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DUSTY DIAMONDS CUT AND POLISHED: A TALE OF CITY ARAB LIFE AND ADVENTURE

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
An Accident and some of its Curious Results

Every one has heard of those ponies—those shaggy, chubby, innocent-looking little creatures —for which the world is indebted, we suppose, to Shetland.

Well, once on a time, one of the most innocent-looking, chubbiest, and shaggiest of Shetland ponies—a dark brown one—stood at the door of a mansion in the west-end of London.

It was attached to a wickerwork vehicle which resembled a large clothes-basket on small wheels. We do not mean, of course, that the pony was affectionately attached to it. No; the attachment was involuntary and unavoidable, by reason of a brand-new yellow leather harness with brass buckles. It objected to the attachment, obviously, for it sidled this way, and straddled that way, and whisked its enormous little tail, and tossed its rotund little head, and stamped its ridiculously small feet; and champed its miniature bit, as if it had been a war-horse of the largest size, fit to carry a Wallace, a Bruce, or a Richard of the Lion-heart, into the midst of raging battle.

And no wonder; for many months had not elapsed since that brown creature had kicked up its little heels, and twirled its tail, and shaken its shaggy mane in all the wild exuberance of early youth and unfettered freedom on the heather hills of its native island.

In the four-wheeled basket sat a little girl whom it is useless to describe as beautiful. She was far beyond that! Her delicate colour, her little straight nose, her sparkling teeth, her rosebud of a mouth, her enormous blue eyes, and floods of yellow hair—pooh! these are not worth mentioning in the same sentence with her expression. It was that which carried all before it, and swept up the adoration of man-and-woman-kind as with the besom of fascination.

She was the only child of Sir Richard Brandon. Sir Richard was a knight and a widower. He was knighted, not because of personal merit, but because he had been mayor of some place, sometime or other, when some one connected with royalty had something important to do with it! Little Diana was all that this knight and widower had on earth to care for, except, of course, his horses and dogs, and guns, and club, and food. He was very particular as to his food. Not that he was an epicure, or a gourmand, or luxurious, or a hard drinker, or anything of that sort—by no means. He could rough it, (so he said), as well as any man, and put up with whatever chanced to be going, but, when there was no occasion for roughing it, he did like to see things well cooked and nicely served; and wine, you know, was not worth drinking—positively nauseous—if it was not of the best.

Sir Richard was a poor man—a very poor man. He had only five thousand a year—a mere pittance; and he managed this sum in such a peculiar way that he never had anything wherewith to help a struggling friend, or to give to the poor, or to assist the various religious and charitable institutions by which he was surrounded; while at certain intervals in the year he experienced exasperating difficulty in meeting the demands of those torments to society, the tradespeople—people who ought to be ashamed of themselves for not being willing to supply the nobility and gentry with food and clothing gratuitously! Moreover, Sir Richard never by any chance laid anything by.

Standing by the pony's head, and making tender efforts to restrain his waywardness, stood a boy —a street boy—a city Arab. To a Londoner any description of this boy would be superfluous, but it may be well to state, for the benefit of the world at large, that the class to which he belonged embodies within its pale the quintessence of rollicking mischief, and the sublimate of consummate insolence.

This remarkable boy was afflicted with a species of dance—not that of Saint Vitus, but a sort of double-shuffle, with a stamp of the right foot at the end—in which he was prone to indulge, consciously and unconsciously, at all times, and the tendency to which he sometimes found it difficult to resist. He was beginning to hum the sharply-defined air to which he was in the habit of performing this dance, when little Diana said, in a silvery voice quite in keeping with her beauty—

"Let go his head, boy; I'm quite sure that he cannot bear restraint."

It may be remarked here that little Di was probably a good judge on that point, being herself nearly incapable of bearing restraint.

"I'd better not, miss," replied the boy with profound respect in tone and manner, for he had yet to be paid for the job; "he seems raither frisky, an' might take a fancy to bolt, you know."

"Let his head go, I say!" returned Miss Diana with a flashing of the blue eyes, and a pursing of the rosebud mouth that proved her to be one of Adam's race after all.

"Vell, now, don't you think," rejoined the boy, in an expostulating tone, "that it would be as veil to vait for the guv'nor before givin' 'im 'is 'ead?"

"Do as I bid you, sir!" said Di, drawing herself up like an empress.

Still the street boy held the pony's head, and it is probable that he would have come off the victor in this controversy, had not Diana's dignified action given to the reins which she held a jerk. The brown pony, deeming this full permission to go on, went off with a bound that overturned the boy, and caused the fore-wheel to strike him on the leg as it passed.

Springing up with the intention of giving chase to the runaway, the little fellow again fell, with a sharp cry of pain, for his leg was broken.

At the same moment Sir Richard Brandon issued from the door of his mansion leisurely, and with an air of calm serenity, pulling on his gloves. It was one of the knight's maxims that, under all circumstances, a gentleman should maintain an appearance of imperturbable serenity. When, however, he suddenly beheld the street boy falling, and his daughter standing up in her wickerwork chariot, holding on to the brown pony like an Amazon warrior of ancient times, his maxim somehow evaporated. His serenity vanished. So did his hat as he bounded from beneath it, and left it far behind in his mad and hopeless career after the runaway.

A policeman, coming up just as Sir Richard disappeared, went to the assistance of the street boy.

"Not much hurt, youngster," he said kindly, as he observed that the boy was very pale, and seemed to be struggling hard to repress his feelings.

"Vell, p'raps I is an' p'raps I ain't, Bobby," replied the boy with an unsuccessful attempt at a smile, for he felt safe to chaff or insult his foe in the circumstances, "but vether hurt or not it vont much matter to you, vill it?"

He fainted as he spoke, and the look of half-humorous impudence, as well as that of pain, gave place to an expression of infantine repose.

The policeman was so struck by the unusual sight of a street boy looking innocent and unconscious, that he stooped and raised him quite tenderly in his arms.

"You'd better carry him in here," said Sir Richard Brandon's butler, who had come out. "I saw it 'appen, and suspect he must be a good deal damaged."

Sir Richard's footman backing the invitation, the boy was carried into the house accordingly, laid on the housemaid's bed, and attended to by the cook, while the policeman went out to look after the runaways.

"Oh! what ever shall we do?" exclaimed the cook, as the boy showed symptoms of returning consciousness.

"Send for the doctor," suggested the housemaid.

"No," said the butler, "send for a cab, and 'ave the boy sent home. I fear that master will blame me for givin' way to my feelin's, and won't thank me for bringin' 'im in here. You know he is rather

averse to the lower orders. Besides, the poor boy will be better attended to at 'ome, no doubt. I dare say you'd like to go 'ome, wouldn't you?" he said, observing that the boy was looking at him with a rather curious expression.

"I dessay I should, if I could," he answered, with a mingled glance of mischief and pain, "but if you'll undertake to carry me, old cock, I'll be 'appy to go."

"I'll send you in a cab, my poor boy," returned the butler, "and git a cabman as I'm acquainted with to take care of you."

"All right! go a'ead, ye cripples," returned the boy, as the cook approached him with a cup of warm soup.

"Oh! ain't it prime!" he said, opening his eyes very wide indeed, and smacking his lips. "I think I'll go in for a smashed pin every day o' my life for a drop o' that stuff. Surely it must be wot they drinks in 'eaven! Have 'ee got much more o' the same on 'and?"

"Never mind, but you drink away while you've got the chance," replied the amiable cook; "there's the cab coming, so you've no time to lose."

"Vell, I *am* sorry I ain't able to 'old more, an' my pockets wont 'old it neither, bein' the wuss for wear. Thankee, missus."

