Fanny and Jane and Sue and Polly, all at the same time. And so there was a rare old game, 'e says, the best 'e'd ever see since 'is 'ole pile of relations got blind drunk on the day of 'is grandfather's funeral. But I didn't never 'ear the end of that story, through Mrs. Macrae gettin' up sudden, and goin' out, lettin' 'er umbereller fall, and makin' a deal of noise. So all the people turn round and say "'Ish!" and "D—— 'er bloomin' row!" And the girl with the feathers in front leaves off squeezin' of 'er young man's 'and and says: "Thank Gord, that old death's 'ead's gorn at last!"

After Scotty, the rest o' the show wasn't nothink, only a rare old frorst. So we get talkin' and 'avin' drinks, puttin' 'em on the ikey little stands on the backs of the seats in front. And Lina says she 'ad a mind to turn up 'er work at the ropes and take to the stage.

"And me dancin'," she says, "I'll drive the men just wild, you see. But there aint only one I'd aim at, for all that the others 'ud be very well for a time."

"Is it me ye're meanin' of?" says I, puttin' my arm round 'er.

"You?" she says. "Ger along! any girl could get over you. 'Im as I aims at must be as 'ard as pavin'-stones. That's my sort!"

But she lets me keep my arm round 'er till the sketch at the end was over. Then we all went out and stood at the stage door, waitin' for Scotty, and on 'is comin' we forms up into a gang, a dozen of us pals, and six or eight girls beside, and settin' 'im in the middle we marches 'im right 'ome, singin' and shoutin' all the way. But, comin' close up to Mrs. Macrae's door, we fetch up a minute just to finish singin' the chorus to a tune as everybody was singin', and it went :

"Kiss me upon the street, love,
Kiss me be'ind the door,
Kiss me whene'er we meet, love,
Reckon each time a score ;
If yer forget, my sweet love,
'Ow many went before,
Oh, to make all complete, love,
Kiss me ten thousand more!"

Then we all says good-night. But Lina would 'ave it she must see Scotty's gran'mother to wish 'er luck over 'is catch-on. So bein' friends, me and 'er, we goes in along with Scotty. And we finds the old woman in the room, standin' up and watchin' the door till Scotty follers us in, 'e 'avin' turned round again to say good-night. Then she says to us : "I'm glad to mak' ye welcome. But, oh, lad, I was sair fearsome ye'd be behind the hour o' family worship. Now sit ye down, and eat your supper, and we'll yet be in time the night."

So she makes Scotty sit down to two great squares of dry bread and a cup of milk, as she'd set out on a clean white table-cloth ; and Lina

and me she puts by the fire, and then she says again : " And now, maybe, just to spare the time, ye'll listen to a bit story I've lang had in my mind to tell. Aye, ye all look at me as an auld wife, na doubt, but it's no sae lang sin' Donald Macrae took me to his home by the beach, albeit I was na bigger than the lassie there, only clothed more decent. But it's a later time I have in mind to tell ye of. It was a day when this little lad's father, who is my only bairn, was just a grown man, and he'd come in early in the mornin' after bein awa' for the fishin' around Ireland. So I'd put him to bed, and gone down wi' the auld mon, my husband, to our bit harbor, to set him off wi' his mates to the deep-sea fishin', awa' east. It was early winter, but the sun was shinin' as harmless as the grace of God, and the sea lay fit for a bairn to play on. So they all got aboard and put off, my mon with the rest. Six and forty good fishin' vessels went out frae our town that day, and just at twelve o'clock my mon sailed his boat after them, he bein' the last out through havin' lingered to speak with his son. And we wives turned to go home along the quay. And as we got to the end o' the harbor auld Henderson's Maggie pointed round to the sea, and shroke ont : 'Gord's mercy ! what's happenin' to our vessels ?'"

" So we all turned round, and saw that the sea and sky had fallen together and were mixed up in a white mist streakit wi' gray. And for a minute we could mak' out a few brown sails whirlin' about in the midst. Then the gale

struck us full, with rain and snaw and hail, driving us against the walls, and carryin' awa' the roofs and chimneys frae the houses, aye from the meetin'-house itself; and we saw the brown sails no more. All that afternoon the town was down at the shore pickin' up the dead bodies. Nineteen of our vessels went to wreck, and over a hundred men never cam' home. Eight of 'em I picked up with my own hands, and my Donald among 'em, close by the rocks where I'd stood to see him part. Braw bodies of men they were all, though naught but fishin' folk. It was a sair sight to see them rolled about in the surf with their faces against the sand, and the weed stickin' in their beards. And some of 'em, like enough, no just sae ready to be sent straight to their Maker as was my mon. But bein' fishers they must know in their hearts they'd got to be ready, and that's why fishers were chosen for the disciples."

The old woman drew up a bit, and we sat there sayin' nothink, same as yer do when a parson tries to 'ave a talk at yer. Then, kind o' lookin' at the fire, she says: "But, oh, my bairn, I misdoubt whiles if ye are aye ready to go yoursel'. Maybe, bein' an auld wife, I've indulged ye ower much. But the Lord, Ben, He will na indulge ye, for that's no' the true merrcy."

She gets up and shifts the table-cloth and things. "And now ye ken," she says, "how it was your gran'father cam' by his funeral. But what it was to turn home again, leavin' 'im

in the ground, maybe by the divine favor ye'll na ken forever."

Seein' she was about gettin' out 'er big books, and layin' 'em on the table, me and Lina ups and says good-night. And goin' out by the door we 'ears 'er say: "Let us read Isaiah fifty-five," and then somethink about 'avin' a thirst and comin' to the water, for all yer 'aven't got no money.

On the way 'ome Lina didn't seem to care about love-makin' and the proper sort o' things. And me kissin' 'er at 'er door, she didn't say nothink only: "I'm thinkin', Jacko, the kind o' life me and you lives in sometimes seems right enough, and sometimes it looks poor, some'ow —bleedin' poor!"

"Yer'e right," says I, "but thank Gord to-morrer's Sunday, and we can stop in bed all mornin'."

And afore two months was out, Little Scotty was pasted all over London, and was took up in cabs at 'alf-a-crown each to sing in the West End, and 'is tunes was played on all the organs for the kids to dance to. Some people stuck out 'e was makin' five pound a week, and some said four pound ten. But nobody didn't know, what yer may call knowin', only as 'e give 'is gran'mother two pound every Saturday. And what she did with all that money was a fair old mystery, worse nor the 'Ansom Cab in the song, seein' she went on with 'er cleanin' just the same, and didn't make no change in 'er and Scotty's eatin'. Mrs. Simon said she blewed it in soap to wash

the Dock out with, and 'er 'usband the sweep 'e thought she likely sent it to the Sailors' 'Ome for coals of fire. But my mother was certain it was all laid by in the 'ope Scotty 'ud turn up the stage and take to the preachin' line, same as 'is father before 'im. But, bless yer soul, Scotty aint such a born fool as what that comes to.

CHAPTER VII.

A Man of Genius.

NE Friday night in February, about ten o'clock as it might be, I turned out in the street after tryin' for near on an hour to teach my young brother to whistle through 'is fingers, till my mother, settin' and mendin' as usual, said as she'd do a dynamite if we didn't shut it. So I goes out, and strolls down Wappin' way independent, on chance o' meetin' some of my mates. And yer'e sure to find somethink to amuse yer down there, if it's only a dog bein' drownded. It was pretty cold still, but there was just a kind of a snuff in the air as told yer the winter was nigh on over. The wind was blowin' up fresh from over Rother'ithe way, and drivin' bits of cloud quick acrost the moon ; and in the spaces of sky 'twix' the clouds the stars looked kind of pale and clean, same as if fresh scoured down. Crossin' the fust bridge, I could 'ear the river splashin' and frettin' in little waves agen the pier-'eads of Shadwell entrance, for all the tide was three parts down.

I 'ad just gone over the second bridge, when all on a sudden I see a woman standin' back in a dark corner of the palin's. I shouldn't 'ave

took no notice of 'er there, it bein' a reg'lar kind of place to stand and wait for yer young man or young woman ; but the minute she see me, she pulled off a kind of peak-cap, same as mates and foremen wears up and down the river, and stuck it under 'er apron. So I looks again, and sees by the paleness of 'er 'air in a streak of moonlight shinin' through the bars as it was Amy Morrison, 'er who 'adn't been very long married to Sam Lester, and was now livin' with 'im not many doors from us down our street.

"What, Amy!" I says, she not bein' much older nor me, and me 'avin' knowed 'er for years and years.

"'Ullo, Jacko!" she answers, in a kind of a whisper. "Is it you?"

"Yus," I says, "it's me, Who else do yer take me for? 'Ad another bust-up at 'ome?"

"Not me," she says. "I'm all right up to now, thank Gord, or soon will be! Don't yer mind for me."

"Well, good-night to yer, Amy!" I says.

"Good-night, Jacko, dear!" she says.

And I passed on.

In another 'alf minute I'd forgot all about her; but I might 'ave noticed two things as being out of the usual : one, as she called me "dear," for all I'd never so much as offered to keep company with 'er, she bein' married early ; but a proper enough girl, with brown eyes and a tidy figure "all 'er own," like Mary Ann Malone's in the Poplar boys' song. And for the second thing—she'd got 'oldin' a 'ole 'eap of newspapers in 'er 'and, and a kind of sack

slung round the other arm, not to speak on the peak-cap 'id under 'er apron. But I thought nothink only that she was 'idin', and waitin' there on the look-out for some fancy-bloke she'd took up, so as to put 'erself level with her own man for 'is treatment of 'er.

Not as Sam Lester was a bad sort in 'is way, takin' 'im all round, for all 'e 'adn't only one leg, 'avin' lost the other below the knee in some machine when 'e was 'prentice. 'Is face was as thin as a 'orse's, and just about the same color as 'is collar at the end of a fortnight; for 'e always wore a collar did Sam, and was somethink of a masher to look at. But what yer mostly saw about 'im was 'is blackin-brush of thick 'air, and 'is big black eyes seemin' as if they was always on the look-out for somethink special to eat, and they never able to find it. 'E 'adn't been in our part long, comin' down to us from Islington way, where 'e'd worked in a pianner factory till 'e got the sack, it might be through the drink, or only through just slackin' off in 'is work, 'e bein' an unreckonable kind of bloke. 'E'd called 'isself a musician when fust 'e came down our way, and kep' on callin' 'isself that, for all nobody never see 'im do nothink in that line by way of playin' any music, beyond once tunin' up Mrs. Baker's pianner for a game, 'cos it was the only pianner yer ever 'eard goin' in Shadwell, and 'e couldn't put up with the sound of it as it stood, for all nobody else not makin' no complaint.

There's no doubt 'e must 'ave been a real musician sometime, 'cos 'e 'ad a 'ole crowd of

music-notes, all printed out in sheets, same as German bands stick up on their trumpets and blow from, only larger. And my mother—she some'ow 'avin' taken rather a fancy for 'im so soon as 'e come—she used to say as 'ow often and often, when she'd looked in of an evenin' to see if Amy wanted for anythink, as was only natural soon after 'er gettin' married, she 'as seen Sam standin' at the table with a lot of them music sheets before 'im, and wavin' is wooden leg about in the air, same as the man in the middle of a music-'all band waves 'is stick.

"Well," she said first time to Amy, as was messin' around at the fire with a bit o' washin' and pealin' the pertaters for next day's dinner, "whatever use is 'e puttin' 'is leg to now, my dear?"

"Oh, goodness only knows!" says she. "It aint for the likes o' me and you to keep on askin' what *'e's* after. 'E's often took like that, 'e is. It comes o' bein' what 'e calls a genius, same as in the pantomime. And if 'is leg *is* lighter and more 'andier nor what the poker 'ud be, that aint no concern o' mine, now as 'e can't take my umbereller, 'cos why, I've 'ad to put it away, worse luck, and got nothink only bare one-and-three for it. But never you fret for 'im, Mrs. Britton. I just put a chair for 'im to rest 'is own bit o' leg on, and so long as 'e's carryin' on like that, *'e's* all right, and I gets a bit o' peace to do my work in."

Just then Sam turns sharp round, and starts callin' Amy all the worst words the cleverest

people 'ave ever thought on for interruptin' is' performance with 'er noise. But seein' my mother there, 'e stops on a sudden and says, "Good-evenin'!" 'e bein' always very perlite and takin' with the women, barrin 'is own wife, and sometimes even with 'er.

"You must excuse me for not noticin' yer entrance, Mrs. Britton," 'e says; "I was just approachin' the climax of this overture. It's called *The White Ladies*—not the 'ighest music, but refreshin' to the 'orny-'anded son of toil after 'is day's work."

"But if yer'e so bloomin' fond o' music," says my mother, "why don't yer go to the music-'alls and 'ear it, in place o' foolin' about 'ere by yerself and makin' never a sound?"

"Ah, Mrs. Britton!" 'e says, "do yer think I want to 'ear their confounded fiddle squeakin' and their blasted 'orns groanin', when this 'ere little 'ead of mine is soundin' with 'eaven's own orchestrer?"

"To say nothink," says Amy, "o' this style not costin' a single penny to nobody, let alone all I got for my nice umbereller as I 'ad to put away, and now get soaked to my skin without —me as never couldn't abide bein' wet."

But a long way the queerest thing about Sam, next to 'is wooden leg, was 'ow all day long 'e seemed to be laborin' and laborin' and nothink ever comin' of it. 'E'd fitted up what 'ad ought to 'ave been the bedroom into a kind of workshop, and there yer could 'ear 'im sawin' and 'ammerin' and planin' as yer went to yer work. And on yer comin' back 'e'd be still at

it, with a penny candle goin'. And none the less everybody knowed 'e couldn't be makin' money, if only through 'is always lookin' so pinched and 'ungry. But more especial when 'e'd married Amy, and she went on with 'er work same as before in a lead-works factory, or somethink o' that, down in the Isle o' Dorgs; and after a month or two she'd even sold 'er bed, and slep' in front o' the fire, cos there wasn't no room for the bed in the workshop; and Sam said 'e'd sooner starve nor 'ave a bed in the same room with the cookin' goin' on.

As to what it might be 'e kep' on makin' in that workshop nobody didn't rightly know. Only if yer 'appened to go by late of an evenin', yer'd sometimes see 'im rush out without no 'at on, and go 'obblin' down the street mutterin' to 'isself, 'is 'ands drawn tight, and 'is face workin' about, as if nothink short of killin' somethink or 'eavin' 'isself into the river could quiet 'im down. And sometimes 'e'd go smilin' along, swingin' 'is 'ands in reg'lar time, like a drum-major in the Volunteers, and kind of talkin' pleasant to 'isself. And after a bit we got to 'ear the most extraordinary kind o' noises comin' from 'is workroom, first of all like bullocks 'ollerin' out as they're drove up the Road to the slaughter-'ouses in Aldgate, and all the kids keep runnin' alongside of 'em to cheer 'em in and see the door shut on 'em, and listen in 'opes of 'earin' the thud of the ax. And afterward it got more like the 'ootin' of a steamer when a lighter comes driftin' acrost 'er bows. And, later on, there come a kind of squeakin' as

well, so as there was some as asked if Amy 'ad 'ad a baby. But all the women said it couldn't be that, 'cos they knowed it couldn't.

What it really was we found out at last in an easy kind of way as was disappointin' to most. It was Mrs. Turner as did it; and I 'eard 'er tell about it after. She just 'appened to look in one Saturday night when she knowed Sam wouldn't be at 'ome. And she finds Amy with her skirts pinned up sweepin' the place out, and cryin' to 'erself all the time fit to lay the dust. So she says:

"What, Amy! Doin' a bit of a clean?"

"Yer right," says Amy. "And 'oo else is to do it when yer've got a 'usband as stops at home all week bar Saturday nights, and you at work every day and all day?"

"I didn't know 'e worked at the makin' o' matches and that," says Mrs. Turner, just tryin' it on, and pointin' to the 'eap of chips and shavin' all swep' up together.

"Matches, ger on!" says Amy. "Some people's 'usbands is above them sort o' things, I *should* 'ope. Bless yer soul, *'e* don't work at nothink. 'E aint only a genius, that's all. And them chips, why they're all along of the Invention, as is the cause why 'e's a genius. Matches, indeed!"

"Invention," says Mrs. Turner, "what's that?"

"Lord love yer!" says Amy, "don't yer know what *that* is? Why, *I've* knowed that these months past. I'll show it yer, if yer 'll promise me not to put yer 'ands on it. Look 'ere!"

With that she takes Mrs. Turner into the work-room, and there the whole floor was littered over with tools—saws, and chisels, and pincers, and queer-cut bits of wood, and yards of steel wire, and things like penny whistles. And in the middle of it all was standin' a big concern, near twice the size of a decent pianner, but lookin' much the same, only for its 'avin' no inside to speak on, and bein' all covered up in cloths, same as a race 'orse goin' to the Derby Day.