He managed, by a strong effort, to dispose of a little more soup before the cab drew up.

"Where do you live?" asked the butler, as he placed the boy carefully in the bottom of the cab with his unkempt head resting on a hassock, which he gave him to understand was a parting gift from the housemaid.

"Vere do I live?" he repeated. "Vy, mostly in the streets; my last 'ome was a sugar barrel, the one before was a donkey-cart, but I do sometimes condescend to wisit my parents in their mansion 'ouse in Vitechapel."

"And what is your name? Sir Richard may wish to inquire for you—perhaps."

"May he? Oh! I'm sorry I ain't got my card to leave, but you just tell him, John—is it, or Thomas?—Ah! Thomas. I knowed it couldn't 'elp to be one or t'other;—you just tell your master that my name is Robert, better known as Bobby, Frog. But I've lots of aliases, if that name don't please 'im. Good-bye, Thomas. Farewell, and if for ever, then—you know the rest o' the quotation, if your eddication's not bin neglected, w'ich is probable it was. Oh! by the way. This 'assik is the gift of the 'ouse-maid? You observe the answer, cabby, in case you and I may differ about it 'ereafter."

"Yes," said the amused butler, "a gift from Jessie."

"Ah!—jus' so. An' she's tender-'earted an' on'y fifteen. Wots 'er tother name? Summers, eh? Vell, it's prettier than Vinters. Tell 'er I'll not forget 'er. Now, cabman—'ome!"

A few minutes more, and Bobby Frog was on his way to the mansion in Whitechapel, highly delighted with his recent feast, but suffering extremely from his broken limb.

Meanwhile, the brown pony—having passed a bold costermonger, who stood shouting defiance at it, and waving both arms till it was close on him, when he stepped quickly out of its way—eluded a dray-man, and entered on a fine sweep of street, where there seemed to be no obstruction worth mentioning. By that time it had left the agonised father far behind.

The day was fine; the air bracing. The utmost strength of poor little Diana, and she applied it well, made no impression whatever on the pony's tough mouth. Influences of every kind were favourable. On the illogical principle, probably, that being "in for a penny" justified being "in for a pound," the pony laid himself out for a glorious run. He warmed to his work, caused the dust to fly, and the clothes-basket to advance with irregular bounds and swayings as he scampered along, driving many little dogs wild with delight, and two or three cats mad with fear. Gradually he drew towards the more populous streets, and here, of course, the efforts on the part of the public to arrest him became more frequent, also more decided, though not more successful. At last an inanimate object effected what man and boy had failed to accomplish.

In a wild effort to elude a demonstrative cabman near the corner of one of the main thoroughfares, the brown pony brought the wheels of the vehicle into collision with a lamp-post. That lamp-post went down before the shock like a tall head of grain before the sickle. The front wheels doubled up into a sudden embrace, broke loose, and went across the road, one into a greengrocer's shop, the other into a chemist's window. Thus diversely end many careers that begin on a footing of equality! The hind-wheels went careering along the road like a new species of bicycle, until brought up by a donkey-cart, while the basket chariot rolled itself violently round the lamp-post, like a shattered remnant, as if resolved, before perishing, to strangle the author of all the mischief. As to the pony, it stopped, and seemed surprised at first by the unexpected finale, but the look quickly changed—or appeared to change—to one of calm contentment as it surveyed the ruin.

But what of the fair little charioteer? Truly, in regard to her, a miracle, or something little short of one, had occurred. The doctrine that extremes meet contains much truth in it—truth which is illustrated and exemplified more frequently, we think, than is generally supposed. A tremendous accident is often much less damaging to the person who experiences it than a slight one. In little Diana's case, the extremes had met, and the result was absolute safety. She was shot out of her basket carriage after the manner of a sky-rocket, but the impulse was so effective that, instead of causing her to fall on her head and break her pretty little neck, it made her perform a complete somersault, and alight upon her feet. Moreover, the spot on which she alighted was opportune, as well as admirably suited to the circumstances.

At the moment, ignorant of what was about to happen, police-constable Number 666—we are not quite sure of what division—in all the plenitude of power, and blue, and six-feet-two, approached the end of a street entering at right angles to the one down which our little heroine had flown. He was a superb specimen of humanity, this constable, with a chest and shoulders like Hercules, and the figure of Apollo. He turned the corner just as the child had completed her somersault, and received her two little feet fairly in the centre of his broad breast, driving him flat on his back more effectively than could have been done by the best prize-fighter in England!

Number 666 proved a most effectual buffer, for Di, after planting her blow on his chest, sat plump down on his stomach, off which she sprang in an agony of consternation, exclaiming—

"Oh! I have killed him! I've killed him!" and burst into tears.

"No, my little lady," said Number 666, as he rose with one or two coughs and replaced his helmet, "you've not quite done for me, though you've come nearer the mark than any *man* has ever yet accomplished. Come, now, what can I do for you? You're not hurt, I hope?"

This sally was received with a laugh, almost amounting to a cheer, by the half-horrified crowd which had quickly assembled to witness, as it expected, a fatal accident.

"Hurt? oh! no, I'm not hurt," exclaimed Di, while tears still converted her eyes into blue lakelets as she looked anxiously up in the face of Number 666; "but I'm quite sure you must be hurt—awfully. I'm *so* sorry! Indeed I am, for I didn't mean to knock you down."

This also was received by the crowd with a hearty laugh, while Number 666 sought to comfort the child by earnestly assuring her that he was not hurt in the least—only a little stunned at first, but that was quite gone.

"Wot does she mean by knockin' of 'im down?" asked a small butcher's boy, who had come on the scene just too late, of a small baker's boy who had, happily, been there from the beginning.

"She means wot she says," replied the small baker's boy with the dignified reticence of superior knowledge, "she knocked the constable down."

"Wot! a leetle gurl knock a six-foot bobby down?—walk-*er*!"

"Very good; you've no call to b'lieve it unless you like," replied the baker's boy, with a look of pity at the unbelieving butcher, "but she did it, though—an' that's six month with 'ard labour, if it ain't five year."

At this point the crowd opened up to let a maniac enter. He was breathless, hatless, moist, and frantic.

"My child! my darling! my dear Di!" he gasped.

"Papa!" responded Diana, with a little scream, and, leaping into his arms, grasped him in a genuine hug.

"Oh! I say," whispered the small butcher, "it's a melly-drammy—all for nuffin!"

"My!" responded the small baker, with a solemn look, "won't the Lord left-tenant be down on 'em for play-actin' without a licence, just!"

"Is the pony killed?" inquired Sir Richard, recovering himself.

"Not in the least, sir. 'Ere 'e is, sir; all alive an' kickin'," answered the small butcher, delighted to have the chance of making himself offensively useful, "but the hinsurance offices wouldn't 'ave the clo'se-baskit at no price. Shall I order up the remains of your carriage, sir?"

"Oh! I'm so glad he's not dead," said Diana, looking hastily up, "but this policeman was nearly killed, and *I* did it! He saved my life, papa."

A chorus of voices here explained to Sir Richard how Number 666 had come up in the nick of time to receive the flying child upon his bosom.

"I am deeply grateful to you," said the knight, turning to the constable, and extending his hand, which the latter shook modestly while disclaiming any merit for having merely performed his duty —he might say, involuntarily.

"Will you come to my house?" said Sir Richard. "Here is my card. I should like to see you again, and pray, see that some one looks after my pony and—"

"And the remains," suggested the small butcher, seeing that Sir Richard hesitated.

"Be so good as to call a cab," said Sir Richard in a general way to any one who chose to obey.