"Pianner!" says Amy. "Bless yer 'eart, no. It aint no pianner. It's the Invention."

"But what's it for?" asks Mrs. Turner.

"Oh, goodness only knows what it's for!" says Amy. "All I knows is as it's a work of genius, and so far as I can gather from what mine keeps sayin' over to 'isself, it 'ud turn into a kind o' pianner and organ mixed up together, if it ever got to bein' finished. Yer see, it's like this: yer set down, same as if yer was playin' a pianner, and if yer feel occasion, yer just give a kick with yer knees, and it turns on an organ at the same time, and whiles yer go on playin' the pianner, the organ goes on groanin' and squeakin', kind of independent. The long, blowin' sounds of the organ 'll be made by them there whistles, and the pianner 'll make its noise with them wires, as always will get workin' round under my petticoats most uncomfortable as sure as ever I come into the room. Yus, that's the invention. There's a deal o' work put into it, I can tell yer. Oh, it aint a bad sort of a thing in its way, now is it?"

"Maybe not," says Mrs. Turner, "but what's 'e goin' to do with it?"

"Do with it?" says Amy. "Why, 'e's goin' on makin' at it, acourse."

"Yus," says Mrs. Turner, "but when it's all done?"

"Done?" says Amy. "Lord love yer! it won't never be done. Why, 'e starts it all fresh over again pretty near once a fortnight. Yer see 'e's got such a terrible deal o' genius; that's where it is."

"Yus," says Mrs. Turner, "but 'ow does 'e make 'is money with the thing?"

"Oh! 'e don't never make no money," says Amy. "Why should 'e, and 'ow could 'e, when 'e's all day messin' about at the Invention? But I'm in work, thank Gord! It's little enough I bring in; but there isn't only two on us up to now, and yer wouldn't 'ave me livin' on a pore unfortunate cripple, would yer?"

So that was the Invention and the thing as Sam kep' 'ammerin' and filin' and screwin' at all day. All on us 'ad 'oped it might be somethink interestin'—somethink more in the criminal line, same as old Mr. Wilson's work, 'im as always dressed so decent, and lived so quiet, and 'ad such a fancy for kids, till one day they broke into 'is room, and found 'im layin' dead on 'is bed and all 'is cupboards cram-full of burglar's tools and the things as 'e'd snaked. Or like Mrs. Green, as 'er own son got 'er to do time, 'e sayin' to a pot-boy: "Oh, you boils yer pewters, do yer? Why, my mother she bakes 'em." So the coppers called on 'is mother, and

found as big a coinin' concern as what the Royal Mint is, and now she's doin' time. But nothink at all interestin' can't come out of makin' a kind of pianner-organ. So we give over carin' about it. And nobody wouldn't 'ave took no more notice of Sam and Amy, but for some 'avin' a kind of extry likin' for 'er 'cos she was so nice-lookin', and some for 'im for bein' so perlite.

So for a bit people still kep' talkin' of what it might be as set Amy cryin' fit to lay the dust that night when Mrs. Turner looked in. And some says it was 'cos of 'er bein' kep' to the work, and she not able to stand it. And some thought it might come of bein' short of money for the Sunday dinner. But my mother said: "I sometimes wonders at people not 'avin' more sense nor to talk so foolish, things bein' as plain as a bug on the ceilin'. Why was Amy takin on? Why, all along of its being Saturday night, and I'll bet my bonnet it's just the same every Saturday night o' the year. It aint what yer'd call exackly cheerin' when yer man goes with the girls and gets boozed once a week to give 'imself a fair start for the Sunday. Not as I've got anything agen Sam, as is always very decent be'aved toward me. But me and Amy aint the same thing, and that's the cause why she was cryin'."

There wasn't no manner of questions as Sam was a rare 'and at breakin' out. 'E'd set day after day workin' at 'is Invention or 'avin' a read at 'is music as quiet and good as a convick. And then all on a sudden some night,

mostly Saturdays, 'e'd just stroll into the street, and lay 'imself out for what 'e'd 'adn't ought. 'E wasn't never what yer'd call a 'ard drinker, but 'e'd kep' the art of makin' a little go further nor any man I've seen, and what 'd make a decent man just comfortable, fair drove Sam Lester mad. And by gettin' stood, 'e could always drink enough for that, 'cos of the men 'avin' a kind o' feelin' for 'is wooden leg. So 'e wasn't a drunkard by no manner, but of the girls there 's no doubt 'e was most terrible fond, and they willin' one and all to go down and lick 'is solitary boot, 'cos of 'is 'avin' such a way with 'im. It was a queer thing: everybody knowed Sam 'adn't enough money to bury 'isself decent, and 'e wasn't much to look at, let alone 'is wooden leg; but there wasn't a girl but was proud to pass the time of day to Sam, and would 'ave liked well enough to be keepin' company with 'im up and down the streets. And to speak 'im fair, 'e give 'em mostly all a chance, turn and turn about. Why it was they took such a fancy for 'im, nobody couldn't say, till one evenin' my mother 'it upon the right word for 'im. "I sometimes wonder at the girls," she said, "but yer see where it is: 'e's not the same with the rest o' the men; 'e's interestin'. That's where it is. Yer can see it in 'is eye."

And you lay Amy found 'im uncommon interestin'! Leastways 'e kep' on givin' 'er plenty of variety. But things went pretty smooth between 'em on the 'ole, only for 'is breakin' out nights. And then Amy 'ud mostly

'ang about the streets to give 'im time to simmer down nicely by goin' to sleep or workin' at the Invention. But late on Chris'mus night, about seven or eight weeks afore the time I see 'er standin' by the dock-bridge, as I was tellin', there come what's called a fair old crisis in the Bank, as near bust up the concern by wipin' out one o' the partners. As bad luck would 'ave it, Chris'mus fell on a Monday, and without 'avin' properly got over Saturday and Sunday, Sam must needs go breakin' out again on Chris'mus day, 'cos 'e knowed Boxin' Day was comin' on the Tuesday for the purpose of everybody gettin' steady for work by Wednesday.

So when Sam comes back 'ome late that night, and starts bangin' at the door to be let in, a neighbor 'ears Amy call 'im—well for the once she called 'im what 'e was, more especial in regard to women, she not so much mindin' for a bit o' drink and that. Next minute Sam's wooden leg 'ad carried away the lock, and 'e was in the room ragin' about like a quodded explosion. The winder glass was the first thing to go, and brought us all runnin' out into the street, or 'angin' from the winders, to see what the fun was all about. And fust we 'ear all the bits of ornaments swep' off the chimney-piece at one stroke down on the 'earth-stone. And next the pictures went, and all the plates and teacups and that. Then we 'ear the crackin' up of the table and chairs, as 'e smashed one agen the other. Next 'e overturns the chest o' drawers, and empties out 'is shirts and Amy's bits of dresses and shimmies and such, and starts

tearin' 'em. And yer could 'ear the clo's shriek as 'e pulled 'em in 'alves bit by bit.

"That's all right," says the woman from the floor above. "'E aint only breakin' up the things. That's a mercy for 'er. 'E's got a good 'eart, same as my own man, as 'ud break all the bits o' things in the 'ouse sooner nor lay a bloomin' finger on me. It's a blessin' to 'ave a man with a good 'eart."

And all the time Amy was ragin' at 'im, and laughin' and goadin' 'im on, callin' on 'im to strike' er, and not go on like a bloomin' coward, and askin' if 'e called 'isself a man or a bloomin' child. And then she turns on 'im with all the girls 'e knowed, tellin' 'em over one after another by their names, and goin' through their points, same as old Spotter summin' up a lot of 'orses, only it wasn't 'orses she called 'em nor their good points as she spoke to. Then all on a sudden she seems to choke, and we don't 'ear nothink but a sound like beatin' carpets.

"'E'll be beatin' the drum with 'is wooden leg for drum-stick, I doubt," says one o' the men.

"Yer right," says the woman from the top winder again. "But it aint on 'er flesh. She's all right. I always did say 'e 'ad a good 'eart."

Then comes a sound there aint never no mistakin', seein' as there's nothink like it in the world, more especial when made on a woman.

"I'm thinkin' that drum's got too sorft a parchment to its drum-'ead," says the man again.

"Eh! and there's warm flesh on the underside of it," says another.

But Amy 'erself 'ad give over 'er screamin' and cursin', and 'adn't been sayin' nothink all the time, only after a bit yer now and then 'eard somethink between a cat's growl and a groanin' as if she couldn't help it.

At last somethink sorft falls 'eavy on the ground and all the noise stopped. So we crep' up closer round the winder, as 'adn't 'ardly one bit o' glass left in it, and after a bit we 'ear Amy kind o' whisperin' as gentle as a pigeon, and she always did 'ave a very takin' voice. And she was sayin', "'Ow could yer go for to do such things, darlin'? and me lovin' yer a 'eavenly deal better nor what any o' them females ever could."

"Yer'e not 'urt, dear, are yer? not much?" 'e says, speakin' low and sober, as if worn out.

"Not me," she says. "I was too precious careful of yer to let yer do nothink bad, for all it's not bein' 'urt I'd mind. But yer dear 'air's all wet, and yer'e sweatin' all over, just through me bein' so aggravatin'. Let me undress yer now, dear, and get yer off quiet to sleep, or maybe yer 'll get took queer. Yer've not touched the blankets, thank Gord! nor yet the beddin' neither, not to speak on."

So we 'ear 'er movin' about and tryin' to make up some kind of a bed in 'is workshop.

"That's all right," says the woman at the winder; "that's what I call a decent endin'. I knowed Sam 'ud be all right, 'cos I always

did say 'e 'ad a good 'eart. Yer can see it in 'is face."

So we all went 'ome again to bed. But next mornin' it wasn't only natural, bein' Boxin'-Day and nothink to do, we should some on us go round to Amy's again, same as yer go to stare at the 'ouse of a murder, for all it's looked just the same any day o' the week since yer was born. And we find all the bits of Amy's china and ornaments and pictures swep' up into a nice little 'eap in the gutter against the dustman comin'. And she'd took and piled 'er broken table and chairs into one corner of 'er room as fire-wood, very neat. And she'd set up the chest of drawers on its legs with nothink only one drawer missin'. And now she 'erself was at the winder, tryin' to keep the air out by fixin' bits of tore-up dresses and that over the winder-blind.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Britton," says she, "and a merry Chris'mus to yer, for all I'm be'ind-'and wishin' it."

"Mornin', Amy!" says my father. "Why, old Seabrook 'ud say you'd been standin' a siege agen the Zulus."

"Oh, bless yer, that ain't nothink!" says she: "nothink only my way o' takin' a Chris'mus-box."

"Well," says my father, "yer took it standin', and we likes yer all the better *for* it."

"Standin', ger along!" says she. "There wasn't no standin' called for. It wasn't nothink, only 'is fun. When a man's took merry, 'e must always be after breakin' somethink, and then

the only way is to give 'im the right thing to break. Yer'e all the same, you men, only for mine bein' a bit worse through 'is 'avin' such a deal of genius; and that's somethink to be proud on, they do tell me."

"Any'ow 'e seems to 'ave broke up most things this time," says my father; "no matter for you givin' 'im the right things or not."

"Ger on!" she says. "'E didn't never touch an 'air of its 'ead."

"What's 'ead?" says 'e. "You're not meanin' yer own, I s'pose, from the look of yer."

"Mine?" she says. "Lord love yer, what 'ud that matter either 'ere or there? No, it's somethink different I'm speakin' on. Why, in another 'alf minute 'e'd have put 'is 'and on it, and then where should we have been? 'No,' ays I, 'better me. It's no matter for me.' Just to think on all the labor 'e's put into it, let alone the genius, as shows itself in all manner o' ways o' breakin' out. No, 'eaven be praised, the Invention didn't never take no 'arm for all 'is fun; and now 'e's layin' asleep inside of it as innercent as a new-born with a 'ood over its cradle to keep the draught off."

"Well, my dear, that's right enough," says my father; "but a fine strong girl like you might 'ave kep' 'im quiet by other means, if yer'd only 'ad presence o' mind. Now there was 'Liza Bates the other night. 'Er man comin' in ragin' drunk and fit to murder 'er, she 'ad the presence o' mind to fetch 'im one over the 'ead with the poker, she told me so 'erself.

And 'e never moved a finger till next afternoon, and 'as been kind o' quiet ever since."

"Oh, Mr. Britton," she says, "don't be for makin' me out worse nor what I am. Yer wouldn't 'ave me turn upon a pore unfortunate cripple, would yer, and 'e nothink only one leg to stand on? Acourse I could knock 'im over by just liftin' my 'and, but where's the credit o' that I should like to know? No, indeed. You bring me up that there Beamin' Nellie or one o' them, and see me mark 'er; but my pore 'usband, why, 'e aint 'ardly to be called a man, 'avin' nothink only a genius and a wooden leg. Just set yer down a minute, Mr. Britton, and Sam 'ud like to see yer. Yer'e quite a stranger lately."

We could 'ear Sam callin' from the workshop, and Amy takes 'im a zinc pail of water and a bit of soap and 'alf a towel; and she 'avin' washed and dressed 'im, and put on 'is leg, 'e comes in for 'is breakfast as was set out on the drawers for want of a table, it standin' as firewood in the corner, as I said. 'E looked much as usual, white and 'ungry, with 'is two eyes shinin' like the lights of a 'amsom cab.

"I'm afraid you find our room a little uncomfortable this mornin', Mr. Britton," 'e says. "But I sometimes think yer may give up too much for nothink only comfort. Last night I wasn't what yer'd call comfortable, but I was fair inspired, and now, even among all this dirt and confusion, yer can't think 'ow 'appy I feel. Amy, dear, I've got 'old on it; I've found the secret. It came over me whiles I was with

Nellie last night; and when yer'd put me to bed, I went through it all over again in my 'ead quite straight. The Invention's finished, dear; yus, as good as finished."

"That's good 'earin'," she says; "and now drink luck to it whiles the tea's hot. It 'll do yer pore 'ead good."

"Yus," 'e says, settin' by the drawers, and startin' on 'is breakfast, with 'is knees stuck out on each side a corner of 'em, cos they wouldn't go underneath same as under a table. "Yus, it's all right in front now. It's a queer thing 'ow these notions always come by busts."

"Yus, dear," she says, "it's the genius as makes yer bust out. I always reckoned that."

"Yer see," he says to my father, "the difficulty lay in the couplin' and uncouplin' of the wind attachment. Yer don't want the organ goin' the 'ole time. Yer 'll start off with the pianner, and after a bit yer 'll turn on the organ part unbeknown, like an army of flutes and trumpets comin' up in the distance. Or it may be as yer 'll start with the organ, same as an orchestrer in a concerto, and on a sudden the pianner 'll come trippin' in like the feet of a lot o' fairies, distinct and light. And now the thing's done. I could draw it for yer. Six weeks' work, and it's finished."

"And what then?" says my father.

"Oh, it don't matter what then!" 'e said.

"Money in it?" says my father.

"Oh, yus!" 'e says, "thousands in it! Not as we wants more. We're 'appy enough, aint we, Amy?"

"Lord love us, yus. I should 'ope so!" says Amy, puttin' a chair-leg on the fire, and tryin' to pin up 'er dress as was split down the back, from the placket-'ole to the 'em. "Not but what, if there's thousands goin', we couldn't do with a bit, if only to buy me a new umbereller."

"Well," 'e says, "it 'll be thousands as many as yer can count. In a few weeks' time a little money 'll be wanted to make a perfect model and bring it out on the market. Everythink of the best, all rosewood and bound with brass. But only a matter of a 'undred pound or so."

"A 'undred pound?" says Amy, lookin' up from tryin' to make a bent spoon 'old in place of a catch on the door. "Mercy on us! What blime rot 'll the man be talkin' next? 'Ave some more tea, dear, do now! It 'll do your pore 'ead good; and it don't taste so bad, for all you've got to drink it out of the spout o' the tin tea-pot, through me 'avin' 'ad an accident with the china last night."

"Oh, that amount of money aint nothink!" 'e says. "Why, I once knowed a man as saved four 'undred out o' two pound a week by never marryin'. But 'e died. And only a winter or two back wasn't there a gen'leman as pocketed a cool thousand by gettin' killed in a railway accident with a lot of insurance tickets and newspapers in 'is 'and? What else 'ad 'e done for the money beyond layin' out a shillin' and then dyin' on the top of it? I can go one better nor that, I *should* 'ope."

"Yer right," she says. "We'll get the money easy enough so soon as it's wanted, never you

fret. It's 'avin' a genius as does it. When yer've got a genius about in yer 'ouse, yer kind o' get to feel as if Kingdom-come might come any day o' the week, and nothink for you to do but walk in, as easy as steppin' off the pier on to a penny steamer."