"Here you are, sir!" cried a peculiarly sharp cabby, who, correctly judging from the state of affairs that his services would be required, had drawn near to bide his time.

Sir Richard and his little daughter got in and were driven home, leaving Number 666 to look after the pony and the remains.

Thus curiously were introduced to each other some of the characters in our tale.

Chapter Two.
The Irresistible Power of Love

Need we remark that there was a great deal of embracing on the part of Di and her nurse when the former returned home? The child was an affectionate creature as well as passionate. The nurse, Mrs Screwbury, was also affectionate without being passionate. Poor Diana had never known a mother's love or care; but good, steady, stout Mrs Screwbury did what in her lay to fill the place of mother.

Sir Richard filled the place of father pretty much as a lamp-post might have done had it owned a child. He illuminated her to some extent—explained things in general, stiffly, and shed a feeble ray around himself; but his light did not extend far. He was proud of her, however, and very fond of her—when good. When not good, he was—or rather had been—in the habit of dismissing her to the nursery.

Nevertheless, the child exercised very considerable and ever-increasing influence over her father; for, although stiff, the knight was by no means destitute of natural affection, and sometimes observed, with moist eyes, strong traces of resemblance to his lost wife in the beautiful child. Indeed, as years advanced, he became a more and more obedient father, and was obviously on the high road to abject slavery.

"Papa," said Di, while they were at luncheon that day, not long after the accident, "I *am* so sorry for that poor policeman. It seems such a dreadful thing to have actually jumped upon him! and oh! you should have heard his poor head hit the pavement, and seen his pretty helmet go spinning along like a boy's top, ever so far. I wonder it didn't kill him. I'm *so* sorry."

Di emphasised her sorrow by laughing, for she had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and the memory of the spinning helmet was strong upon her just then.

"It must indeed have been an unpleasant blow," replied Sir Richard, gravely, "but then, dear, you couldn't help it, you know—and I dare say he is none the worse for it now. Men like him are not easily injured. I fear we cannot say as much for the boy who was holding the pony."

"Oh! I quite forgot about him," exclaimed Di; "the naughty boy! he wouldn't let go the pony's reins when I bid him, but I saw he tumbled down when we set off."

"Yes, he has been somewhat severely punished, I fear, for his disobedience. His leg had been broken. Is it not so, Balls?"

"Yes, sir," replied the butler, "'e 'as 'ad 'is—"

Balls got no farther, for Diana, who had been struck dumb for the moment by the news, recovered herself.

"His leg broken!" she exclaimed with a look of consternation; "Oh! the poor, poor boy!—the dear boy! and it was me did that too, as well as knocking down the poor policeman!"

There is no saying to what lengths the remorseful child would have gone in the way of self-condemnation if her father had not turned her thoughts from herself by asking what had been done for the boy.

"We sent 'im 'ome, sir, in a cab."

"I'm afraid that was a little too prompt," returned the knight thoughtfully. "A broken leg requires careful treatment, I suppose. You should have had him into the house, and sent for a doctor."

Balls coughed. He was slightly chagrined to find that the violation of his own humane feelings had been needless, and that his attempt to do as he thought his master would have wished was in vain.

"I thought, Sir Richard, that you didn't like the lower orders to go about the 'ouse more—"

Again little Di interrupted the butler by asking excitedly where the boy's home was.

"In the neighbour'ood of W'itechapel, Miss Di."

"Then, papa, we will go straight off to see him," said the child, in the tone of one whose mind is fully made up. "You and I shall go together—won't we? good papa!"

"That will do, Balls, you may go. No, my dear Di, I think we had better not. I will write to one of the city missionaries whom I know, and ask him to—"

"No, but, papa—dear papa, we *must* go. The city missionary could never say how very, *very* sorry I am that he should have broken his leg while helping me. And then I should *so* like to sit by him and tell him stories, and give him his soup and gruel, and read to him. Poor, *poor* boy, we *must* go, papa, won't you?"

"Not to-day, dear. It is impossible to go to-day. There, now, don't begin to cry. Perhaps—perhaps to-morrow—but think, my love; you have no idea how dirty—how *very* nasty—the places are in which our lower orders live."

"Oh! yes I have," said Di eagerly. "Haven't I seen our nursery on cleaning days?"

A faint flicker of a smile passed over the knight's countenance.

"True, darling, but the places are far, far dirtier than that. Then the smells. Oh! they are very dreadful—"

"What—worse than *we* have when there's cabbage for dinner?"

"Yes, much worse than that."

"I don't care, papa. We *must* go to see the boy—the poor, *poor* boy, in spite of dirt and smells. And then, you know—let me up on your knee and I'll tell you all about it. There! Well, then, you know, I'd tidy the room up, and even wash it a little. Oh, you can't think how nicely I washed up my doll's room—her corner, you know,—that day when I spilt all her soup in trying to feed her, and then, while trying to wipe it up, I accidentally burst her, and all her inside came out—the sawdust, I mean. It was the worst mess I ever made, but I cleaned it up as well as Jessie herself could have done—so nurse said."

"But the messes down in Whitechapel are much worse than you have described, dear," expostulated the parent, who felt that his powers of resistance were going.

"So much the better, papa," replied Di, kissing her sire's lethargic visage. "I should like *so* much to try if I could clean up something worse than my doll's room. And you've promised, you know."

"No—only said 'perhaps,'" returned Sir Richard quickly.

"Well, that's the same thing; and now that it's all nicely settled, I'll go and see nurse. Good-bye, papa."

"Good-bye, dear," returned the knight, resigning himself to his fate and the newspaper.

Chapter Three.
Poverty Manages to Board out her Infant for Nothing

On the night of the day about which we have been writing, a woman, dressed in "unwomanly rags" crept out of the shadow of the houses near London Bridge. She was a thin, middle-aged woman, with a countenance from which sorrow, suffering, and sin had not been able to obliterate entirely the traces of beauty. She carried a bundle in her arms which was easily recognisable as a baby, from the careful and affectionate manner in which the woman's thin, out-spread fingers grasped it.

Hurrying on to the bridge till she reached the middle of one of the arches, she paused and looked over. The Thames was black and gurgling, for it was intensely dark, and the tide half ebb at the time. The turbid waters chafed noisily on the stone piers as if the sins and sorrows of the great city had been somehow communicated to them.

But the distance from the parapet to the surface of the stream was great. It seemed awful in the woman's eyes. She shuddered and drew back.

"Oh! for courage—only for one minute!" she murmured, clasping the bundle closer to her breast.

The action drew off a corner of the scanty rag which she called a shawl, and revealed a small and round, yet exceedingly thin face, the black eyes of which seemed to gaze in solemn wonder at the scene of darkness visible which was revealed. The woman stood between two lamps in the darkest place she could find, but enough of light reached her to glitter in the baby's solemn eyes as they met her gaze, and it made a pitiful attempt to smile as it recognised its mother.

"God help me! I can't," muttered the woman with a shiver, as if an ice-block had touched her heart.

She drew the rag hastily over the baby's head again, pressed it closer to her breast, retraced her steps, and dived into the shadows from which she had emerged.

This was one of the "lower orders" to whom Sir Richard Brandon had such an objection, whom he found it, he said, so difficult to deal with, (no wonder, for he never tried to deal with them at all, in any sense worthy of the name), and whom it was, he said, useless to assist, because all *he* could do in such a vast accumulation of poverty would be a mere drop in the bucket. Hence Sir Richard thought it best to keep the drop in his pocket where it could be felt and do good—at least to himself, rather than dissipate it in an almost empty bucket. The bucket, however, was not quite empty—thanks to a few thousands of people who differed from the knight upon that point.

The thin woman hastened through the streets as regardless of passers-by as they were of her, until she reached the neighbourhood of Commercial Street, Spitalfields.

Here she paused and looked anxiously round her. She had left the main thoroughfare, and the spot on which she stood was dimly lighted. Whatever she looked or waited for, did not, however, soon appear, for she stood under a lamp-post, muttering to herself, "I *must* git rid of it. Better to do so than see it starved to death before my eyes."

Presently a foot-fall was heard, and a man drew near. The woman gazed intently into his face. It was not a pleasant face. There was a scowl on it. She drew back and let him pass. Then several women passed, but she took no notice of them. Then another man appeared. His face seemed a jolly one. The woman stepped forward at once and confronted him.

"Please, sir," she began, but the man was too sharp for her.

"Come now—you've brought out that baby on purpose to humbug people with it. Don't fancy you'll throw dust in *my* eyes. I'm too old a cock for that. Don't you know that you're breaking the law by begging?"

"I'm *not* begging," retorted the woman, almost fiercely.

"Oh! indeed. Why do you stop me, then?"

"I merely wished to ask if your name is Thompson."

"Ah hem!" ejaculated the man with a broad grin, "well no, madam, my name is *not* Thompson."

"Well, then," rejoined the woman, still indignantly, "you may move on."

She had used an expression all too familiar to herself, and the man, obeying the order with a bow and a mocking laugh, disappeared like those who had gone before him.

For some time no one else appeared save a policeman. When he approached, the woman went past him down the street, as if bent on some business, but when he was out of sight she returned to the old spot, which was near the entrance to an alley.

At last the woman's patience was rewarded by the sight of a burly little elderly man, whose face of benignity was unmistakably genuine. Remembering the previous man's reference to the baby, she covered it up carefully, and held it more like a bundle.

Stepping up to the newcomer at once, she put the same question as to name, and also asked if he lived in Russell Square.

"No, my good woman," replied the burly little man, with a look of mingled surprise and pity, "my name is *not* Thompson. It is Twitter—Samuel Twitter, of Twitter, Slime and—, but," he added, checking himself, under a sudden and rare impulse of prudence, "why do you ask my name and address?"

The woman gave an almost hysterical laugh at having been so successful in her somewhat clumsy scheme, and, without uttering another word, darted down the alley. She passed rapidly round by a back way to another point of the same street she had left—well ahead of the spot where she had stood so long and so patiently that night. Here she suddenly uncovered the baby's face and kissed it passionately for a few moments. Then, wrapping it in the ragged shawl, with its little head out, she laid it on the middle of the footpath full in the light of a lamp, and retired to await the result.

When the woman rushed away, as above related, Mr Samuel Twitter stood for some minutes rooted to the spot, lost in amazement. He was found in that condition by the returning policeman.

"Constable," said he, cocking his hat to one side the better to scratch his bald head, "there are strange people in this region."

"Indeed there are, sir."

"Yes, but I mean *very* strange people."

"Well, sir, if you insist on it, I won't deny that some of them are *very* strange."

"Yes, well—good-night, constable," said Mr Twitter, moving slowly forward in a mystified state of mind, while the guardian of the night continued his rounds, thinking to himself that he had just parted from one of the very strangest of the people.

Suddenly Samuel Twitter came to a full stop, for there lay the small baby gazing at him with its solemn eyes, apparently quite indifferent to the hardness and coldness of its bed of stone.

"Abandoned!" gasped the burly little man.

Whether Mr Twitter referred to the infant's moral character, or to its being shamefully forsaken, we cannot now prove, but he instantly caught the bundle in his arms and gazed at it. Possibly his gaze may have been too intense, for the mild little creature opened a small mouth that bore no proportion whatever to the eyes, and attempted to cry, but the attempt was a failure. It had not strength to cry.

The burly little man's soul was touched to the centre by the sight. He kissed the baby's forehead, pressed it to his ample breast, and hurried away. If he had taken time to think he might have gone to a police-office, or a night refuge, or some such haven of rest for the weary, but when Twitter's feelings were touched he became a man of impulse. He did not take time to think—except to the extent that, on reaching the main thoroughfare, he hailed a cab and was driven home.

The poor mother had followed him with the intention of seeing him home. Of course the cab put an end to that. She felt comparatively easy, however, knowing, as she did, that her child was in the keeping of "Twitter, Slime and —." That was quite enough to enable her to trace Mr Twitter out.

Comforting herself as well as she could with this reflection, she sat down in a dark corner on a cold door-step, and, covering her face with both hands, wept as though her heart would break.

Gradually her sobs subsided, and, rising, she hurried away, shivering with cold, for her thin cotton dress was a poor protection against the night chills, and her ragged shawl was—gone with the baby.

In a few minutes she reached a part of the Whitechapel district where some of the deepest poverty and wretchedness in London is to be found. Turning into a labyrinth of small streets and alleys, she paused in the neighbourhood of the court in which was her home—if such it could be called.

"Is it worth while going back to him?" she muttered. "He nearly killed baby, and it wouldn't take much to make him kill me. And oh! he was so different—once!"

While she stood irresolute, the man of whom she spoke chanced to turn the corner, and ran against her, somewhat roughly.

"Hallo! is that you?" he demanded, in tones that told too clearly where he had been spending the night.

"Yes, Ned, it's me. I was just thinking about going home."

"Home, indeed—'stime to b'goin' home. Where'v you bin? The babby 'll 'v bin squallin' pretty stiff by this time."

"No fear of baby now," returned the wife almost defiantly; "it's gone."

"Gone!" almost shouted the husband. "You haven't murdered it, have you?"

"No, but I've put it in safe keeping, where *you* can't get at it, and, now I know that, I don't care what you do to *me*."

"Ha! we'll see about that. Come along."

He seized the woman by the arm and hurried her towards their dwelling.

It was little better than a cellar, the door being reached by a descent of five or six much-worn steps. To the surprise of the couple the door, which was usually shut at that hour, stood partly open, and a bright light shone within.

"Wastin' coal and candle," growled the man with an angry oath, as he approached.

"Hetty didn't use to be so extravagant," remarked the woman, in some surprise.

As she spoke the door was flung wide open, and an overgrown but very handsome girl peered out.

"Oh! father, I thought it was your voice," she said. "Mother, is that you? Come in, quick. Here's Bobby brought home in a cab with a broken leg."

On hearing this the man's voice softened, and, entering the room, he went up to a heap of straw in one corner whereon our little friend Bobby Frog—the street-Arab—lay.

"Hallo! Bobby, wot's wrong with 'ee? You ain't used to come to grief," said the father, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, and giving him a rough shake.

Things oftentimes "are not what they seem." The shake was the man's mode of expressing sympathy, for he was fond of his son, regarding him, with some reason, as a most hopeful pupil in the ways of wickedness.

"It's o' no use, father," said the boy, drawing his breath quickly and knitting his brows, "you can't stir me up with a long pole now. I'm past that."

"What! have 'ee bin runned over?"

"No—on'y run down, or knocked down."

"Who did it? On'y give me his name an' address, an' as sure as my name's Ned I'll—"

He finished the sentence with a sufficiently expressive scowl and clenching of a huge fist, which had many a time done great execution in the prize ring.

"It wasn't a he, father, it was a she."

"Well, no matter, if I on'y had my fingers on her windpipe I'd squeeze it summat."