After that the hours as Sam worked was worse nor a tramcar's and no money for it, let alone overtime. Nobody 'ardly didn't see 'im, only when 'e'd start 'obblin' down the street late at night, swingin 'is arms, and singin' a kind of German band to 'isself. And at the end o' the time 'e looked more like a frame-work nor an ordinary filled-in bein'. And at last 'e give over singin', and mouched along with 'is eyes on the ground. And anybody could see as now was the right time for that 'undred pound to show itself, but it didn't seem in no 'urry. And some-'ow 'e'd lost all spirit for breakin' out. 'E never touched a thing, and the girls might call after 'im all the words they could think on; 'e didn't give 'em scarcely a look.

And as to Amy, my mother says one night:

"That girl's gettin' a face on 'er same as if she was goin' to 'ave a baby. But she aint. It's nothink only that there bloomin' Invention as is weighin' 'er down body and mind, and it's a cruel shame, when it 'ud be less trouble to 'ave a big family, and cheaper too; seein' as Sam never turns a penny with it, nor never will."

But I didn't ever catch a sight of 'er till that night I was tellin' on, when I find 'er down by the dock-bridge in a corner, 'idin' from the

moonlight, and waitin', as was only natural to suppose, to pay Sam out for 'is treatment of 'er by carryin' on a bit 'erself.

After walkin' right through Wappin' and meetin' with a mate or two, and tryin' to unlock the oars of a waterside boat and take a bit of a row down the tide, I was mouchin' back, maybe an hour or more later, when I 'ears talkin' goin' on be'ind the palin's on the pier-'ead. So lookin' through I see 'alf a dozen men standin' with their 'eads bent together as if gamblin'; but I 'ear one on 'em say:

"Now she's a-comin' round."

"Not 'er," says somebody else; "she aint only startin' to do another dummy."

So me knowin' from this as somethink 'ad 'appened to make a woman queer, I crep' through the gate, and got up to the men without their never noticin'. And there in the middle on 'em I could see Amy layin' straight out on 'er back, and makin' a kind of puddle on the stones with the drippin's as ran off 'er. The peak-cap was still on 'er 'ead, bein' tied under 'er chin by a string, and the bag was still slung round 'er arm, and I see a bundle o' newspapers stickin' out of 'er pocket. But 'er stockin's 'ad come down over 'er boots, as were all squashy with mud and water, and 'er bare legs stuck out underneath 'er skirts, very white and cold-lookin'.

"Why don't yer 'eave 'er in again?" says one of the men. "If she wants to drownd, let 'er drownd; that's what I say."

"Yer right," says another; "you take and

'eave 'er in, poor thing! She won't know the differ now, and it's 'er own wish."

"You 'old yer noise," says the dock watchman, as was kneelin' over 'er' and squeezin' the water from 'is blue coat into 'er mouth, in 'opes to bring 'er round; "what yer sayin' aint the law."

"Oh, blast the law!" says the fust of 'em. "It's a free country, aint it? What's the bloomin' law got to do with us?"

"Yus," says the other; "why shouldn't the poor woman drownd, if she wants to? She oughter know what's the best for 'erself. What did yer want interferin' with her for, just as she'd got off comfortable?"

The watchman didn't say nothink, but takes off his drippin' coat and weskit, and spreads 'em over 'er legs. Then he tries to find a dry bit of 'is shirt to wipe 'er face with. But 'e couldn't do it.

"Ger on!" says the fust of 'em. "Why can't yer let the bloomin' woman alone? Come along, Bill, you just cop 'old on her feet, and me take 'er 'ead, and in she goes again like a slung cat."

"Now you look 'ere," says the watchman, seein' they made as if to take 'old on 'er, "you just shut it, or in yer go yerselves, afore ever yer can say Christ! The woman's mine, and you aint got no rights over 'er, seein' as it wasn't you as laid 'old on 'er in the water. As to 'er wantin' to drownd and not drowndin', it's all 'er own bloomin' fault for 'ollerin' out just as she was a-jumpin' off. It wasn't me as

wanted to catch my death o' cold by gettin' wet through to-night."

Just then Amy starts wrigglin' about, same as a dead eel. And presently she sets up, and stares round at us with a look to make yer shiver. Whether she was wonderin' if we was the angels or not, I dunno; but I reckon the other thing.

"There yer are now," says the men. "We told yer 'ow it 'ud be. And now it's too late to do no good with 'er."

"I'll tell yer what we'd best do," says another. "It's what was done with a female as was 'auled out in Southwark last week, same as this might be. They run 'er round to the gas-works, and stuck 'er up in front of the furnaces till she was pretty nigh baked to a brick, mud on 'er and all. And as soon as 'er very bones was dry as powder, they takes 'er to the perlice-station, and she got a month 'ard, to learn 'er out o' them little games. There aint no gas-works 'ere about, but the station aint fer."

"Please, sir," says I to the watchman, "I 'appen to know the lady, and where she lives is close agen my 'ome."

"Common woman, or bad 'usband?" 'e asks.

"'Usband kind of uncertain," I says.

"Ger along!" says the men. "You take 'er to the station. Yer robbin' the law if yer take 'er 'ome."

"Yus," says the watchman, "I'm not jest clear about the law of it. But maybe the law 'll wait till to-morrer, if she's took 'ome to-night.

Now, my dear, do yer think yer could jest try and stand up if I put my arm round yer, and no offense? Steady, now! All together, and up she comes! There's a beauty! Don't yer take on, my dear. *Yer* all right."

So we 'auled Amy on to 'er feet, same as yer 'eave up a 'orse when it's down, and it groans and roars a bit, and then stands snuffin' and turnin' its eyes about, just like Amy. So we get on each side of 'er, and walk 'er up the bit of 'ill into Shadwell and down our street, she seemin' kind of dazed, and 'oldin' 'er 'ands up in front of 'er face all the way, so as nobody mightn't know 'er. And by good luck there wasn't nobody about.

When we got to the 'ouse, I go in fust to call Sam, and I found 'im standin' in 'is workshop with a pair o' plyers in 'is 'and, and lookin' at the Invention, as 'ad got a deal of inside put into it by then. So I says: "Sam, 'ere's yer wife brought back. She's gone and met with an accident."

"Oh!" 'e says, still with 'is eye on the Invention. "Accident? Really? Yer see, Jacko, it's almost finished now. Money's all I want. With a bare 'undred, I'd make it fit for 'eaven!"

"Whether Amy's fit or not isn't for me to say," I says; "but she's almost been there, without waitin' for no 'undred to take 'er."

At that minute we 'ear Amy's voice at the outside door, and it was the fust time she'd spoke since they 'auled 'er out of the river. And she was sayin': "I tell yer I won't go no

further. I'll take off my things 'ere, so as not to mess the place."

"It's as yer like, my dear," says the watchman. "Yer'e no more concern o' mine, now as I've put yer under care of yer legal 'usband. Only, if yer was my old woman, my advice 'ud be go to bed warm and take a drop of somethink 'ot. And that's what I'm goin to do for myself; so, wishing yer good-night, I'll take the liberty o' callin' round to inquire in the mornin'."

With that the men went away, and takin' the light out o' the workshop, I brought Sam to the door. And there we see Amy still drippin' big drops now and then, and 'er face and 'ands all smeared with mud and slime. She was takin' off 'er skirt and bodice, and she asks me to bring out a bench and 'elp with 'er boots and 'er stockin's, and rub 'er naked feet in my 'ands. And Sam kep' startin' at 'er and sayin' fust one thing and then another, but she took no kind of notice of 'im, till she'd wrung out the one petticoat she kep' on, and comin' barefoot into the room in that and 'er stays, 'ad set 'er other things on the sink to drip, and stuck 'er 'ands and 'ead under the tap, and dried 'er 'air as best she could. Then she stands in front of the fire, and looks round the room and at the bundle of newspapers as 'ad fell out of her pocket on the floor, and then she puts 'er cold arm round Sam's neck and fair bu'sts out cryin'.

"It aint no manner o' good, dear," she says, speakin' with sobs and long gaps between.

"We aint a step nearer it nor what we was before. No, it wasn't no matter o' slippin' in, nor I wasn't shoved neither. Yer see, dear, it came all along of that insurance money as yer told us the man pocketed by gettin' killed. Jest yer look at 'em there now! That there cap in the sink, with a string to keep it on my 'ead, was a-goin' to bring me twenty pound. It's advertised, and the ticket's pinned inside of it. And in that there bag there's lots of bits of things as would 'ave made up five pound together. And the best of all's them papers. The six on 'em's worth four 'undred pound to any man or woman as 'ad the good luck to die readin' of 'em. Nigh on five 'undred pound I'd got on me, one thing with another, and I'd paid four and ninepence 'alfpenny down for the lot, and all for nothink! Four and nine clean chucked away! Let alone my dress and boots as 'll never come right again. No, yer may say what yer like, they won't never look decent, and I got none others. And nigh on five 'undred pound clean gone, too! Why, it 'ud 'ave been enough for five Inventions, wouldn't it, dear?"

"Never you mind for that, darlin'," 'e says, speakin' gentle. "Maybe we'll think on some other way of gettin' the money yet. And while you was out to-night, I made another bit of a discovery—a grand improvement it 'll be, too! So yer see it's all the same in the end, and I've got you into the bargain."

"No, it aint all the same," she says. "I don't care what yer've got, me nor nothink else.

It's the Invention I'm thinkin' on. 'Ow's we to get a 'undred pound now, let alone five, I ask yer? Oh, yer needn't never think I was jest doin' of it to pleasure you. I've done enough by way o' pleasurin' you already, as yer know very well. 'No,' I says to myself, 'never you mind for 'im. The Invention's the thing to be thought on.' But now I dursn't go through with it again. No, I dursn't! So yer won't be for askin' it of me, will yer, Sam? It's all over and the Invention not a step forrarder. And now what 'll we do for the money? I never did 'ave no luck same as most people. With luck, you'd 'ave been worth five 'undred at this moment, and 'ave been waitin' for me to come in to bed, and me at the bottom of the river, without you knowin' nothink about it."

"Don't you be talking about luck," 'e says. "I've 'eard say it's a deal better to 'ave genius, same as me. But now I just want to finish off a point or two in my new improvement. Oh, it's a treat! you'll see."

"Yus, dear," she says. "I'll come and 'ave a look to-morrer. Only I did 'ave it in my mind to ask yer if yer couldn't some'ow manage to give up some o' them girls now—that Beamin' Nellie leastways, and the one or two as knows me. Now couldn't yer? I've been right down to 'ell for yer, and it aint no fault o' mine as ever I come back. And that's a bloomin' sight more nor any o' them's done, up to now, anyways."

"Oh, acourse, acourse!" 'e says. "You're never goin' to mind for a girl more or less, are

yer, dear? Nothink o' that don't matter, so long as we get the Invention out. Oh, it 'll be grand! you see."

So he shut 'isself up in 'is workshop. And I'd just finished wringin' the clo's over again at the sink, and scrapin' off the mud with an old knife, and settin' the boots to dry. Then I ask 'er if there wasn't nothink else I could do to oblige. And she starts cryin' a bit again, and says:

"No, thank yer, Jacko, dear. I must take off the rest of my things, and make up the bed 'ere, I s'pose. But fust I'll just make myself a cup o' tea, and I got plenty o' that, there bein' a full pound o' fust-class thirteen-penny in that there bag, with an insurance ticket lastin' for a fortnight, if it so 'appen my body gets found with it on me. But I doubt the water's rather took the syrup out of it, Thames water bein' good for the makin' of tea, through bein' so sorft. But sorft or 'ard, oh, my soul, Jacko, it's uncommon cold!"

So I get the packet of tea out of that bag for 'er, and it was all soppy and brown. Then I set the kettle boilin', and she says good-night very sweet to me, and I come away.

Next mornin' the watchman come, and Sam promised 'im eighteen-pence so soon as the Invention was finished, for 'is trouble in 'aulin' Amy out.

"There aint many women 'ud do them things for their 'usbands," says my mother. "Yer see it all comes of 'is 'avin' a genius, and it's that as makes 'im interestin'. But 'er doin' such

things seems likely to run into a deal o' money, and no mistake, when yer come to reckon it up."

"Yer right," said my father. "But if she'd really got drownded with all that on 'er, why, she'd 'ave just about broke the bank."

"Instead of which she'll get three weeks 'ard," says old Warner, as was uncommon knowin' about the law. "Comin' along, I see the perlice and dock-foreman walkin' 'er off to take before the beak for trespassin' on the Dock property with intent to do herself grievous bodily 'arm."

But the magistrate let 'er off with a caution, tellin' 'er it wouldn't be no good 'er doin' it again, cos the insurance money wouldn't be paid at the end of it all. So she goes back to work, and Sam goes on still plannin' away at the Invention, same as before.

CHAPTER VIII.

In the Spring.

AS I was just sayin', there aint nobody in our part as knows so much about the law as what old Warner does, we not 'avin' a great lot of criminals. 'E 'as seen more cases nor the biggest judge, let alone magistrate. And if 'e 'ears of anybody doin' anythink, such as sneakin' bits o' staircase for firewood, or knockin' down a woman, 'e'll fix the exact sentence to it right off without carin' to stop 'earin' witnesses, they bein' nothink but waste o' time unless when yer wants to 'ave a game with the perlice. But to 'ear old Warner say "Three months 'ard" when 'e's told 'ow one on us 'as been breakin' out again is enough to give yer the shivers. And when Maudie Davis 'ad a little baby by chance, and took and drownded it in a basin, to listen to 'im passin' sentence o' death on 'er straight away down to "mercy on yer soul," near stretched all the women out faintin', more especial as we could 'ear Maudie totterin' up and down, up and down, on the floor over our 'eads, and we knowed she was carryin' the dead infant about and tryin' to nurse it. And the way old Warner got to know such a lot about

the law was from mostly always settin' in the Perlice Court, barrin' when 'e follered the cases up to Sessions. 'E's a big man, sixty or thereabout, always dressed uncommon decent, and clean shaved. And 'e 'as a mop of curly gray 'air, as 'e'd like well enough to be took for a judge's wig, 'cos the law is 'is perfessional interest, 'e 'avin' no children, and 'is wife keepin' 'im by workin' all day makin' up slippers for a big firm at seven farthings the pair.

'E's rather partial to tellin' the story 'ow 'e fust come to be mixed up with the law. It was all along of 'is bein' jealous of 'is wife, she 'avin' been carryin' on with the ground-floor, whiles old Warner, 'e bein' young then, was drivin' round in a baker's cart. So when 'e finds it out, 'e just shifts 'is things, and leaves 'er alone. And she 'auls 'im up afore the Court for desertin' of 'er. And I've many a time 'eard 'im tell my father 'ow queer it was to be stood up in the middle of the Court, and 'im not know a mortal soul there, exceptin' only for 'is wife, and she agen 'im, and the lawyers all askin' all manner of questions at 'er, as any man worth callin' would 'ave knocked 'em down for askin' 'is wife outside of a Court. And it didn't seem to 'im some'ow right as they two, knowin' such a lot of each other, should be standin' up in that crowd of strangers, and they not on the same side like decent man-and-wife prisoners 'ad up for stealin' or some such. Then 'e thinks to 'isself : "If this 'ere case goes agen me, so much the worse. And if it goes for me, so much the worse too, me 'avin'

only proved as the ground-floor man's got 'old on 'er." And that was more nor 'e could abide, they not long bein' married and all. So in the middle of the witnessin' 'e plucks up 'eart, and says :

"Please, yer worship, I withdraw the charge."

"But, my good man," says the beak, "the charge lies agen yer."

"No, it don't, beggin' yer worship's pardon," 'e says; "leastways not my reason for desertin' of 'er."

With that the woman, settin' on the witness-bench, starts cryin', and says: "Oh, Ted, Ted, that's just what I been sayin' at 'em all along, as I got yer took up for nothink only to clear myself. And sure enough I'll be true to yer, Ted, to my dyin' day, I will, if yer 'll only forgive me, and clear me o' the charge."

So there wasn't nothink more to be done but to dismiss the summons, and old Warner says it was grand to see 'ow wild the lawyers was at the case comin' to an end without provin' no crime nowheres.