"If you did I'd bang your nose! She didn't go for to do it a-purpose, you old grampus," retorted Bobby, intending the remark to be taken as a gentle yet affectionate reproof. "A doctor's bin an' set my leg," continued the boy, "an' made it as stiff as a poker wi' what 'e calls splints. He says I won't be able to go about for ever so many weeks."

"An' who's to feed you, I wonder, doorin' them weeks? An' who sent for the doctor? Was it him as supplied the fire an' candle to-night?"

"No, father, it was me," answered Hetty, who was engaged in stirring something in a small saucepan, the loose handle of which was attached to its battered body by only one rivet; the other rivet had given way on an occasion when Ned Frog sent it flying through the doorway after his retreating wife. "You see I was paid my wages to-night, so I could afford it, as well as to buy some coal and a candle, for the doctor said Bobby must be kept warm."

"Afford it!" exclaimed Ned, in rising wrath, "how can 'ee say you can afford it w'en I 'aven't had enough grog to *half* screw me, an' not a brown left. Did the doctor ask a fee?"

"No, father, I offered him one, but he wouldn't take it."

"Ah—very good on 'im! I wonder them fellows has the cheek to ask fees for on'y givin' advice. W'y, I'd give advice myself all day long at a penny an hour, an' think myself well off too if I got that—better off than them as got the advice anyhow. What are you sittin' starin' at an' sulkin' there for?"

This last remark was addressed gruffly to Mrs Frog, who, during the previous conversation, had seated herself on a low three-legged stool, and, clasping her hands over her knees, gazed at the dirty blank walls in blanker despair.

The poor woman realised the situation better than her drunken husband did. As a bird-fancier he contributed little, almost nothing, to the general fund on which this family subsisted. He was a huge, powerful fellow, and had various methods of obtaining money—some obvious and others mysterious—but nearly all his earnings went to the gin-palace, for Ned was a man of might, and could stand an enormous quantity of drink. Hetty, who worked, perhaps we should say slaved, for a firm which paid her one shilling a week, could not manage to find food for them all. Mrs Frog herself with her infant to care for, had found it hard work at any time to earn a few pence, and now Bobby's active little limbs were reduced to inaction, converting him into a consumer instead of a producer. In short, the glaring fact that the family expenses would be increased while the family income was diminished, stared Mrs Frog as blankly in the face as she stared at the dirty blank wall.

And her case was worse, even, than people in better circumstances might imagine, for the family lived so literally from hand to mouth that there was no time even to think when a difficulty arose or disaster befell. They rented their room from a man who styled it a furnished apartment, in virtue of a rickety table, a broken chair, a worn-out sheet or two, a dilapidated counterpane, four ragged blankets, and the infirm saucepan before mentioned, besides a few articles of cracked or broken crockery. For this accommodation the landlord charged ninepence per day, which sum had to be paid *every night* before the family was allowed to retire to rest! In the event of failure to pay they would have been turned out into the street at once, and the door padlocked. Thus the necessity for a constant, though small, supply of cash became urgent, and the consequent instability of "home" very depressing.

To preserve his goods from the pawnbroker, and prevent a moonlight flitting, this landlord had printed on his sheets the words "stolen from —" and on the blankets and counterpane were stamped the words "stop thief!"

Mrs Frog made no reply to her husband's gruff question, which induced the man to seize an empty bottle, as being the best way of rousing her attention.

"Come, you let mother alone, dad," suggested Bobby, "she ain't a-aggrawatin' of you just now."

"Why, mother," exclaimed Hetty, who was so busy with Bobby's supper, and, withal, so accustomed to the woman's looks of hopeless misery that she had failed to observe anything unusual until her attention was thus called to her, "what ever have you done with the baby?"

"Ah—you may well ask that," growled Ned.

Even the boy seemed to forget his pain for a moment as he now observed, anxiously, that his mother had not the usual bundle on her breast.

"The baby's gone!" she said, bitterly, still keeping her eyes on the blank wall.

"Gone!—how?—lost? killed? speak, mother," burst from Hetty and the boy.

"No, only gone to where it will be better cared for than here."

"Come, explain, old woman," said Ned, again laying his hand on the bottle.

As Hetty went and took her hand gently, Mrs Frog condescended to explain, but absolutely refused to tell to whose care the baby had been consigned.

"Well—it ain't a bad riddance, after all," said the man, as he rose, and, staggering into a corner where another bundle of straw was spread on the floor, flung himself down. Appropriately drawing two of the "stop thief" blankets over him, he went to sleep.

Then Mrs Frog, feeling comparatively sure of quiet for the remainder of the night, drew her stool close to the side of her son, and held such intercourse with him as she seldom had the chance of holding while Bobby was in a state of full health and bodily vigour. Hetty, meanwhile, ministered to them both, for she was one of those dusty diamonds of what may be styled the East-end diggings of London—not so rare, perhaps, as many people may suppose—whose lustre is dimmed and intrinsic value somewhat concealed by the neglect and the moral as well as physical filth by which they are surrounded.

"Of course you've paid the ninepence, Hetty?"

"Yes, mother."

"You might 'ave guessed that," said Bobby, "for, if she 'adn't we shouldn't 'ave bin here."

"That and the firing and candle, with what the doctor ordered, has used up all I had earned, even though I did some extra work and was paid for it," said Hetty with a sigh. "But I don't grudge it, Bobby—I'm only sorry because there's nothing more coming to me till next week."

"Meanwhile there is nothing for *this* week," said Mrs Frog with a return of the despair, as she looked at her prostrate son, "for all I can manage to earn will barely make up the rent—if it does even that—and father, you know, drinks nearly all he makes. God help us!"

"God *will* help us," said Hetty, sitting down on the floor and gently stroking the back of her mother's hand, "for He sent the trouble, and will hear us when we cry to Him."

"Pray to Him, then, Hetty, for it's no use askin' me to join you. I can't pray. An' don't let your father hear, else he'll be wild."

The poor girl bent her head on her knees as she sat, and prayed silently. Her mother and brother, neither of whom had any faith in prayer, remained silent, while her father, breathing stertorously in the corner, slept the sleep of the drunkard.

Chapter Four.
Samuel Twitter astonishes Mrs Twitter and her Friends

In a former chapter we described, to some extent, the person and belongings of a very poor man with five thousand a year. Let us now make the acquaintance of a very rich one with an income of five hundred.

He has already introduced himself to the reader under the name of Samuel Twitter.

On the night of which we write Mrs Twitter happened to have a “few friends” to tea. And let no one suppose that Mrs Twitter’s few friends were to be put off with afternoon tea—that miserable invention of modern times—nor with a sham meal of sweet warm water and thin bread and butter. By no means. We have said that Samuel Twitter was rich, and Mrs Twitter, conscious of her husband’s riches, as well as grateful for them, went in for the substantial and luxurious to an amazing extent.

Unlimited pork sausages and inexhaustible buttered toast, balanced with muffins or crumpets, was her idea of “tea.” The liquid was a secondary point—in one sense—but it was always strong. It was the only strong liquid in fact allowed in the house, for Mr Twitter, Mrs Twitter, and all the little Twitters were members of the Blue Ribbon Army; more or less enthusiastic according to their light and capacity.

The young Twitters descended in a graduated scale from Sammy, the eldest, (about sixteen), down through Molly, and Willie, and Fred, and Lucy, to Alice the so-called “baby”—though she was at that time a remarkably robust baby of four years.

Mrs Twitter’s few friends were aware of her tendencies, and appreciated her hospitality, insomuch that the “few” bade fair to develop by degrees into many.

Well, Mrs Twitter had her few friends to tea, and conviviality was at its height. The subject of conversation was poverty. Mrs Loper, a weak-minded but amiable lady, asserted that a large family with 500 pounds a year was a poor family. Mrs Loper did not know that Mrs Twitter’s income was five hundred, but she suspected it. Mrs Twitter herself carefully avoided giving the slightest hint on the subject.

“Of course,” continued Mrs Loper, “I don’t mean to say that people with five hundred are *very* poor, you know; indeed it all depends on the family. With six children like you, now, to feed and clothe and educate, and with everything so dear as it is now, I should say that five hundred was poverty.”

“Well, I don’t quite agree with you, Mrs Loper, on that point. To my mind it does not so much depend on the family, as on the notions, and the capacity to manage, in the head of the family. I remember one family just now, whose head was cut off suddenly, I may say in the prime of life. A hundred and fifty a year or thereabouts was the income the widow had to count on, and she was left with five little ones to rear. She trained them well, gave them good educations, made most of their garments with her own hands when they were little, and sent one of her boys to college, yet was noted for the amount of time she spent in visiting the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, for whom she had always a little to spare out of her limited income. Now, if wealth is to be measured by results, I think we may say that that poor lady was rich. She was deeply mourned by a large circle of poor people when she was taken home to the better land. Her small means, having been judiciously invested by a brother, increased a little towards the close of life, but she never was what the world esteems rich.”

Mrs Twitter looked at a very tall man with a dark unhandsome countenance, as if to invite his opinion.

“I quite agree with you,” he said, helping himself to a crumpet, “there are some people with small incomes who seem to be always in funds, just as there are other people with large incomes who are always hard-up. The former are really rich, the latter really poor.”

Having delivered himself of these sentiments somewhat sententiously, Mr Crackaby,—that was his name,—proceeded to consume the crumpet.

There was a general tendency on the part of the other guests to agree with their hostess, but one black sheep in the flock objected. He quite agreed, of course, with the general principle that liberality with small means was beautiful to behold as well as desirable to possess—the liberality, not the small means—and that, on the other hand, riches with a narrow niggardly spirit was abominable, but then—and the black sheep came, usually, to the strongest part of his argument when he said "but then"—it was an uncommonly difficult thing, when everything was up to famine prices, and gold was depreciated in value owing to the gold-fields, and silver was nowhere, and coppers were changed into bronze,—exceedingly difficult to practise liberality and at the same time to make the two ends meet.

As no one clearly saw the exact bearing of the black sheep's argument, they all replied with that half idiotic simper with which Ignorance seeks to conceal herself, and which Politeness substitutes for the more emphatic "pooh," or the inelegant "bosh." Then, applying themselves with renewed zest to the muffins, they put about ship, nautically speaking, and went off on a new tack.

"Mr Twitter is rather late to-night, I think?" said Mr Crackaby, consulting his watch, which was antique and turnipy in character.

"He is, indeed," replied the hostess, "business must have detained him, for he is the very soul of punctuality. That is one of his many good qualities, and it is *such* a comfort, for I can always depend on him to the minute,—breakfast, dinner, tea; he never keeps us waiting, as too many men do, except, of course, when he is unavoidably detained by business."

"Ah, yes, business has much to answer for," remarked Mrs Loper, in a tone which suggested that she held business to be an incorrigibly bad fellow; "whatever mischief happens with one's husband it's sure to be business that did it."

"Pardon me, madam," objected the black sheep, whose name, by the way, was Stickler, "business does bring about much of the disaster that often appertains to wedded life, but mischief is sometimes done by other means, such, for instance, as accidents, robberies, murders—"

"Oh! Mr Stickler," suddenly interrupted a stout, smiling lady, named Larrabel, who usually did the audience part of Mrs Twitter's little tea parties, "how *can* you suggest such ideas, especially when Mr Twitter is unusually late?"

Mr Stickler protested that he had no intention of alarming the company by disagreeable suggestions, that he had spoken of accident, robbery, and murder in the abstract.

"There, you've said it all over again," interrupted Mrs Larrabel, with an unwonted frown.

"But then," continued Stickler, regardless of the interruption, "a broken leg, or a rifled pocket and stunned person, or a cut windpipe, may be applicable to the argument in hand without being applied to Mr Twitter."

"Surely," said Mrs Loper, who deemed the reply unanswerable.

In this edifying strain the conversation flowed on until the evening grew late and the party began to grow alarmed.

"I do hope nothing has happened to him," said Mrs Loper, with a solemnised face.

"I think not. I have seen him come home much later than this—though not often," said the hostess, the only one of the party who seemed quite at ease, and who led the conversation back again into shallower channels.

As the night advanced, however, the alarm became deeper, and it was even suggested by Mrs Loper that Crackaby should proceed to Twitter's office—a distance of three miles—to inquire whether and when he had left; while the smiling Mrs Larrabel proposed to send information to the headquarters of the police in Scotland Yard, because the police knew everything, and could find out anything.

"You have no idea, my dear," she said, "how clever they are at Scotland Yard. Would you believe it, I left my umbrellar the other day in a cab, and I didn't know the number of the cab, for

numbers won't remain in my head, nor the look of the cabman, for I never look at cabmen, they are so rude sometimes. I didn't even remember the place where I got into the cab, for I can't remember places when I've to go to so many, so I gave up my umbrellar for lost and was going away, when a policeman stepped up to me and asked in a very civil tone if I had lost anything. He was so polite and pleasant that I told him of my loss, though I knew it would do me no good, as he had not seen the cab or the cabman.

"'I think, madam,' he said, 'that if you go down to Scotland Yard to-morrow morning, you may probably find it there.'

"'Young man,' said I, 'do you take me for a fool!'

"'No, madam, I don't,' he replied.

"'Or do you take my umbrellar for a fool,' said I, 'that it should walk down to Scotland Yard of its own accord and wait there till I called for it?'

"'Certainly not, madam,' he answered with such a pleasant smile that I half forgave him.

"'Nevertheless if you happen to be in the neighbourhood of Scotland Yard to-morrow,' he added, 'it might be as well to call in and inquire.'

"'Thank you,' said I, with a stiff bow as I left him. On the way home, however, I thought there might be something in it, so I did go down to Scotland Yard next day, where I was received with as much civility as if I had been a lady of quality, and was taken to a room as full of umbrellas as an egg's full of meat—almost.

"'You'd know the umbrellar if you saw it, madam,' said the polite constable who escorted me.

"'Know it, sir!' said I, 'yes, I should think I would. Seven and sixpence it cost me—new, and I've only had it a week—brown silk with a plain handle—why, there it is!' And there it was sure enough, and he gave it to me at once, only requiring me to write my name in a book, which I did with great difficulty because of my gloves, and being so nervous. Now, how did the young policeman that spoke to me the day before know that my umbrellar would go there, and how did it get there? They say the days of miracles are over, but I don't think so, for that was a miracle if ever there was one."

"The days of miracles are indeed over, ma'am," said the black sheep, "but then that is no reason why things which are in themselves commonplace should not appear miraculous to the uninstructed mind. When I inform you that our laws compel cabmen under heavy penalties to convey left umbrellas and parcels to the police-office, the miracle may not seem quite so surprising."

Most people dislike to have their miracles unmasked. Mrs Larrabel turned from the black sheep to her hostess without replying, and repeated her suggestion about making inquiries at Scotland Yard —thus delicately showing that although, possibly, convinced, she was by no means converted.

They were interrupted at this point by a hurried knock at the street door.

"There he is at last," exclaimed every one.

"It is his knock, certainly," said Mrs Twitter, with a perplexed look, "but rather peculiar—not so firm as usual—there it is again! Impatient! I never knew my Sam impatient before in all our wedded life. You'd better open the door, dear," she said, turning to the eldest Twitter, he being the only one of the six who was privileged to sit up late, "Mary seems to have fallen asleep."