But some'ow after that 'e couldn't get the Court out of 'is 'ead, and if ever 'e got a spare time 'e'd be sure to drop in and take a look at the prisoner, just so as to wonder what the man or woman must be feelin' like. And 'is wife didn't mind 'im goin' 'cos it always kep' 'im in mind of their makin' it up, and 'e'd come back from the Court almost as civil as if they was just startin' again. So bit by bit, what with 'er bein' so fond of 'im, and takin' in work to make

'im more comfortable, 'e got to give up workin' for 'isself, and made the law 'is perfession, same as a gen'leman might do; goin' reg'lar to 'ear the cases in the Court, if so 'appen 'e felt minded, as was most days of the week. And by reason of 'is standin' the coppers somethink now and then, they let 'im set down just outside the public dock, and in time 'e came to look as much a part of that Court as the lion and unicorn over the magistrate's chair; and 'e thought 'isself quite as needful for the supportin' of the law. Besides we found 'im very useful for bringin' round the news if any of our people's friends should 'appen to get into misfortune, and in keepin' an eye on their trial if we couldn't go owin' to work, and in bringin' in the fust tidin's of their sentence. And sometimes 'e'd be called on in Court to speak a good word for the prisoner, if 'e was personal acquainted. And everybody said as 'ow after old Warner 'ad give the Court 'is views on a case, the beak, for the sake of 'is own reputation, wouldn't dare to take no different.

Well, it was Tuesday after Whitsun, and we was 'angin' about with breakfast, wonderin' if anybody 'ud be such a fool as go back to work at our places. Only my father 'adn't no call to wonder, seein' 'e was on a fitter's job at 'Ammersmith, and fitters and painters never does go back till the Wednesday after an 'oliday, 'cos they takes Mondays off pretty near all the year round, and it wouldn't be fair on 'em to get no extry 'oliday same as other folks at Whitsun and such times. And I'd just said 'ow

poor it seemed to go to work after drivin' down on the Monday to my aunt's at Barkin' to exercise a 'orse and trap lent us by the greengrocer. And my mother was sayin' that's why she didn't 'old with 'olidays; they bein' like nothink but drippin' a 'alf dead fish in the water to keep 'im fresh, when on a sudden old Warner busts in, and says:

"'Ere's old Groun'sel lagged at last! trespassin', not exackly in pursuit of game, seein' it was in a widder's tenement, but with unlawful intent. Twenty shillin's or a calendar month!"

All on us knowed old Groun'sel well enough, for all nobody couldn't call to mind ever 'avin' 'eard 'is real name, whatever it was. 'E was a ragged old bloke with lots of gray beard and 'air, never wearin' a 'at, and always lookin' as if 'e was just goin' to fall in pieces, legs and arms, coat and trouseys and all. 'E seemed to be never comin' from nowhere, nor yet goin' nowhere else. And nobody never knowed 'ow it was 'e come to be 'ankin' about Shadwell, 'e bein' by nature born to live in Bethnal Green or 'Oxton, seein' as a bird was 'is one fancy, and sellin' bird-food 'is purtikler way of not makin' no money, same as the law was to old Warner. So in one street or other down our way you might lay you'd 'ear 'im all day long, goin' back and forward, first on one side the road, and then on the other, and croakin' out "Any groun'sel, any groun'sel," in a kind o' voice as if 'is throat wanted sweepin' very bad. Sometimes 'e'd stick in one court all day long, just goin' up and down, cryin' 'is groun'sel. And

it's my belief 'e thought 'e was walkin' miles and miles all the time. And in summer, if 'e 'appen to go out in Creepin' Jeannies or watercress, through 'avin' nicked some in the country, 'e'd still go on callin', "Any groun'sel, any groun'sel," just the same. And one of 'is arms was all twisted and scarred and shriveled up, same as if it 'ad been a skinned rabbit 'alf roasted, but nobody didn't know the cause why. Only when we was kids, we'd used to try and get a sight on it, 'cos it looked 'orrible enough to make yer sick. As for 'is livin' place, there was a kind of empty coal-'ouse 'alf underground in a court runnin' up from the fish-market way, as was said by some to be 'is home, leastways in winter-time. But nobody couldn't rightly know, seein' as 'e paid no rent, and was out in the mornin' before anybody else, and many a time, we 'avin' all got to bed, I've 'eard 'im gruntin', "Any groun'sel, any groun'sel," up and down our street, as if 'e thought likely anybody 'ud get out of their beds to buy. 'E carried 'is groun'sel or creases or whatever green stuff it might be in an old sack slung over 'is shoulder, and just kep' steady by 'is withered arm. And in the other 'and 'e mostly 'eld a little wooden cage with a young blackbird or a lark in it, or somethink o' that, as 'e was nursin' up to sell—or maybe let go again, 'e bein' loony enough for nothink.

So old Groun'sel wasn't no stranger by sight, we seein' 'im always shufflin' about, and the kids baitin' 'im for wearin' no 'at, for all some on 'em was frightened at 'im through the look

of 'is milky-blue eyes as kep' starin' as if lookin' at somethink not the same as what 'e really see. Nobody else wasn't frightened at 'im any longer, seein' 'e'd been so 'armless ever since most was born. But there aint many in our part fools enough to want to lay out money on groun'sel and jeannies. And as for creases, yer can't always be buyin' 'em, 'owever 'olesome, no more nor a gen'leman can't always be buyin' lights. So it 'ad come to be the women's way to give 'im a bit 'ere and a bit there, as might 'appen, to eat goin' along. And my mother said she'd not begrudge 'im so long as 'e continned be'avin' decent, seein' as 'e was the only what you'd call reg'lar workin' beggar in our part.

"But I'm not denyin'," she went on, "as 'e's maybe more suitable for the 'Ouse or the cimeterry either."

"And what I want to know is," says Mrs. Simon, "what's the good o' men like that 'aving Guardians o' the Poor set over 'em, if they don't lock 'im up?"

But all that springtime before Easter, old Groun'sel 'ad got to look worse off nor ever before. 'Is voice turned more croaky, and 'is coat, by reason of the 'oles, must 'ave been 'arder to get in and out of, if 'e ever tried. 'Is trouseys didn't do all the things as trouseys is meant for. There was more skin nor leather to be seen on 'is feet. And 'e seemed to be kind of shrinkin' together, doublin' in over 'is stomick, as if to keep it tight and warm. And seein' 'e couldn't 'ardly shuffle along, the kids

started mobbin' 'im worse nor ever, 'oundin' after 'im, and nickin' 'is green-stuff. But 'e took no more notice of 'em nor what a dead corpse takes of a copper when 'e tells it to move on.

One day my father, goin' out in the rain to give 'im a bit of bread and butter, sees as 'e 'adn't got the bird with 'im as 'e'd been carryin' about in a cage for nigh on a year. So 'e says: "'Ullo, Groun'sel, where's yer bloomin' thrush?"

"Returned to Nature, same as the rest on us 'll return," says old Groun'sel.

"Dead?" says my father.

"And eaten," says 'e.

"Cage and all?" says my father.

"Cage cooked 'im," says 'e.

"And what's to eat now?" says my father.

"Groun'sel," says 'e.

"That's poor livin', that is," says my father, wishin' to cheer 'im up.

"No," 'e says, "Nature makes nothink superfloous, and groun'sel's very advantageous for a weak stomick, more especial if over-full. Don't yer be sayin' nothink agen Nature."

With that 'e went away, takin' the bit of bread, as usual, same as if it was 'is born right, and never so much as a thank yer spoken.

So when old Warner brings the news as Groun'sel was up for burglary in a widder's 'ouse, all on 'em said as they'd knowed all along there must be somethink wrong with 'im, or 'e'd never 'ave gone croakin' about all them years like a misfortunate bird. And my father

said as bein' 'oliday time, 'e didn't mind if 'e went to the Court along with old Warner to 'ear the case tried, and p'r'aps speak a good word for the old feller, seein' 'e'd been copped at last, and nobody knowed when 'is own time mightn't come for wantin' a good word spoke for 'im. Then 'e tells me to turn up work for that day, and we all three start off together for the Perlice Court.

Seein' we'd mostly 'ad three days' 'oliday, and three nights to enjoy ourselves in, the long passage up to the Court entrance was fair packed with what old Warner called "assaults"—these bein' women mostly, their 'eads or eyes or jaws tied up in white rag, put on so as to let the blood show through as fer as might be. And they was all talkin' and shoutin' like Members of Parliament, and comparin' their symptoms. And by reason of everybody 'avin' put on their best clo's and 'ats to prosecute in, yer might 'ave took the passage for a place of worship by the look of it, only for a copper jumpin' out every minute like a bull-dog, and screamin': "Be quiet, be quiet!" But seein' old Warner with us, the coppers let us straight into Court, and there we stood hour after hour while the beak was clearin' off the assaults. And old Warner goes fast asleep on 'is own bit of bench, the same as any judge, 'cos 'e says them sort o' cases wasn't only 'uman nature, and didn't give no call for the knowledge of the law.

But so soon as the last woman 'ad done up 'er bandages after showin' the gaps where 'er

teeth had been when the 'olidays started, the magistrate says 'e'd take on one more case afore the Court adjourned for their lunches. And then old Groun'sel is set in the dock with 'is own special copper to keep 'old on 'im. Not as 'e wanted much 'oldin', 'e lookin' for all the world like a work'us ghost caught wanderin' about by daylight through not bein' able to find its right grave among the rest o' the paupers, 'avin' forgot 'is number. So I woke old Warner, and we all started listenin'.

Fust of all a copper was sworn, and speakin' like a school-teacher readin' a book, through bein' so used to it, 'e says: "K 076. I was on duty this mornin', yer worship, between one and two, at the corner of Dora Street, Lime-'ouse, and I 'ears a winder go up, and the prosecutrix she sticks 'er 'ead out, and screams there was a man in the 'ouse. I go to the door, and find the lower winder 'ad been shove open through the pane of glass above the bolt bein' broke. Goin' upstairs I discover the prisoner on the landin' opposite the bedroom door, as was 'alf open and a light shinin' through. The prosecutrix, bein' very excited, complains as 'e'd come there to rob 'er, and she gives 'im in charge. 'E didn't make no resistance. On the railin's outside I find a sack containin' green leaves and things, as 'e asks to be allowed to carry with 'im, sayin' it was all 'is worldly wealth. At the Station nothink wasn't found on 'im only a large bit of 'edge covered over with white flowers as is called May, yer worship, and 'e'd kep' 'old on it with one 'and

the 'ole time. Both parties were entirely sober."

"Any questions?" says the magistrate to old Groun'sel. But 'e didn't take no notice, seemin', as 'is way is, to be lookin' at somethink fer off, and kind of smilin' to 'isself like one silly.

Then the prosecutrix was called, and was rubbed down with the book, as is usual for makin' people tell the 'ole truth. She was a decent lookin' old body, got up as a widder, only for 'avin' some lilac flowers in 'er bonnet. She didn't look near so old as Groun'sel, p'r'aps through bein kind of fattish and rosy in the face, and 'avin' dark brown 'air brushed very smooth with grease down each side of 'er forehead. She was wearin' a pair of black cotton gloves as she kep' pullin' off and on while givin' 'er evidence, and now and then she'd take a look at three gold rings as she wore on 'er weddin' finger. And all the time she was in the box old Groun'sel kep' on starin' at 'er, as if 'e could some'ow see somethink different from 'erself in the middle of 'er. And all the time she never looked once at 'im, but only at 'er 'ands.

She give 'er name as Mary Whitmore, widder, three times married, and left comfortable. Then she told much the same story as the copper, sayin' 'ow she was woke up by the breakin' of the winder-glass in the room below, just as she'd got nicely off to sleep in 'er bed. So she reached out and lighted 'er candle. And next thing she 'ears the prisoner knock at

'er bedroom door, and make as if 'e was comin' in. But instead of that 'e stood there callin' to 'er by 'er name, as was Mary. So she fust peeped out at the door to make sure, and sees him standin' with the flowers in 'is 'and. And at sight of that she rushes to the winder and screams for the perlice. Then she takes the two pound ten as was 'idden away in one o' the drawers, and creeps under the bed with it, till she 'eard the constable on the landin'.

Up to that she'd done nothink but answer the questions as was put by the lawyer-boy settin' at the table and takin' down the cases. But now the beak 'isself put in; "You was afraid of bein' robbed, I suppose?"

"Yus, my lord, or burgled, or 'Eaven only knows what, with a man loose in the 'ouse, and two pound ten on my person."

"Do you think it's the 'abit of burglars to walk up the stairs, knock at yer bedroom door, and call yer Mary, they 'oldin' flowers in their 'ands?"

At this all the men looked at each other, and nodded, as much as to say, "'*E*'s all right!"

"I'm not for settin' up agen yer lordship for knowledge o' burglars," says she; "but I 'ave 'eard they're uncommon artful are burglars, same as perlice, more especial in their dealin's with females."

"Did yer say anythink to the prisoner whiles 'e was on yer landin'?"

"So soon as the constable 'ad took good 'old on 'im, I come out from under the bed

where I was layin', and I told him 'e was the biggest scoundrel on the face o' the earth."

We all looked at old Groun'sel. 'E didn't seem to be 'earin' what she was sayin', but nobody couldn't 'elp but laugh. "If 'e's the biggest scoundrel on it," whispers my father, "the face o' the earth aint got no cause to fret."

"And you still think the prisoner entered yer 'ouse for the purpose of robbin' you?" asks the magistrate.

"What else for?" she says, "me 'avin' money and 'im none."

"'Ow did 'e know yer name was Mary?"

"That's the name as I've always been called by."

"Then 'e knew you before?"

"Well, I s'pose I may say 'e kind o' knowed me."

"And you knew 'im?"

"No, not exackly what yer might call knowin', so to speak; leastways not this long time back."

"'Ow long?"

"Oh, maybe it's a matter of twelve or fifteen year, when I was quite a girl."

Again the men looked at each other and laughed.

"That's a good un!" they said.

"And you've not seen 'im since?" said the magistrate.

"Why acourse, I've seen 'im maybe a time or or two about the place, but not to what yer might call know 'im."

"Why not to know 'im?"

"Well, my lord, yer see all my 'usbands 'ave been in what yer might call a different station of life to what 'e was—they bein' kind of superior, as was only natural,"

"Then you can't think of no reason for the prisoner comin' to yer 'ouse, except for burglary?"

"What other reason could there be?" she said again, "me bein' comfortable off, and 'im not—more especial at one o'clock in the mornin'."

"Any question to ask the witness?" says the magistrate, turnin' to the prisoner.

Then old Groun'sel seemed to wake up for a minute and said: "I should like to ask 'er if she knowed 'oo I was when I fust called 'Mary' at 'er door?"

"Well, my lord," she says, "I should like to ask *you* what *you'd* do if you was a poor widder layin' alone, and a man came bustin' through yer winders, and standin' outside yer bedroom in the middle o' the night and callin' yer names?"

"You must answer the question," says the magistrate. "Did you know 'im, or did you not?"

"Oh, p'r'aps I thought it might be 'im as likely as anybody else."

"Now, do answer. Did you know 'im?"

"Well then, yus; I s'pose it might be said as I did, if it's put so barefaced as what that comes to."

"Any other question?" asked the magistrate.

But old Groun'sel seemed to be thinkin' of somethink else, and never answered.

"Any witnesses on yer be'alf or anythink to say?" the magistrate asked again.

Then old Groun'sel looked at 'im full, and started talkin' in a quiet, sleepy kind o' voice, such as nobody 'adn't 'eard 'im talk in before.

"Yer see," 'e said, "my witnesses is all on 'em dead, by reason of its bein' nigh on forty year since that Whitsun as I'm thinkin' on, All on 'em dead, only for the woman there and me; but we was 'appy enough that day. I'm not sayin' it was any way different from any ordinary Whitsun 'oliday, but some'ow it's got stuck in my 'ead, and every Whitsun it kind o' comes back, me forgettin' it right enough between whiles. There was me and Bob Stevens and Jemmy Grogan, with three girls, 'er bein' one. And by reason of 'er bein' the prettiest, we'd tossed for 'er and I won 'er fair, the coin comin' down woman for me each time. So we all on us went down to Eppin' Forest, as was further off then nor what it is now, unless yer walk it, but me not mindin' 'ow fer it was with 'er settin' on my knee. And it was the fust time as ever I got a girl to go out with me; so p'r'aps that's why it's stuck in my 'ead. So all day we set about in the forest, talkin' and laughin' and playin' at things, and 'avin' things to eat and drink. But about sunsettin', what with it bein' very 'ot weather, and the others wanderin' off to make love by theirselves, me and 'er we got left alone, and through losin' of the road we was kep' alone till long after it

turned dark. But we never minded for that, goin' along together wherever we could catch sight of a bit of a path, and beginnin' to make love, as was nothink but natural. And all the thorn bushes was fair white with the May, and through the air bein' so still and warm in the evenin', the smell of it was layin' thick all over the forest like a sweet-smellin' mist."

"There, that 'll do!" says the magistrate. "That seems to account for the prosecutrix and you gettin' acquainted; but it 'as no connection with last night, and I must ask you to be quick, if you please."

But in place of 'urryin' up, old Groun'sel, as 'ad been runnin' along quite smooth up to then, seemed to lose 'isself again, and started speakin' by bits.

"Yer see," 'e says, "it was all along o' me eatin' that thrush, as I cherished up from the nest. The eatin' o' that bird was agen Nature; and do as yer will, Nature's sure to cop 'old on yer at the last. People some'ow seemed to leave off takin' their opportunities of showin' kindness in givin' me anythink. And you may lay it was the bird stickin' in my stomick as made 'em think I wasn't 'ungry, seein' as not even groun'sel aint no good to rid yer of a singin'-bird in yer inside. Nature tells us 'ow, if yer've eat a song-bird, it goes on singin' in yer stomick as long as yer can keep alive with it. Yus, and I 'eard that there bird singin' as if it 'ad worked its way right up into my 'ead. So people didn't think to give me nothink by reason of me 'avin' eat my thrush. And I went 'ungry all the time,

nobody thinkin' what a chance 'e was lettin' go by of recompensing me for my studyin' of Nature. There's two books—one printed, one not. Nature's the unprinted book, and all my life I've studied in it. That's where it is I've come to know the advantageous 'abits of groun'sel and such. So I was in the Forest yesterday evenin' gatherin' up my plants, and on a sudden there comes over me the smell o' the May, layin' thick like a sweet-smellin' mist, the air bein' still and warm. All smells is good for the memory, but there aint no smell in the world so good for it as the smell of the May. So I says to myself: 'Every time as you smell that there May, you kind o' seem to go back to that Whitsun with Mary, as then was. Now, it bein' like that with you, aint it likely enough as she'd go back after the same manner? If she got a smell o' the May, p'r'aps she'd call you to mind, for all you bein' a bit older nor what you was then.' That's what I call Nature's teachin'. Nature made the smell o' the May, and my doctrine is as Nature don't make nothink superfloous. What's more, I'd 'eard say as females keeps up more tenderer kind o' feelin's nor the likes o' you and me. And thirty or forty years aint much to call to mind when you've lived through 'em, nor yer don't feel so much different at the end on 'em neither. So I just walked back as I stood, and knowin' as females keeps a tender 'eart, more purtikler at night, bein' so made by Nature, as don't make nothink superfloous, neither females nor nothink else, I just went straight

up to where she was, 'oldin' on to a bit o' May, in the 'ope as the smell on it 'ud make 'er call me to mind, as is a thing as Nature learned me, seein' she———"

"One minute," said the magistrate. "Let me ask one question before you continue. I ask the prosecutrix if she still wishes to press this charge."

"Well, my lord," says the widder, standin' up, "yer see, this is 'ow it is. All I'm askin' for is the purtection of the law agen any old lunatic comin' and disturbin' me in my own bed at the middle o' the night, whether it be to take my money or to talk a lot of 'is nonsense about makin' love, and me a widder of three 'usbands, as 'as always kep' 'erself respectable."

"O Mary," says old Groun'sel, "yer know perfectly well I didn't never come to talk love-makin' nor nothink o' that, seein' as I don't act superfloous no more nor what Nature does. Only I did 'ope as yer might p'r'aps 'ave give me a bit o' somethink to eat, me bein' 'ungry, and you smellin' the May."

"Any previous convictions?" asked the magistrate of the warder.

"No, yer worship."

"Anything known as to 'is state of mind?"

"The prisoner, yer worship, 'as long been known to the perlice as a 'armless lunatic."

"Very well," says the magistrate; "I shall dismiss this case as a first offense, and recommend that the proper authorities be informed of the man's condition."

Then old Groun'sel was led out by 'is copper, and the magistrate and lawyers got up and went to their lunches, and we was all bundled out into the street and set off 'ome to dinner as 'ard as we could go.

And in crossin' Commercial Road we catch sight o' the widder 'obblin' away all alone back to Lime'ouse, where 'er 'ome was. And all my father said was:

"She could have walked quicker that Whitsun she was in the Forest with old Groun'sel forty year ago. Only maybe she 'ad no call to walk quick that time."

But old Warner kep' on shakin' 'is 'ead and sayin':

"It aint the law! It aint the law! My sentence was twenty shillin' or a calendar month. I dunno what's come over the law. When a born magistrate don't purtect it, what's it got to look to?"

At our dinner we tell my mother about it; and in gettin' up to clear away the things, she says:

"Poor old bloke! P'r'aps it wasn't such a bad way 'e'd thought on for gettin' a bite or sup out of a woman's 'eart, for all it likely makes a difference when yer've got a comfortable bed o' yer own and a 'ole roof to yerself over yer 'ead. And forty year's a precious long time to call to mind a feelin' yer've 'ad for anybody, either likin' or mislikin'. But as to studyin' Nature, there aint much to be got from the likes o' that, if it lands yer in sellin' groun'sel as nobody won't buy. Any'ow let's 'ope the Asylum 'll treat 'im decent."

But there wasn't no call for the Asylum anyway. The coppers let old Groun'sel go after 'is discharge, they knowin' they could find 'im easy enough about the streets, when wanted. And they found 'im the very next day, for all not wantin' 'im purtikler. A carman goin' early in the mornin' to fetch out 'is cart from under one o' the railway arches alongside of Johnson Street thought it pulled a bit 'eavy, and climbin' up on the wheel to look into it 'e sees somebody layin' inside curled up fast asleep. So 'e drives the butt end of 'is whip 'ard into 'is ribs to wake 'im up, and the man just 'eaved over a bit, and showed 'is face. And lookin' again the carman sees it was old Groun'sel layin' there quite dead.

So the doctor sat on 'im, and found 'e'd died of an empty stomick. My young brother asked if the thrush was found inside of 'im, but it wasn't. And the doctor said 'e never in 'is life see an arm burnt so bad as the old man's left. And there was some as began to call to mind stories 'ow, a long time back, 'e'd pulled a child's dead body out of a burnin' 'ouse down Lime-'ouse way. And through puttin' this and that together, some said it was the widder's child, and others went so far as sayin' it was the widder 'erself. But there wasn't nobody as really knowed a word about the truth of it, and we soon enough forgot the old man. Only sometimes of an evenin', as one of the women might be sittin' mendin', I've 'eard 'er say :

" This is the kind o' time I'd used to like to

'ear old Groun'sel callin' out along the street. Some'ow it sounded kind of 'omely."

But old Warner always stuck out the old man 'ad been killed through the beak not followin' the law, as would 'ave kep' 'im comfortable in quod for one calender month at all events.

CHAPTER IX.

Father Chris'mus.

 OON after that we 'ad a queer turn-out with another old man, but a different kind of thing altogether. It was full summer, and broad daylight to go to work by and come back in the evening. So 'avin' some time to spare, me and one or two of my mates, we started joinin' the Cadets for a bit of a change. It was Ned Philips, 'is proper name in the ranks bein' Tentpole, as fust put us on the job, 'e 'aving joined more nor six months before, and tellin' us there wasn't nothink like mixin' up with military life. But 'is mother 'ad made 'im promise not to enlist in the Reg'lars till 'e'd turned of twenty, and 'is young brother got work. So 'e was just keepin' 'is 'and in by servin' in the Cadets.

So after we'd done work, and washed, and 'ad our teas, we start goin' up to the drills pretty reg'lar twice a week. And we get learned all manner of queer ways of standin' still and walkin' and turnin' round—ways as yer wouldn't never 'ave thought of for yerself, more especial the turnin' round, a thing as everybody in the world is safe to do wrong till 'e joins the British army. Then we got learned

just the most unlikely ways of carryin' on with a rifle, exercisin' and that; and next 'ow to aim bullets at a target with it through a Morris Tube.

But it aint the drill I'm goin' to tell about now, that bein' mostly regulation, same as other drills 'ad ought to be. What I want to tell about is a queer old boy as some'ow seemed to take a mighty deal of interest in our Company from the fust day 'e met it marchin' out in its red tunics. 'Is name was Father Chris'mus, by reason of 'is 'avin' a clean white beard and a face the color of an old brick, same as if the sun 'ad burnt into it and never been rightly washed out. 'E was a tall, biggish man too, and 'ad a kind of a smile for everybody, as if 'e was askin' of you to do 'im no 'arm, but just let 'im alone. And let alone 'e mostly was, 'avin' a reg'lar weekly doss in a respectable lodgin' 'ouse some way up the road, and goin' every mornin' to 'is work at the Tower, as messenger or cleaner, or somethink o' that. And in the evenin' 'e'd just come back to 'is doss, carryin' the kipper or whatever it might be 'e wanted to cook for 'is tea at the big kitchen fire. And there 'e'd sit, mostly sayin' nothink, but makin' room for everybody, and 'elpin' 'em with their bits of cookin', and always as obligin' as if they was classy ladies and gen'lemen, as they wasn't by no manner. And by the time we got to know about 'im 'e'd come to be a reg'lar kind of boss in that doss-'ouse, and was appointed chucker-out when anybody came in too drunk for convenience.

And sometimes 'e'd give the manager a 'and with 'is books and that; so as a recompense the manager's wife she give 'im a cup o' corfee every mornin', and nothink to pay for it.

"But outside of 'is work and 'is doss, 'e didn't seem to take no sort of an interest in nothink, till, as I was sayin', 'e one day come acrost the Cadets whiles they was doin' rout-marchin'. 'E watched 'em go past, and then 'e falls in be'ind, almost alongside of the left guide, and marches along, keepin' step to the band, and fair towerin' over 'em all, with 'is white beard flyin'.

"'I! 'I!" screamed the girls and other kids, as always go dancin' in front of the band and on both sides the Company, till a tram-car comes and clears 'em off. "'Ere's old Chris'-mus gone and jined the blood'ounds! My! don't 'e look a rare old Valentine, too!"

And some'ow or another that march seemed to turn the old man's 'ead. For the very next week one of the parsons down our way gets married, and old Chris'mus appears at the church door, to chuck people in and chuck 'em out again, wearin' a queer kind of uniform as 'e'd 'ired by bits from some Sheeny shop off 'Oundsditch. And when the girl as 'ad got to be married drives up, 'e stands at attention, with a short-jointed cane up to 'is shoulder, same as any Guardsman or Cadet, barrin' only 'is long beard. And after that, on drill-nights, 'e took to 'angin' about the door of our 'ead-quarters, and sometimes 'e'd say a word or two to some of us lads about the insides of our rifles

or the best way of fetchin' oil off our tunics. And one night 'e seemed to pluck up 'eart, and 'e asks our Captain if 'e might come in and 'ave a look at the drill. And after that 'e was up there near every drill-night, just standin' agen the wall and watchin', and never sayin' nothink, only taking off 'is cap to the orfficer on comin' up and goin' down. And one night, soon arfter I joined, our Color-Sergeant bein' away queer, 'e asks the Captain if 'e might be allowed to try 'is 'and at drillin' the recruits, seein' as he knowed somethink of drill from lookin' at the battalion in the Tower Ditch. And when 'e come to give 'is fust word of command to us recruits, for all its bein' nothink only "'Tention!" it made us jump as if we was shot, and near blew the winder-glasses out.

Two evenin's after that, just past tea-time, my father 'avin' a set down, and makin' up 'is mind if 'e'd go round to 'is Union meetin' or not, and my mother goin' on with 'er mendin', and me teachin' my little brother the manual exercise with the poker, in walks old Seabrook, as I'd 'ardly set eyes on since we got back from the 'oppin'. So 'e says "Good-evenin'," and sets 'isself down by the fire-place, and starts starin' at it, and spittin' now and then into the dead ashes.

"Mate," 'e says at last, "it's queer 'ow things come about mostly."

"Yer right," says my father.

"Yus, it's queer," says my mother; "to take a kind of instance, I often wonder to myself whose legs it was 'ad the wearin' o' these 'ere

trouseys afore they come to my man, and was next cut down for Jacko, and now is in a fair way to pass to little Jim, for all they still keep what yer might call a style about 'em. But it's quality as does it."

"Yus," says Seabrook, "it's quality. There aint no mistakin' quality. It's in the blood, as old Spotter says. But trouseys, Mrs. Britton, aint the only thing as 'as it.

"Jacko," 'e says to me on a sudden, after 'oldin' 'is tongue a long time, "did I 'ear as yer'd gone and joined them bloomin' Cadets?"

"Yus," I says, "that's right."

"And what did yer think o' the stranger orfficer as put yer through the drill the other night?"

"There wasn't no orfficer," I says; "nobody else but old Father Chris'mus; 'e took a turn at us."

"Well, what did yer think of 'im, then?"

"Oh, 'e was all right, only in place of sayin' 'Bout turn!' 'e says 'Right about turn,' as is an order they tell me 'asn't never been used in the British army since Noah told 'is animals to go out o' the ark that way."

"And a dam sight better soldiers them animals made, I 'ave no doubt, nor what all the pack o' *you* 'll ever be, so you just 'old yer row," says old Seabrook, in a fair rise at 'earin' me chip the old regulations.

"Well," 'e says, turnin' to my father, "I'd 'eard tell about this old Chris'mus too, and 'is drillin' and all. And I thinks to myself, if there's a job goin', I might 'ave a look in.

Any'ow I thinks I'd just 'ave a see what this bloomin' civvy was like as sets up for drillin' recruits, and me as 'ave put in my twenty-one year service not so much as spoke of. So up I goes to the doss-'ouse, meanin' maybe to do a little business upon that there old Chris'mus. And I meets 'im comin' in from 'is work; 'is trouseys was above 'is ankles, and 'is boots split at the sides fit to let 'is toes drop out. But I looks at 'im 'ard, and I says to myself, 'I some-'ow seem to know the look o' yer bloomin' mug, my beauty,' I says. So I make no remark that time, but go 'ome again, and all that night and next day I keep thinkin' and thinkin', and 'oldin, as yer might say, a kind o' General Inspection Parade in my 'ead of all the men as that old Chris'mus might 'ave been. And the queer part of it was that every mother's son of 'em turned up to the Parade in uniform. There was lads I'd knowed in Injer and buried in jungles, or seen cut up acrost the rivers; and there was lads I'd camped with in the Cape, and lads I'd 'ad games with in the Curragh. And the most on 'em I ordered to dismiss right off as bein' casualities or deaders these many years back. But among 'em all there wasn't never a bloomin' civvy, nor yet old Chris'mus. So this evenin' up I goes again to get another look at 'im. And I see 'im comin' straight along the street a long way off, and at that moment somethink inside o' me says, 'Yus, my dear, yer may call yerself Father Chris'mus, and yer may grow white beard enough to take the fancy of an Afghan she-goat; but it's clean-shaved you are

by nature, and it's old Fireirons as is yer proper name.'

"From that moment I 'adn't got no more doubt in my own mind nor what I've got of damnation. But just to satisfy other people, I thought well to make kind o' certain. So I stood leanin' agen a shop-winder close by where the man must pass as 'e come along. And just as 'e come within a yard or two, 'e takin' no notice o' me, as was only natural, up I spring to attention, 'eels together, knees straight, and salute very stiff and correct. And at that very second up goes 'is right 'and with the two middle fingers stretched out straight, same as a parson givin' yer 'is blessin', as was always old Fireirons' way of answerin' a salute. But just in the middle on it, 'e seems to be took queer all on a sudden. Down goes 'is 'and again, and 'e gives me such a look, same as a girl caught bathin' 'erself, and with that disappears into the doss-'ouse, pretty near at the double, leavin' me with the kind o' feelin' yer 'll get when yer go up to speak to a woman after the resurrection, and she not know yer."

"There aint many I'll care to know," says my mother; "I've 'ad enough of 'em mostly already, and the men too."

"That's got nothink to do with it," says my father. "Why can't yer let the man get in a word edgeways?"

"Yus," says old Seabrook, takin' no notice for them; "it's old Fireirons, there aint no error. 'Oly Poker we'd used to call 'im too, Gord knows why; but that wasn't only when

we was pleased with 'im, and that wasn't often by reason of 'is temper, it bein' mostly red-'ot, same as 'is face, and seemin' to burn yer inside out most disagreeable. Major 'e was to us afore 'e turned it up, 'avin' got 'is commission by purchase in the good old days, as these Board-School Tommies o' yers 'll die without knowin' the likes on; and as to 'Right about turn,' we 'adn't no need for that order through keepin' always turned to the front."

And with that old Seabrook looks at me, and I tells 'im to keep 'is 'air on.