Before the eldest Twitter could obey, the maligned Mary was heard to open the door and utter an exclamation of surprise, and her master's step was heard to ascend the stair rather unsteadily.

The guests looked at each other anxiously. It might be that to some minds—certainly to that of the black sheep—visions of violated blue-ribbonism occurred. As certainly these visions did *not* occur to Mrs Twitter. She would sooner have doubted her clergyman than her husband. Trustfulness formed a prominent part of her character, and her confidence in her Sam was unbounded.

Even when her husband came against the drawing-room door with an awkward bang—the passage being dark—opened it with a fling, and stood before the guests with a flushed countenance, blazing eyes, a peculiar deprecatory smile, and a dirty ragged bundle in his arms, she did not doubt him.

"Forgive me, my dear," he said, gazing at his wife in a manner that might well have justified the black sheep's thought, "screwed," "I—I—business kept me in the office very late, and then—" He cast an imbecile glance at the bundle.

"What *ever* have you got there, Sam?" asked his wondering wife.

"Goodness me! it moves!" exclaimed Mrs Loper.

"Live poultry!" thought the black sheep, and visions of police cells and penal servitude floated before his depraved mental vision.

"Yes, Mrs Loper, it moves. It is alive—though not very much alive, I fear. My dear, I've found —found a baby—picked it up in the street. Not a soul there but me. Would have perished or been trodden on if I had not taken it up. See here!"

He untied the dirty bundle as he spoke, and uncovered the round little pinched face with the great solemn eyes, which gazed, still wonderingly, at the assembled company.

It is due to the assembled company to add that it returned the gaze with compound interest.

Chapter Five.
Treats still further of Riches, Poverty, Babies, and Police

When Mr and Mrs Twitter had dismissed the few friends that night, they sat down at their own fireside, with no one near them but the little foundling, which lay in the youngest Twitter's disused cradle, gazing at them with its usual solemnity, for it did not seem to require sleep. They opened up their minds to each other thus:—

"Now, Samuel," said Mrs Twitter, "the question is, what are you going to do with it?"

"Well, Mariar," returned her spouse, with an assumption of profound gravity, "I suppose we must send it to the workhouse."

"You know quite well, Sam, that you don't mean that," said Mrs Twitter, "the dear little forsaken mite! Just look at its solemn eyes. It has been clearly cast upon us, Sam, and it seems to me that we are bound to look after it."

"What! with six of our own, Mariar?"

"Yes, Sam. Isn't there a song which says something about luck in odd numbers?"

"And with only 500 pounds a year?" objected Mr Twitter.

"*Only* five hundred. How can you speak so? We are *rich* with five hundred. Can we not educate our little ones?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And entertain our friends?"

"Yes, my love,—with crumpets and tea."

"Don't forget muffins and bloater paste, and German sausage and occasional legs of mutton, you ungrateful man!"

"I don't forget 'em, Mariar. My recollection of 'em is powerful; I may even say vivid."

"Well," continued the lady, "haven't you been able to lend small sums on several occasions to friends—"

"Yes, my dear,—and they are *still* loans," murmured the husband.

"And don't we give a little—I sometimes think too little—regularly to the poor, and to the church, and haven't we got a nest-egg laid by in the Post-office savings-bank?"

"All true, Mariar, and all *your* doing. But for your thrifty ways, and economical tendencies, and rare financial abilities, I should have been bankrupt long ere now."

Mr Twitter was nothing more than just in this statement of his wife's character. She was one of those happily constituted women who make the best and the most of everything, and who, while by no means turning her eyes away from the dark sides of things, nevertheless gave people the impression that she saw only their bright sides. Her economy would have degenerated into nearness if it had not been commensurate with her liberality, for while, on the one hand, she was ever anxious, almost eager, to give to the needy and suffering every penny that she could spare, she was, on the other hand, strictly economical in trifles. Indeed Mrs Twitter's vocabulary did not contain the word trifle. One of her favourite texts of Scripture, which was always in her mind, and which she had illuminated in gold and hung on her bedroom walls with many other words of God, was, "Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." Acting on this principle with all her heart, she gathered up the fragments of time, so that she had always a good deal of that commodity to spare, and was never in a hurry. She gathered up bits of twine and made neat little rings of them, which she deposited in a basket—a pretty large basket—which in time became such a repository of wealth in that respect that the six Twitters never failed to find the exact size and quality of cordage wanted by them—and, indeed, even after the eldest, Sammy, came to the years of discretion, if he had suddenly required a cable suited to restrain a first-rate iron-clad, his mind would, in the first blush of the thing, have reverted to mother's basket!

If friends wrote short notes to Mrs Twitter—which they often did, for the sympathetic find plenty of correspondents—the blank leaves were always torn off and consigned to a scrap-paper box, and the pile grew big enough at last to have set up a small stationer in business. And so with everything that came under her influence at home or abroad. She emphatically did what she could to prevent waste, and became a living fulfilment of the well-known proverb, for as she wasted not she wanted not.

But to return from this digression—

"Well, then," said Mrs Twitter, "don't go and find fault, Samuel," (she used the name in full when anxious to be impressive), "with what Providence has given us, by putting the word 'only' to it, for we are *rich* with five hundred a year."

Mr Twitter freely admitted that he was wrong, and said he would be more careful in future of the use to which he put the word "only."

"But," said he, "we haven't a hole or corner in the house to put the poor thing in. To be sure, there's the coal-cellar and the scuttle might be rigged up as a cradle, but—"

He paused, and looked at his wife. The deceiver did not mean all this to be taken as a real objection. He was himself anxious to retain the infant, and only made this show of opposition to enlist Maria more certainly on his side.

"Not a corner!" she exclaimed, "why, is there not the whole parlour? Do you suppose that a baby requires a four-post bed, and a wash-hand-stand, and a five-foot mirror? Couldn't we lift the poor darling in and out in half a minute? Besides, there is our own room. I feel as if there was an uncomfortable want of some sort ever since *our* baby was transplanted to the nursery. So we will establish the old bassinet and put the mite there."

"And what shall we call it, Maria?"

"Call it—why, call it—call it—Mite—no name could be more appropriate."

"But, my love, Mite, if a name at all, is a man's—that is, it sounds like a masculine name."

"Call it Mita, then."

And so it was named, and thus that poor little waif came to be adopted by that "rich" family.

It seems to be our mission, at this time, to introduce our readers to various homes—the homes of England, so to speak! But let not our readers become impatient, while we lead the way to one more home, and open the door with our secret latch-key.

This home is in some respects peculiar. It is not a poor one, for it is comfortable and clean. Neither is it a rich one, for there are few ornaments, and no luxuries about it. Over the fire stoops a comely young woman, as well as one can judge, at least, from the rather faint light that enters through a small window facing a brick wall. The wall is only five feet from the window, and some previous occupant of the rooms had painted on it a rough landscape, with three very green trees and a very blue lake, and a swan in the middle thereof, sitting on an inverted swan which was meant to be his reflection, but somehow seemed rather more real than himself. The picture is better, perhaps, than the bricks were, yet it is not enlivening. The only other objects in the room worth mentioning are, a particularly small book-shelf in a corner; a cuckoo-clock on the mantel-shelf, an engraved portrait of Queen Victoria on the wall opposite in a gilt frame, and a portrait of Sir Robert Peel in a frame of rosewood beside it.