"Eh, 'e was a rare orfficer, was Fireirons," 'e goes on. "'E didn't know nothink, and 'e didn't care nothink; and 'is language came to yer scorchin' 'ot as from the 'ell-fire as was always blazin' inside of 'im. But when yer'd got the devil's own business to do, Fireirons was the man to see yer through with it. Clever? Bless yer, 'e was a bloomin' sight too good an orfficer to think of bein' clever. 'E wasn't none o' them as plays tricks with the enemy, and tries on artful little ways to bamboozle 'em, same as a girl makin' love, jumpin' on 'em 'ere, and outflankin' 'em there, and cuttin off their supplies when there's 'undreds o' their poor men just as 'ungry as us. Not 'im! 'E 'adn't no notion of maneuverin', only to go straight. Bless yer soul, if the 'ole German army was 'oldin' a line of 'ills in our front, and nothink only our one battalion to put agen 'em, and 'im in command, 'e'd 'ave called out 'is junior orfficers, and said: 'Our business to-day, gen'lemen, is to dislodge the enemy from that risin'

ground. It is a simple movement. The point to march on will be the center of their line, where you see that thing as they've got the imperence to call a flag. Orfficers will see that the direction is kep' by the shortest way. The men will reserve their fire till within four 'undred yards, and after advancin' by 'alf-companies, will clear the position with the bayonet. That ought to give account of a pot-bellied lot o' sausage-eaters, I *should* 'ope.' That was 'is way. Clever? Oh, lord! a man like 'im wasn't never such a fool as to try to be clever. Them was before the days of Board Schools, thank Gord, or I shouldn't 'ave been settin' 'ere to-night cool and comfortable. And now old Fireirons 'e's livin' in a doss-'ouse, and 'as changed 'is name to Father Chris'mus! Didn't I tell yer it's queer 'ow things come about?"

"Yer did, Mr. Seabrook," says my mother, "and that's why I sometimes think there may be 'ope for all on us yet. Yer can't never know when things mayn't take a turn with yer."

"No more yer can't," says old Seabrook; "but I'm thinkin' as what started makin' things take a turn with old Fireirons was a woman. Yus, I call 'er to mind plain enough, for all it's a many years gone since then. And even if she's gettin' old and fadin', same as other females, I'd still march a solid mile on my bare knees only to put my little finger on the outside of 'er skirts."

"Oh, cheese it, do, Mr. Seabrook!" says my mother.

"It's Gord's truth," says 'e, "and there aint a man on us wouldn't 'ave told yer the same thing; and the regiment was a thousand strong in them days, mind yer, and each soul of us as 'ard and straight as a cleanin' rod. And wherever she went, you'd see the men keep turnin' this way and that and lookin after 'er, same as recruits lookin' after the Inspectin' Orfficer goin' down the line on parade. It was the time we was layin' quartered at Dover, all there was of us as got back from South Africa, together with a fine squad o' likely recruits. Where she come from none on us ever rightly knowed, she appearin' all on a sudden as old Fireirons' wife. But there was plenty of tales goin' round from the very fust, what with 'er bein' so pretty, and all on us knowin' the Major 'adn't been noways different from other men, only in the matter of 'is tactics. She was one o' them sorft and tender-lookin' little things, as seems as if they'd melt away if yer only put yer 'and over 'em. Uncommon comfortin' they are too, mate, as you likely know."

"And it's easy enough to make yer flesh sorft and meltin'," says my mother, "if only yer start doin' nothink in yer cradle, and keep on at it all yer life—same with fowls and that."

"Maybe yer right, Mrs. Britton," says 'e; "but at that rate the only wonder is there aint more like 'er. And that's what old Fireirons thought, worse luck for 'im. For 'e must needs 'ave 'er picture painted from 'er toes up, to show 'imself and the women what a little

beauty she was afore she'd 'ad the time to start fadin'. So down there comes an artist feller from London, with a floppin' brown 'at and a little yeller tuft to 'is chin, and 'is 'air over 'is eyes, like a Scotch tarrier out on the loose. And 'e gets put up in the Major's quarters, and sets to paintin' and paintin' at that bit of a wife mornin', noon, and night. And no doubt the picture got on famous; but it wasn't the only thing as could do that. And so after a bit—well, the only queer thing about it was as that's the one army woman I ever knowed take up with a civvy."

"Like yer sorft and meltin' sort to do such things!" says my mother.

"No, it wasn't no fault of 'ers neither," says old Seabrook, "nobody couldn't say nothink agen 'er exackly. She was just one o' them as can't 'elp lettin' yer make love to 'em for the askin', and nobody none the worse. It all comes of bein' so sorft-'earted and perlite. Yer see, she couldn't never bring 'erself to say 'No!' to a bloke for fear of 'urtin' 'is feelin's or 'is proper pride, and she'd always got a kind word for everybody, and seemed more nor 'alf in love with all the world to start. So nobody needn't 'ave minded, nor been none the wiser, if old Fireirons 'isself 'adn't got wind on it, and started raisin' 'ell, just as if 'e'd never 'eard of such a thing 'appenin' in all 'is life. There's no question 'e must 'ave been uncommon fond o' that woman, as yer may see by what 'e did afterward; but some'ow 'e 'adn't read the nature of her right, same as I'd read it, or 'e'd

'ave knowed better ways for managin' 'er nor what 'e follered all along. But that's where it is, yer see: there's only two sorts o' men—them as women like, and them as they don't; and no matter for what the fust sort does, it's always the right thing with women, and the other sort's always wrong. Not but what the last sort isn't mostly the best, taken all round; for all I've no cause to say so, me belongin' to the fust sort myself, thank Gord!"

"I'm glad yer told us that, Mr. Seabrook," says my mother.

"Yus," says 'e, "that's right. But old Fire-irons must 'ave been one o' them as women don't really take to 'eart and soul, for all 'is tactics bein' of a sort as mostly pleases females, through bein' kind o' different from their own. Any'ow, at revelly one mornin' the word goes round as the little lady 'ad gone off along with that artist feller, never to come back. What came of 'em nobody didn't rightly know. P'r'aps they set up picture-dealin' with the portrait. Once, anyway, in a print-shop in the City I see a picture of a female uncommon like 'er, only for bein' dressed most undecent, with nothink better to cover 'er nor a kind of sheet, and thin at that."

"Which shop was it in?" says my father.

"And what came to the poor 'usband?" says my mother.

"Well, that's the queerest part of all," says old Seabrook; "and it's only to-night I'm gettin' a kind of look-in to it. Nobody wouldn't believe it, and yet it's gospel truth. Yer see, it

was like this: 'e wasn't the man to stand dodderin' and shillyshallyin' about, wasn't old Fireirons. 'Plunge, my boy,' 'e'd say to 'isself. 'It's no odds for what 'appens when yer once in. Only, for Gord's sake, plunge!' That was the kind of man 'e was. So within a week o' that poor little lady goin' away, 'e'd chucked the regiment, chucked the army, chucked everythink. 'E did a reg'lar, all-round, 'varsal chuck. And some'ow, through the orfficers' servants and what they picked up at the Mess, we all on us came to know as Fireirons 'ad sold 'is commission to the Government; and puttin' the full price of it together, regulation and over-regulation, 'e'd just took and sent the 'ole bloomin' lot—thousands o' pounds they said it was—as an annuity to that pretty, temptin' wife of 'is, so as she shouldn't fall into no low ways of livin', through bein' druv to it by want. And they told as 'ow when the Colonel fust 'eard on it, 'e cursed and swore awful, and then 'e said: 'Poor beggar!' 'e says, 'and 'e's got precious little of 'is own to fall back upon. And what little 'e's got is like enough to go the same way—damn 'im! And it's just the thing as any other man worth callin' 'ud do in 'is place to save a woman like that from demeanin' 'erself with civilians, one or many.' Then all the orfficers started laughin', and said 'e was right. And for a week or two we kep' on talkin' about old Fireirons, and what 'is little wife 'ud be thinkin' o' the change out o' the army. Then we was drafted off to Ireland, and forgot about 'im.

"And now 'ere 'e is, turned up again as sure as a nigger yer've left for dead. But it's rum to think what must 'ave 'appened to 'im between whiles. Talk about the change for the woman! It's just nothink to what the change must 'ave been for 'im when 'e'd parted with 'is last solid shillin', and stood alone in the world, worse off nor any common Tommy o' this new-boy lot, as takes 'is discharge long afore 'e's thirty, when 'e's just beginning to find out as there's other things to be learned in the army besides drillin', and goes 'ome with 'is twenty pound Deferred Pay, as just serves to keep 'imself and 'is people and pals comfortable in drinks and other treats for three weeks runnin', or maybe two days extry, if 'e's careful with it, and at the end o' that he wakes up one mornin' with nothink only the 'eadache and a queer stomick to start the world fresh on. I'm sure it's beyond me to think what old Fireirons turned 'is 'and to, 'e bein' nothink only a gen'leman beside. But 'e wasn't never the man to go adrift. I reckon 'e said to 'isself, 'Cut low enough, my boy, cut low enough, and yer 'll cut somethink.' And so 'e cut low, and sure enough 'ere 'e is, 'abituated in 'a doss-'ouse, with a beard as yer might buy in Drury Lane, and a funk on 'is face when yer salute 'im such as none o' the Queen's enemies ever see there. It only shows, as I was sayin' at the start off, it's queer 'ow things come about."

"Yer right, Mr. Seabrook," says my mother. "There's always that 'ope for them as is low enough down. And them as 'asn't got no 'ope

can mostly leave off despairin'. But as to the poor old gen'leman, all I wonder is if 'e's got somebody to do for 'im a bit and take 'is bits o' washin'."

"What do yer say, mate," says my father, gettin' up, "'ow if we go round and make the offer for to stand 'im somethink?"

"Not me!" says old Seabrook. "Acourse you can do as yer like, bein' nothink only a civvy, and no 'arm done. But it aint becomin' for the likes o' me to go and pal up with an orfficer. I 'ope I knows my place better nor what that comes to. If 'e should 'appen to come along, I stand at attention, and maybe salute, just for old times' sake. But if 'e don't wish to take no notice, I'm not goin' to intrude myself. I'm one as knows 'isself, I 'ope."

Yer may lay, one way or another, the true story o' Father Chris'mus got about fast enough, and it wasn't long afore the kids in the street took to callin' 'im "General Chris'mus," and shoutin' "'Alt, Fire, Present, Bang!" after 'im, same as after any other orfficer. And our Captain 'e got to know about it, and 'e'd take off 'is own 'at whenever the old boy came up to look on at the drills; and we Cadets all saluted 'im same as one of our own orfficers, only a bit extry, for a game. But whether it was as 'is old nut was turned through 'avin' such a lot o' respeck showed 'im, and 'e not used to it, or whether 'is mind got kind o' mixed up through 'is no longer knowin' which o' the two men inside 'im 'e was supposed to be, any'ow within a month or thereabout 'e seemed all on a sud-

den to give way. 'Is face turned near as white as 'is beard. 'Is voice didn't put yer no more in mind of a big dog. 'E still stood up straight as ever; but one night after 'e'd been up to the drill, and 'ad stayed be'ind talkin' to our Captain, 'e says good-night to us lads, and goes back to 'is doss kind of sleepy. And there 'e was found next mornin' stretched out stiff on 'is bed with 'is eyes turned up to the dirty ceilin', and nothink in 'is pockets only 'alf his week's wages and an old blue shoulder-strap with a gold crown worked on it.

Sooner nor let the old man be buried by the parish, our Captain said 'e'd give 'im a military funeral, if only to practice us in such things. So our band started learnin' the Dead March as 'ard as they could split, and on the next Saturday afternoon the Company was drawed up two-deep right opposite the doss-'ouse, all the dossers standin' thick round the door, and the street fair blocked with the crowd. It was rainin' a bit, but nobody didn't mind for that. Then four of our fellers bring out the corffin and 'eave it on to a barrer, and spread a bit of flag over it. And as it come in sight, we got to present arms, and some'ow the ranks seemed to give a kind o' gasp as the rifles came down.

"Lor!" says the girl behind me, "'ere's the bloomin' corpse! Aint it a treat!"

"You 'old yer row," says 'er pal, "and yer 'll see 'em bloomin' well shoot."

So we reversed arms and formed up in fours in front o' the barrer, all but old Seabrook, as 'ad got 'old on some kind of a uniform and

walked just be'ind the corffin, 'avin' our Captain in the rear of 'im with 'is sword turned down. So we start off to march, the side-drums just tappin' to keep the step. And when we get near up agen the gate of Bow Cimeterry, the band strikes up playin' the Dead March, as they did pretty fair, and we fall into slow step, most aggravatin' to keep. But the crowd 'ad got so thick on both sides and in front, we couldn't 'ave moved much quicker if we'd 'ad to. And it was a good business the band started when it did, 'cos the people was beginnin' to chip old Seabrook for follerin' be'ind of the barrer, and kep' askin' why 'e didn't start callin' out "Meat," or "'Okey-pokey," and such things. And in another minute like enough 'e'd 'ave broke out and marked some on 'em, for all 'is braggin' of no soldier mindin' for what a dirty mob says at 'im.

So we come to where the parson was waitin' for us agen the grave, and we opened out and turned inwards to let the corffin pass up the middle with its two mourners. And the crowd stood still, all black round us almost as far as yer could see. But they 'adn't the chance to say or do nothink more agen the corpse, 'cos there we was drawed up on each side of it. Next thing, the firin' party falls out by the grave, and the parson reads a lot of readin', and the corffin is let down by ropes, the bit o' flag still stickin' round it. Then at last we come to the real business of lettin' off the volleys. We was called to attention, and presented arms. The crowd stood still as death,

keepin' their eyes on the firin' party, and waitin' for the bang. The first volley went all right, with nothink from the people only a kind o' breath, same as when a rocket busts 'igh up. But just as the word was bein' give for the second, some fat-'ead must needs call out "Rats!" and acourse that started 'em all off laughin'. And at the third the 'ole crowd sets to, fair shriekin', and whistlin', and singin', and callin' names. And last of all, young Duffy, findin' as 'e'd been tryin' to fire at 'alf-cock, rather nor be done out o' firin' altogether, 'e looses off a good twenty seconds after the volley was over. And with that the people just yelled with laughin', and started singin', "Johnnie, git yer gun" and "Let me like a soldier fall."

And whiles they was still 'owlin', we was formed up into fours again, and marched off. And just as we started, I saw the grave-digger get down into the grave, and stand on the corffin, just on the top of old General Chris'-mus's face. Then 'e lights up 'is pipe, and sticks 'is fingers into 'is can of corffee to see if it 'ad got cold with the waitin'.

But so soon as we was outside the cimeterry gates up go the drumsticks over the bass-drummer's 'ead, and away the band starts to a rare good marchin' tune, the same as 'as got for chorus:

"Oh, there's somethink queer to a Private's ear
In talkin' of a defeat,
And the sound we know when the bugles blow
Says nothink about retreat.

For the captain's good, and the major's good,
And the colonel better nor that;
But for stormin' o' the trenches, and for kissin' o' the wenches,
Why, the Private knocks 'em flat."

And as we swung along I never felt so 'appy in all my life, for one thing 'cos it was the fust time as I'd 'ad my uniform to wear. And when we was dismissed I said something o' that to Tentpole, as 'ad stood number one in the firin' party, 'e bein' the steadiest on parade. But 'e says: "Yus, it feels fine, don't it? for all that soldierin' aint all uniform, as you'll see. But, oh my soul, aint it just worth while bein' a private, let alone an orfficer, if it's only to get a funeral give yer same as this 'ere was to-day!"

"Yus," said old Seabrook, as 'appened to be by, "there aint only one thing I'm sorry for, and that's as we couldn't 'ave got old Fire-irons' wife to come and witness the ceremony. Eh, my boys! but she was a real beauty, she was!"

CHAPTER X.

Only an Accident.

THERE'S one thing almost queerer nor the fust day out 'oppin', and that's to go on the Advance Party into Camp. In the middle of the mornin', everybody else bein' at work, and Aldgate choked up with vans and great loads of 'ay set there to dry, yer find yerself pitched out on to a patch of sand in the country, and nothink over yer 'ead only the sky, and nothink under yer back only bloomin' grass and dirt. And yer'e told that's where yer've got to live for more nor a week, so yer must make the best of it. There was twenty of us on that Advance, and every man-Jack, barrin' only Tentpole, would 'ave bolted back to London before an hour 'ad gone, if we 'adn't 'ad an orfficer with us. And the good of an orfficer is as 'e's kind o' bound to see yer through; and if 'e don't, it aint none o' yer doin', and yer've got 'im to curse at.

It was blowin' cold, for all its bein' the Thursday before Bank 'Oliday, and so soon as we'd found our pitch, it started rainin' 'ard. So we creep under the edge of a bit o' wood, and put our rifles and kit-bags under us to keep 'em dry. And there we sat, our uniforms gettin'

wetter and wetter, and us 'ungrier and 'ungrier, and only that bit o' soppin' sand in front of us, and nothink to eat.

"If this is like what livin' in the bloomin' country is," says one o' the fellers, "it's a mercy I was born in the Boro'."

"Yer right," says Tentpole; "anyway it's a mercy you wasn't born in Shadwell."

"Why's that?" says the other.

"'Cos that's where I live," says Tentpole. "And why the devil can't yer 'old yer tongue and bear what yer've got to bear?"

"Well, I dunno," says Duffy; "I'm Shadwell born and bred, but there's nothink only one thing I'm wishin' now, and that's as I was down at Southend with a girl and s'rimps, me 'avin' 'er 'at on, and 'er mine, just to show there was no ill-feelin.' That's what I call takin' a 'oliday. But to set on a fuz-bush, and not a smell o' nothink to put in yer belly, that aint 'oliday makin' nor yet doin' work."

"You shut yer row," says Tentpole. "I tell yer it's soldierin'."

"'Ere's rations!" says our sergeant at last.

"Two tins of buffalo and six loaves," says Duffy, watchin' the barrer come up. "You see me shift 'em!"

After that there wasn't no more talk of turnin' up the job or doin' a bolt back through Aldershot. And by evenin' we'd got up 'alf the tents, and drawed our stores together with blankets and waterproof sheets. And all the time to see Tentpole work, you'd 'ave thought 'e'd been goin' mad for the want of it, 'im 'oldin up the

tents, and drivin' in the pegs, and shiftin' the stores, and 'ardly stoppin' a moment to swear, for all the world as if 'e'd been born an orfficer or an Army Service Corps.

Next day was just the same, only for the sky turnin' blazin' 'ot, and us gettin' stewed shackles and spuds to our dinners, same as every day afterward. And on Saturday evenin' everythink was ready to receive the main body, from the rubbish-pit up to the Major's tent. The days as come next 'aven't stuck in my mind only as a mixed lot of things—Lights-out, and Rouses, and fights over rations, and parades comin' just too soon for yer convenience, and church in the open air, with ladies and a parson on the inside of our brigade square, and fellers faintin' round the outside with orfficers waterin' 'em like flower-pots in a row; and after that, long marches over the Long Valley where the sand is always blowin', to accustom us to Egyp', or to Fox 'Ills, where a lot o' men died of 'eat, actin' on top of booze, and got pensions for their widders; and deployin' and extendin', and keepin' yer intervals, and right-incline and left-incline, and plungin' about in bogs, and rushin' woods, and layin' down, and volley-firin', and chargin', and 'avin' a thirst like the bottomless pit; and goin' on guard, and doin' Sentry-go with nothink for a light only the stars, as is poor things at best, and me seemin' to see all manner of queer shapes bobbin' up and down out o' the fuz-bushes, and at last fallin' dead off asleep whenever I stood still or set down. All them things 'ave got mixed up in my 'ead, seein'

as soldierin' soon came as natural as goin' 'ome to tea. But some'ow the last field-day stands out clear, by reason of somethink 'appenin' on it. And this is 'ow it was:

"Oh, strike me! that aint the Rouse?" I says, 'earin' the bugles go just outside our tent. It wasn't only 'alf-past four, and some'ow they seemed to 'ave a nastier way with 'em nor ordinary, for all the Rouse being enough to give yer a sick feelin' any mornin'. So I look round, and there was all eight of us fast asleep, only for Tentpole, as was settin' up in 'is shirt cleanin' 'is belt and sling, and kickin' at Duffy with one foot 'cos Duffy was Orderly for the day.

"Ger up, yer fat-'ead," 'e says; "this 'll be the biggest day o' the 'ole lot, and we're set as picket to guard the Camp. Now, be smart, or I'll take and rub yer nose in a fuz-bush, same as the orfficer yesterday to make yer lay down."

"Volley-firin', Duffy!" I calls out, and I sticks my 'ead under the tent curtain, and see all the tents and trees covered with white mist, and get my face all wet with the water on the grass, same as if I'd been a cow wakin' up in the mornin'. So I got under the blankets again, and go to sleep comfortable till Duffy brings in the kettle of corfee, and starts drinkin' it in a buffalo-tin all to 'isself.

"Now, volley-firer," I says, "none o' yer rook-stalkin'!" It bein' 'im as aimed at a rook with a blank cartridge and a round stone, and missed it.

So all on us get our breakfasts, and by the

time the "Fall-in" sounded we was washin' of ourselves down at the pump with our boots and trouseys on, only for Tentpole, as was standin' ready on parade, all clean and smart, and nobody else there barrin' the orfficers. For there is people as seems to love waitin'.

But by 'alf-past six we was all placed out in two pickets with a big support layin' in Chestnut Copse. And Duffy was set on a bit of 'ill as our sentry, to look for the enemy. And so we lay, till the mist all went, and the sun started warmin' us a treat, and then boilin' us alive. But all that time Duffy never see nothink, only a fizzer's cart crawlin' along with things to drink.

But Tentpole 'ad crep' right under a thorny kind o' bush for cover, and was lookin' out down the valley with nothink but 'is two eyes showin' through, watchin' and 'oldin' 'is rifle ready, lookin' just like a terrier when 'e 'ears the rats squeakin' in the drain, and yer see 'is legs shiver.

"'Ear the brigades formin' up be'ind us," 'e whispers to me at last, me layin' alongside of 'im. "That's their orfficers shoutin'. Our battalion 'll be well backed up to-day. But it's cavalry we want. Please Gord, I'll be in the cavalry this time next year, straddlin' my long-nosed friend all day, and rubbin' of 'im down at night. There's a life for yer! And yet there's thousands die without never 'avin' been a soldier for a single day, for all yer wouldn't ever think it."

"The Line 'll do me," I says; "but I'll 'ave

to get six months out of work afore I'm let join."

"That's the devil of 'avin' relations," 'e says, "for all they're good enough other ways."

On a sudden I see 'is eyes get fixed, and 'e stops breathin'. Then 'e whispers: "Look yer there! Along the edge o' them trees! See 'em?"

And sure enough, there under the wood called Cocked 'At, I see black-lookin' things snuffin' around like cats, as if they was afraid of findin' somethink.

"It's the bloomin' enemy!" 'e says, and 'e takes out a cartridge and 'olds it ready in 'is teeth. Then we see 'em creep out of the wood, and run forward, bendin' down, and 'idin' theirselves very artful with bushes and ferns. So we got up into line be'ind a bank, and so soon as we could see their ugly mugs pretty plain we give 'em a volley, and then another. And we see 'em start wrigglin' about and runnin' back a treat.

"Corpsed 'em fair," I says.

"Wish we 'ad!" says Tentpole.

'Earin' the firin', Duffy comes doublin' back from bein' sentry to see what was up. And next minute we see our brigade pourin' out on our right through Outridden Copse, and extendin' all acrost the valley, just as if they'd done all the work. But our battalion gets together, and pushes off bit by bit to the left till we'd near come to Tweseldown 'Ill by the Racecourse. Then we start creepin' along from one cover to the next, till we was layin'

at the foot of a round 'ill called Brocks. And on top of it the enemy was layin' thick, and firin' down on our right in the valley. So we crawl up that 'ill, firin' by sections and always joggin' on a bit each time, same as at drafts, till an Umpire told the enemy they'd jolly well better shift, and about time too. So we double up to the top, and keep loosin' off volleys into the thick o' their ugly backs. And they gets put out of action by the score. And to our right we see our side advancin', and gallopin' and extendin' as reg'lar as a picture. And there was the enemy retirin', all crowded up any'ow, and just mad to see which could get back fust across the bridges over the canal to their own camp. And on the top of all the bits of 'ill the artillery was bangin' away fit to bust itself. But nobody doesn't mind for artillery, no more nor for a woman's noise, 'cos yer can't never be sure what it's aimin' at, unless it 'appens to 'it yer.

So we catch on with the pursuit by 'alf companies, drivin the enemy acrost a long bit of plain covered with bogs and loose trees. And our orfficers kep' on shoutin' at us to right-incline, and left-incline, and lay down, and advance, till I fair give up tryin' to do nothink only what they tells me. So as we was layin' down, I says to Tentpole :

"'Ave yer ever tried steerin' a boat agen the tide in a penny struggle from Wappin' up to London Bridge?"

"What's that about?" says 'e.

"'Cos an orfficer guidin' this company's

pretty much doin' the same kind o' thing," I says.

"Shut yer bloomin' talk," says 'e, "and lay down. And you look 'ere, you volley-firin' Duffy, don't you go loosin' off at the trail no more, or yer 'll be blowin' a 'ole in the back o' somebody's trouseys as won't look at all nice when the fightin' 's over. You keep on aimin' at the enemy in yer three-shots-a-penny style, and we'll drive 'em slap into the canal and drownd 'em like rats."

But the enemy knowed as much about the canal as us, and they was all on the run to get to them bridges afore we could cut 'em off. So, when we got to the canal, we found they'd give us the slip acrost Norris Bridge and a pontoon; same as when my young brother ties a bit of cotton to a mouse's leg, and keeps nickin' it away from the claws of our old cat till she fair goes wild.

"There aint only one thing for it now," says Tentpole, "and that's for us to swim the canal and take 'em on the flank."

So 'e off with 'is cap, and gets 'isself ready to swim. But that maneuver got a stopper put on it, for fear of its drowndin' too many. Then layin' down under the bank, we could just see our pals of the Beds and 'Erts tryin' to rush the bridges to our right. But the enemy 'ad run up a fort of palin's and earth on the other side, and kep' creepin' out, and firin' and runnin' back, the 'ole place bustin' with flames. And then they start turnin' a machine-gun on to us like a fire-'ose, it workin' with a 'andle, and

makin' a kind o' knockin' noise, as seems to let all yer inside out of yer and spread it round yer feet.

"Come in, come in, do!" says Tentpole, shakin' 'is fist at 'em. "Yer 'e bloomin' savages yerselves, gettin' be'ind a bit o' palin' to shoot, and now yer start squirtin' at us, as if we was savages too, do yer?"

Just then, word comes for us all to retire. So we start movin' back through some woods very wild.

"I've a dam good mind to stop," says Tentpole. "The new drill-book says as 'ow each of yer should act to suit 'isself. But it's the way with them Umpires. They never make no odds for the quality o' the men. There aint no umpires in war, thank Gord! It'll be go-as-yer-please-for-sixpence, then!"

So we go trampin' back over miles and miles of growin' stuff, and us all runnin' down with sweat and thick in dust and mud.

"Never you mind," says Duffy; "the further we've got to retire, the nearer we come to plum-duff. It's for dinner to-day; 'cos I asked the quartermaster sergeant whiles the machine-gun was playin' its little games with us. I wonder if the shackles 'll be all fat, same as yesterday. And, oh, my soul! I'd plank down all the money I'm worth for a drink."

On a sudden firin' starts be'ind us again. So we knowed the enemy 'ad come back over the canal and was after us. Then we climb a bit of a 'ill, and lay down along the top to meet 'em. And away to our right we see our own

side stragglin' back, all mixed up together any'ow, crawlin' along in lumps or strings, and a lot of 'em fallin' out, and chuckin' down their rifles, and startin' smokin', and not carin' for what their orfficers kep' shoutin'. Sometimes a section, as still 'eld together, 'ud turn about and give a volley, in the style of a dead 'orse kickin', and be'ind 'em come the enemy, swarmin' thick as bugs, only for bein' much livelier on their feet.

"Now's the time to show what's what," says Tentpole. "Any fat-'ead can win a victory. It takes fellers like us to win a defeat."

"Yus," I says, "look at 'em comin' up agen us now! There aint 'ardly a Reg'lar among 'em. Think we're goin' to get the knock from swine like Volunteers in gray?"

"I sees 'em," says 'e, "and I 'ates 'em from my bleedin' 'eart."

"Nor no wonder," says I.

Just then a mixed lot of our own side come up the 'ill from the back, and jam theirselves in between our intervals, so as to make a stand. And a fat Volunteer in red comes and squeezes in between me and Tentpole, and lays down blowin'.

"Confound it!" 'e says, "I've got near a dozen cartridges left, and I can't put in a shot nowheres."

"That's just what I've always said about these 'ere battles," says Tentpole to 'im. "We'd oughter do same as them Russians, as issue one ball cartridge to each ten of blank.

Then we shouldn't be so thick on the ground at the end o' the day. Or even supposin' ball was give out by mistake now and then, same as last week, maybe there's some regiments wouldn't be so mighty keen for bein' always put in the fightin' line, and stickin' there all day long, and not givin' nobody a chance."

Then we get the order for independent firin', the enemy bein' close at the bottom of the 'ill, And two minutes later, seein' 'em still creepin' up, an orfficer shouts: "Prepare to charge!"

"O glory!" says Tentpole, turnin' round to me, 'is eyes shinin', and 'e grinnin' for joy for the fust time that day. "The butt, Jacko," 'e says; "give 'em the butt!"

Still turnin' to me, 'e 'alf springs up; and at that moment the volunteer, bein' wild to put in another shot, looses off 'is Martin-'Enry slap in Tentpole's face. I see the fire spurt out.

"Charge!" shouts our orfficer. So I jump over Tentpole's 'ead as 'e was layin', and make for the enemy, swingin' my butt and callin' 'em all manner. But an Umpire gallops up, and at that moment the "Cease Fire" sounds.

So I give one more curse at the enemy, and then we go creepin' up the 'ill again, the bugles soundin' the "Assemble." And lookin' around, it came over me as it was the very same Brocks 'Ill where we'd drove the enemy off in the mornin'. That's the way when yer'e fightin', each place looks different, just accordin'. And there on top lays Tentpole on 'is back, 'is eyes shut, and the blood startin' out from little black

'oles all over 'is face. An orfficer was washin' 'im with a penn'orth of lemon-water from a fizzer's cart, and trying to scrape the gunpowder out of the 'oles with a pocket-knife. Our fellers was crowdin' round.

"'Ooray!" says one. "'Ere's work for the bloomin' Ambulance at last!"

"Good old Ambulance!" says another.

"Cut 'is 'ead off!" says one.

"Take and rub 'is belly with a brick!" says another. "It's quietin'."

So we lay 'im careful in the stretcher, and carry 'im back to Camp; and that evenin' whiles we was listenin' to a gunner sing "The Fusiliers" at the Camp Fire, an orfficer takes 'im off to a 'orspital in London, kit-bag and all.

Next day we broke up Camp, and cleaned the sandy bit of ground till it looked almost the same as when we fust set eyes on it, barrin' for the paths down the lines and the rings where the tents 'ad stood, And that night I went to sleep in my own 'ome, and never woke, only to eat, till Monday mornin', time to go to work.

But one evenin' at the end of the next week, Duffy comes to our door, and 'e calls out:

"Say, Jacko! 'ow for a look-in on Tentpole? They *do* say 'e's just been let out of 'orspital, and 'as gone stark, starin' blind!"

So we go along together. It was still blazin' 'ot, and everybody settin' out on their doorsteps and along the pavements, lookin' uncommon white and sticky. And in some o'

them 'ouses I know'd they'd stop talkin' on them doorsteps all night sooner nor face the things as they'd 'ave to face in their own rooms. And I knowed 'ow', when it turned light, the men 'ud mostly go and 'ave a swim in the river, and come back to 'ave a bit o' sleep before startin' out to work; and the women 'ud just fall off asleep where they was, crowdin' up together if it 'appened to come on cold just before the sun risin'. So we find old Philips, as is Tentpole's father, settin' on a chair one side of 'is doorway, and Mrs. Philips the other. She was sewin' the buttons on a pair of regimental overalls, same as civilians mostly call trouseys. And 'e was stoopin' down and rubbin' 'is fingers together, as is a way 'e's got since when the rheumatics copped 'old on 'im one bitter cold winter, and took and tied up 'is arms and 'ands into queer kind o' knots, so as 'e shouldn't never do no work again; 'e 'avin' been as good a waterman as yer'd find in our parts, and out on the river day and night in all weather. And between 'em on the doorstep sets Tentpole 'isself, still 'avin' on 'is uniform, same as when 'e was took away from Camp and put in the 'orspital, only 'e 'ad a white bandage tied tight over 'is eyes. And the worst of all was to see 'is rifle as was laid acrost 'is knees, and it all rusty and covered over with dirt, so as yer might be sure 'e 'adn't set eyes on it 'isself for a week, 'e bein' always clean and purtikler, more especial over army things.

"What chur, boy?" we says, comin' up and standin' lookin' at 'im.

"What, Jacko! What, Volley-firer!" 'e says, and we see 'is 'ands cop tight 'old on 'is rifle by the small and the lower band.

Then we set ourselves down on the pavement, leanin' back agen the wall, and says nothink, 'avin' a kind o' feelin' it wasn't no good for us speakin'. And alongside of us set 'is young brother and his two married sisters with some of their babies. And now and then a neighbor or two came up, and stood whisperin', same as round a corpse laid out.

So at last, thinkin' to say somethink, I says: "What price the 'orspital, boy?"

"Oh, that's all right," 'e says, "only for 'avin' nothink to do day nor night."

"Feed yer well?" says Duffy, speakin' as if 'e was ready to start cryin'.

"Yus," 'e says, "five times a day, and plenty of it, same as if yer'd been a race-'orse or somethink o' that."

"Yus, and I tell 'im," says 'is mother, "as that's more nor 'e'll ever be again. Nothink to do—that 'e may 'ave like enough for the rest of 'is life, same as 'is pore father there. But five times food a day 'e'll never 'ave no more." And with that she fair breaks down, sobbin' and cryin' over them military trouseys.

"Now don't yer be takin' on so, Mrs. Philips," says Mrs. Turner, as 'ad come up and was standin' by. "There's lots o' blind in the world, and always 'as been. And I've 'eard say they're a deal 'appier nor what the deaf are, for all yer'd never think it."

"Yus, that's true enough," says one o' the

sisters, "but yer see this is where it is: Ned 'ere was the only one as brought 'er in anythink as yer might call reg'lar. What was it yer was gettin', Ned, for 'elpin' with that Billin'sgate van, and doin' for them two 'orses? Fourteen, wasn't it?"

"And six," says Tentpole.

"And six," she says, "and now she's lost all that, and what's she got to turn to, with father afflicted, and little Dick nothink but only just left school, and all the rest buried, only for us two, as is married out with families, and nothink to spare off ourselves? That's where it is, so it aint no wonder she takes on."

"And as for them military trouseys as she makes up for the firm," says the other sister, "what's the good o' them? Fivepence a pair she gets, and finds her own things, and she not able to make up no more nor four pair a day, work as she will, what with washin' and dressin' of father, and lookin' after the 'ome and all. It don't leave much over when yer've paid the rent."

"No it don't," says Mrs. Philips, still cryin'; "nor, what's more, the landlady—'er as keeps the oil shop—aint 'ad no rent this week neither, and she's awful upset about it. And us as 'adn't never missed a week's rent since we was married! And then that there poor cripple of mine was a fine young feller as it did yer 'eart good to see—same as Ned was only last week."

"You're right," says old Philips; "I was all that, and I never thought as 'ow a son o' mine

'ud be able to boast of bein' more misfortunate nor what 'is father was afore 'im. But now acourse 'e may say what 'e likes. 'Is bad luck beats mine, and I'm not denyin' it. Only, jest you look at that arm, and think there wasn't only Timmo could show a better once! And now, look at it!"

'E stretches out a crooked, 'orrible lookin' thing, more like a big bird's leg nor anythink else, with the claws all bent in.

"And don't you be takin' on so much neither, guv'nor," says Mrs. Turner again. "The lad aint so terrible bad off when all's said. There's 'eaps 'o ways for the blind to bring in an honest penny. 'E might stick a placard on 'is chest, sayin' ow 'e met with the accident in the defense of 'is country, and all the military 'ud give 'im somethink, and no call to lay out a 'alfpenny for it. Or why shouldn't 'e spend sixpence in buyin' a big stick and go tappin' along over the pavements in the West End?"

"One thing," says Duffy; "bein' real blind, 'e'd be saved trouble in not 'avin' to play no tricks and that."

Just then Lina Sullivan 'appens to come up. She walks straight through the middle of us, and sets 'erself down on the doorstep, close alongside of Tentpole.

"Good-evenin', Mrs. Philips," she says; "I've been standin' sentry over my mother and old Spotter. Seein' as neither on 'em can't make enough to live on by theirselves, they've took up a notion as maybe they 'll do better livin'

together. So they've ordered a priest ready to tie 'em up in style, and now I thought it 'ud be safe for me to leave the young people alone, and come round to 'ave a look at yer all."

"As I was sayin', Mrs. Philips, when broke in upon," says Mrs. Turner, as never could abide Lina, "it aint by no means such a bad thing to be blinded. 'E might get a Bible tex' by 'eart, and be settin' at a corner spellin' it out in a book with 'is fingers. That's a thing as lots o' ladies and gen'lemen likes to see done. Or 'e might kid one o' them toffs into settin' 'im up with a street-organ to play around for the little uns to dance to. A man told me once 'e cleared three to five shillin' a day at that game. 'E was wantin' to marry me on it; and there wasn't no doubt 'e kep' 'isself, and afterterward I find 'e 'ad a wife and family to start with, and likely 'e was obligated to give them somethink too. So there's money in it, and a kind o' life yer pore boy might very well foller."

"Yer right, Mrs. Turner," says one o' the sisters, "or, for the matter o' that, 'e could be learned to play the penny-whistle, same as the blind man as stands in Aldgate with long red 'air and a dorg, as leads 'im along at a fair gallop. Years and years 'e's kep' 'isself respectable, and 'e's laid by the money for a new dorg, as says 'bow-wow' for thank yer, same as the last."

"And if it's nothink only a matter of buyin' 'im a bow-wow," says the other sister, "I'm sure yours and mine 'ud be glad to put two 'alf-crown together, and get a real beauty,

wouldn't they, Florrie? And for the choosin' of it—why, Lina, that old Spotter as is to be yer new father might go round the fancy, and pick up a reg'lar good five-bobber. Give the old man somethink useful and respectable to do for once."

"Don't yer get insultin' my father-in-law as is to be," says Lina. "I'm quite able to look after a father myself, thank yer—or an 'usband too, when 'is time comes."

And I see 'er laugh a bit to 'erself.

"Yus," says Mrs. Turner, "and other people's 'usbands beside, they *do* say, and I make no doubt."

"Well," says Lina, "some people's 'usbands do want a deal o' lookin' after, as you say, and there's no denyin' it; more especial if they've tied theirselves to a woman as keeps makin' 'erself a bit less agreeable every mornin' and evenin', and tells 'er 'usband bread's ris' and the baby's brought up its dinner when 'e goes for to kiss 'er."

"She's right," says old Philips, rubbin' 'is 'ands as usual. "Lord! the girl's right."

"Right or not," says Mrs. Philips, "'er talk don't 'elp us to pay the rent, nor stay our stomicks neither, so fer as I can see."

"That's where it is," says Mrs. Turner; "there is some girls as won't do nothink for nobody, only goin' about amusin' theirselves and startin' the men laughin' like fools. And fools they mostly are, if yer don't be always keepin' an eye on 'em."

"And talkin' of eyes," says the lady next

door, "it's come over me as foldin' up paper bags is just the thing for Ned to turn 'is 'and to. Girls does it mostly, but I make no doubt it's as good for the blind to do. Or there's foldin' and countin' of newspapers. My 'usband, bein' a printer, says it 'ud be a real savin' in gas to take on nothink only blind 'ands, not reckonin' a foreman with a light at one end o' the room. The rest 'ud enjoy their work jest as much in the dark, they not knowin' no difference."

"Why, Ned," says Lina on a sudden, "yer'e fair sweatin' with the 'eat! Put down that there gun and——"

"Don't yer be callin' it a gun," says Tentpole; "nobody only civilians talks about guns, barrin' for what you'd call cannons."

"Put down that there bloomin' cat-shooter, then," she says; "and you, Jacko, take 'old on 'im on the other side, and we'll go and give 'im a bit of a cool by the river. Wishin' of yer all a good-night."

"Yer 'll be careful of 'im, Jacko, and not let 'im go walkin' into the water!" says Mrs. Philips. "'E's always been a good son to me up to now, and it 'ud break my 'eart if 'arm come to 'im, for all 'e'll never bring us in another penny."

"Never you mind for me, mother," says Tentpole. "I'm old enough to look after myself. And as to not bringin' in no money, I was goin' into the Reg'lars any'ow so soon as Dick's in work, and it's little enough I could 'ave sent yer then, for all me not costin' yer nothink."

"Good-night, Lina," says old Philips, "and Gor' bless yer. Maybe at one time I could 'ave give yer some kind o' recompense myself, but now I must leave it to Them above, as is very likely more luckier nor what I've been."

So we take 'old on Tentpole, one by each arm, and as we was startin' off, I 'ear Mrs. Turner grumblin', and sayin': "A blessin' on 'er, indeed! When's she ever done what yer'd call solid good for anybody? There's some calls 'er takin' and that. It's easy enough to be takin' when it comes by nature, and no credit to nobody. But solid good—no, yer won't squeedge it out o' *that* blood."

Then we lead Tentpole past the Fire-station and the Children's 'Orspital to the old pier-'ead, and set ourselves down on some timbers as was layin' 'eaped up along the edge of the quay. There was a bit of a moon standin' almost opposite us acrost the river, but a kind of daylight still 'angin' about in the sky, there bein' no clouds, and the air very 'ot, only for a creepin' ghost of a draught comin' up with the water. The tide was runnin' near the flood, and makin' a fine bubblin' noise agen the beams o' the piers. And the river was thick with craft, ridin' up and down the stream—lighters with long sweeps, and big sailin' barges with their brown sails barely flappin', and dashin' little tugs pantin' and foamin' up and down like coppers at a show, and great 'ootin' steamers slowly makin' up for the Pool. And they all went by acrost the track o' the moon like a prercession, black as sin only for the red

and green and yeller lights, tellin' the kind each vessel was. And all the time the thick black smoke kep' pourin' out o' the funnels, and now and then 'ud come a spurt of white steam as well. And the water was all tossed about into great waves, jumpin' this way and that, by the swell and rushin' of them all. So when me and Lina 'ad been lookin' for a bit, and sayin nothink only for an occasional word about the vessels, and Tentpole 'ad been settin' between us with 'is 'ead on 'is knees, not seemin' to listen, Lina turns to 'im on a sudden, and says:

"Yer know, I've always took a kind of a pride in you, Ned."

"Good Gord! What for?" says Tentpole, without lookin' up.

"Oh, don't be askin' what for!" she says. "That's no matter, unless maybe 'cos you never was that sorft and silly sort as keeps 'ankin' round, and is forever on the grin, same as most young fellers."

"And I aint got no chance o' grinnin' again now forever," 'e says. "But that aint no reason for anybody to be proud o' me."

"Ned," she says, "I'm prouder of yer nor what ever I was before."

"Yer 'aven't no cause to be," says 'e.

"Cause be blowed!" says she. "Any fat-'ead can 'ave a cause. I always did say as the man for me must be 'ard as pavin'-stones. Ned, a pavin-stone's no 'arder nor a feather-bed alongside of you."

"It's good of yer to be sayin' so," says 'e; "but I don't feel like it."

"Feelin' don't make no odds," she says. "I'll lay, yer never felt no difference 'twixt you and all the fellers, young and old, as 'ave made love to me. But there was lots o' difference, all the same. And the fust difference of all was as yer wasn't never in love with me yerself. Now was yer, Ned?"

"Oh, blime, Lina! What things yer'e talkin' of!" 'e says. "Yer know I wasn't never much given to thinkin' about girls and that. Else I make no doubt I'd 'ave liked yer well enough, same as other fellers."

"No, yer wouldn't," she says, "not the same, thank Gord! And I knowed yer wasn't given to thinkin' o' such things, and p'r'aps that's just the first cause why I liked yer the best of 'em, But it don't matter for that. I've always knowed yer'd be about as easy to make up to as that there iron post for windin' cables round. But easy or not, it's got to be done now, so it aint no good for you talkin'."

"Don't yer get laughin' at me, Lina," 'e says; "there's things as a man can't 'old up against."

"Gord knows I aint laughin'," she says, leanin up 'er 'ead agen 'is side.

She 'adn't got 'er 'at on, nor nothink at all smart, only for a clean white apron, and a blue-and-red silk 'an'kerchief tight round 'er neck. But she'd stuck a dyin' old tea-rose in 'er dress, and Tentpole could smell it, and feel the sorftness of 'er 'air close agen 'im. And there's many would 'ave give all they knowed just for that.

"I'm not laughin' this time," she goes on.

"I've been thinkin' of it for near a week gone, and it's this way: I know as ten-and-six don't sound overmuch to set up keepin' a man on. But it's more nor what most girls gets at the Ropes, me bein' kind of superior. And I know lots o' girls, more especial in the Jams at Ratcliffe, as make no more nor nine shillin', and get 'eaps o' young fellers wantin' to live with 'em to save theirselves the trouble of doin' work. Now, yer see there's a pile o' difference between nine shillin' and ten-and-six; and I can make it up to eleven by offerin' to clean the stairs and passages and that in our 'ouse. And in time I may be gettin' twelve or fourteen, let alone what the children 'll bring in after they've left the school. And two shillin' a day aint so bad, even if a sixpence of it 'as to go for the rent. And the best of the luck is as mother's just clearin' out in time, and goin' to live with old Spotter. So now yer see where it is. I've thought it all over, I can tell yer! Now, don't yer think yer could do with me, Ned, dear?"

But 'e never says nothink.

"If yer don't," she goes on, with a bit of a laugh, "it 'll be a bad lookout, 'cos yer've got to."

But 'e only set there, sayin' nothink.

"If it's yer people yer'e thinkin' on," she says, "I've thought o' them too. And what I think is as they'll be free of 'avin' to keep yer anyway. And there's little Dick 'll be bringin' in somethink afore you know where yer are, and by the time yer mother's past work we'll be able to spare a bit ourselves."

But still 'e never says nothink; only 'e lets 'er get 'old on 'is 'and.

"And if yer'e thinkin' any o' that blime rot," she goes on, "about not carin' to 'ave a girl workin' for yer, and you doin' nothink, I've thought o' that too, and the one and only cause for me now implorin' of yer to come and live with me, is just 'cos I can't make my fortune without yer, and with yer I can. Ever see me dance, Ned?"

"No," says 'e; "nor never shall now."

"I see yer," says I, "once down 'oppin' last year, and I never see nobody else a patch on it."

"Yus," she says, "it kind o' came to me, did that sort o' dancin'. I dunno 'ow, and I take no credit, but there it is, and there's millions in it, and all slippin' away every evenin' just for want o' somebody to play the proper kind o' music to fit in with it. It's a thing the blokes in railway trains lays across their knees and beats with two sticks, as yer've got to learn, Ned; and I'll sing yer the tunes every night till yer get to know 'em. I always knowed I'd 'ave to live with a man and learn 'im myself afore I'd dance real proper. And as soon as you can play 'em, we'll go round at nights together, you playin', me dancin', and p'r'aps we'll get took on at the Music 'Alls. Oh, bless yer soul! two pound a week won't buy us. And as to Little Scotty, 'e won't 'ave a look in. So yer see, it's nothink only to make money out of yer why I want yer, same as other girls."

But 'e kep' on settin' there like a stone, and

sayin' nothink. Then she takes 'is arm and puts it round 'er neck, and looks up into 'is face same as if 'e could see 'er.

"Speak to us, Ned," she says. "Couldn't yer put up with me? Couldn't yer manage to care for me a bit? It aint nothink only yerself I want, yer know that very well. I've been proud of yer ever so long. And me 'earin' of the thing as 'ad 'appened to yer, I was kind o' prouder of yer nor ever, and always shall be, I dunno for why. Speak, Ned, won't yer?"

Then at last 'e bust out: "O Lina," 'e says, "yer'e a good girl, there aint no question. And if yer wasn't, it 'ud make no manner o' difference to me likin' yer. But, O Lina, yer aint just the same thing as the British Army!"

"That's it! I knowed as that was it!" she says, flarin' out, and shakin' 'is arm from 'er. "It's that British Army. And what 'as the British Army ever done for you, I'd like to know, barrin' only blowin' yer in pieces? Curse the British Army! What's that to me and you? What can the British Army do as I can't do? Tell us that! Any'ow, if yer live with me, I'll soon make it as lively for yer as any army could. You see! But yer shan't live with me now. Go to yer bloomin' army, do! and be blasted, it and you too!"

"I didn't mean to say nothink agen yer, Lina," 'e says; "but I always did kind of aim after the army. I've got a kind o' feelin' for my country, and what's called servin' of 'er. I'm sure I dunno for why."

"No, nor nobody else neither," she says.

"What's yer bloomin' country ever done for you? And 'ere's me ready to do everythink in the world with my body and soul for yer, and it's a pretty way you take o' servin' me, tellin' me as I aint the same as the British Army! And a jolly good thing it 'll be for you if I aint the same, but somethink quite different, when it comes to livin' with me!"

So she sets ragin' as if they'd been married ten year. And then on a sudden she swings round, and puts up 'er 'ead agen 'im as before, and takes 'old on 'is 'and, and she says: "There, dear, there; don't mind for what I say. I don't never mean nothink of it. And I shouldn't never 'ave took a fancy to yer, if yer'd been sorft and easy. Only, if I do better by yer nor what yer country ever did, yer 'll 'ave to grow a kind o' feelin' for me too. Wouldn't it be a kind o' recompense for yer to 'ave me, Ned? There's crowds o' men been in love with me, thank Gord! so I must be worth somethink, I s'pose."

With that she starts putting both 'er arms round 'im; and I thought p'r'aps she'd sooner 'ave me go, and she look to Tentpole for 'erself. So I up, and says good-night.

"Good-night, Jacko," she says; "yer've always been a good lad to me."

So I says good-night again, and leaves 'em settin' alone on the old pier-'ead by the river.

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