On a little table in the centre of the room are the remains of a repast. Under the table is a very small child, probably four years of age. Near the window is another small, but older child—a boy of about six or seven. He is engaged in fitting on his little head a great black cloth helmet with a bronze badge, and a peak behind as well as before.

Having nearly extinguished himself with the helmet, the small boy seizes a very large truncheon, and makes a desperate effort to flourish it.

Close to the comely woman stands a very tall, very handsome, and very powerful man, who is putting in the uppermost buttons of a police-constable's uniform.

Behold, reader, the *tableau vivant* to which we would call your attention!

"Where d'you go on duty to-day, Giles," asked the comely young woman, raising her face to that of her husband.

"Oxford Circus," replied the policeman. "It is the first time I've been put on fixed-point duty. That's the reason I'm able to breakfast with you and the children, Molly, instead of being off at half-past five in the morning as usual. I shall be on for a month."

"I'm glad of it, Giles, for it gives the children a chance of seeing something of you. I wish you'd let me look at that cut on your shoulder. Do!"

"No, no, Molly," returned the man, as he pushed his wife playfully away from him. "Hands off! You know the punishment for assaulting the police is heavy! Now then, Monty," (to the boy), "give up my helmet and truncheon. I must be off."

"Not yet, daddy," cried Monty, "I's a pleeceman of the A Division, Number 2, 'ats me, an' I'm goin' to catch a t'ief. I 'mell 'im."

"You smell him, do you? Where is he, d'you think?"

"Oh! I know," replied the small policeman—here he came close up to his father, and, getting on tiptoe, said in a very audible whisper, "he's under de table, but don' tell 'im I know. His name's Joe!"

"All right, I'll keep quiet, Monty, but look alive and nab him quick, for I must be off."

Thus urged the small policeman went on tiptoe to the table, made a sudden dive under it, and collared his little brother.

The arrest, however, being far more prompt than had been expected, the "t'ief" refused to be captured. A struggle ensued, in the course of which the helmet rolled off, a corner of the tablecloth was pulled down, and the earthenware teapot fell with a crash to the floor.

"It's my duty, I fear," said Giles, "to take you both into custody and lock you up in a cell for breaking the teapot as well as the peace, but I'll be merciful and let you off this time, Monty, if you lend your mother a hand to pick up the pieces."

Monty agreed to accept this compromise. The helmet and truncheon were put to their proper uses, and the merciful police-constable went out "on duty."

Chapter Six.
Wealth pays a Visit to Poverty

It was an interesting sight to watch police-constable Number 666 as he went through the performance of his arduous duties that day at the Regent Circus in Oxford Street.

To those who are unacquainted with London, it may be necessary to remark that this circus is one of those great centres of traffic where two main arteries cross and tend to cause so much obstruction, that complete stoppages would become frequent were it not for the admirable management of the several members of the police force who are stationed there to keep order. The "Oxford Circus," as it is sometimes called, is by no means the largest or most crowded of such crossings, nevertheless the tide of traffic is sufficiently strong and continuous there to require several police-constables on constant duty. When men are detailed for such "Fixed-Point" duty they go on it for a month at a time, and have different hours from the other men, namely, from nine in the morning till five in the afternoon.

We have said it was interesting to watch our big hero, Number 666, in the performance of his arduous duties. He occupied the crossing on the city side of the circus.

It was a magnificent afternoon, and all the metropolitan butterflies were out. Busses flowed on in a continuous stream, looking like big bullies who incline to use their weight and strength to crush through all obstruction. The drivers of these were for the most part wise men, and restrained themselves and their steeds. In one or two instances, where the drivers were unwise, a glance from the bright eye of Giles Scott was quite sufficient to keep all right.

And Giles could only afford to bestow a fragmentary glance at any time on the refractory, for, almost at one and the same moment he had to check the impetuous, hold up a warning hand to the unruly, rescue a runaway child from innumerable horse-legs, pilot a stout but timid lady from what we may call refuge-island, in the middle of the roadway, to the pavement, answer an imbecile's question as to the whereabouts of the Tower or Saint Paul's, order a loitering cabby to move on, and look out for his own toes, as well as give moderate attention to the carriage-poles which perpetually threatened the small of his own back.

We should imagine that the premium of insurance on the life of Number 666 was fabulous in amount, but cannot tell.

Besides his great height, Giles possessed a drooping moustache, which added much to his dignified appearance. He was also imperturbably grave, except when offering aid to a lady or a little child, on which occasions the faintest symptoms of a smile floated for a moment on his visage like an April sunbeam. At all other times his expression was that of incorruptible justice and awful immobility. No amount of chaff, no quantity of abuse, no kind of flattery, no sort of threat could move him any more than the seething billows of the Mediterranean can move Gibraltar. Costermongers growled at him hopelessly. Irate cabmen saw that their wisdom lay in submission. Criminals felt that once in his grasp their case was hopeless, just as, conversely, old ladies felt that once under his protection they were in absolute security. Even street-boys felt that references to "bobbies," "coppers," and "slops;" questions as to how 'is 'ead felt up there; who rolled 'im hout so long; whether his mother knew 'e was hout; whether 'e'd sell 'em a bit of 'is legs; with advice to come down off the ladder, or to go 'ome to bed—that all these were utterly thrown away and lost upon Giles Scott.

The garb of the London policeman is not, as every one knows, founded on the principles of aesthetics. Neither has it been devised on utilitarian principles. Indeed we doubt whether the originator of it, (and we are happy to profess ignorance of his name), proceeded on any principle whatever, except the gratification of a wild and degraded fancy. The colour, of course, is not

objectionable, and the helmet might be worse, but the tunic is such that the idea of grace or elegance may not consist with it.

We mention these facts because Giles Scott was so well-made that he forced his tunic to look well, and thus added one more to the already numerous "exceptions" which are said to "prove the rule."

"Allow me, madam," said Giles, offering his right-hand to an elderly female, who, having screwed up her courage to make a rush, got into sudden danger and became mentally hysterical in the midst of a conglomerate of hoofs, poles, horse-heads, and wheels.

The female allowed him, and the result was sudden safety, a gasp of relief, and departure of hysteria.

"Not yet, please," said Giles, holding up a warning right-hand to the crowd on refuge-island, while with his left waving gently to and fro he gave permission to the mighty stream to flow. "Now," he added, holding up the left-hand suddenly. The stream was stopped as abruptly as were the waters of Jordan in days of old, and the storm-staid crew on refuge-island made a rush for the mainland. It was a trifling matter to most of them that rush, but of serious moment to the few whose limbs had lost their elasticity, or whose minds could not shake off the memory of the fact that between 200 and 300 lives are lost in London streets by accidents every year, and that between 3000 and 4000 are more or less severely injured annually.

Before the human stream had got quite across, an impatient hansom made a push. The eagle eye of Number 666 had observed the intention, and in a moment his gigantic figure stood calmly in front of the horse, whose head was raised high above his helmet as the driver tightened the reins violently.

Just then a small slipshod girl made an anxious dash from refuge-island, lost courage, and turned to run back, changed her mind, got bewildered, stopped suddenly and yelled.

Giles caught her by the arm, bore her to the pavement, and turned, just in time to see the hansom dash on in the hope of being overlooked. Vain hope! Number 666 saw the number of the hansom, booked it in his memory while he assisted in raising up an old gentleman who had been overturned, though not injured, in endeavouring to avoid it.

During the lull—for there are lulls in the rush of London traffic, as in the storms of nature,—Giles transferred the number of that hansom to his note-book, thereby laying up a little treat for its driver in the shape of a little trial the next day terminating, probably, with a fine.

Towards five in the afternoon the strain of all this began to tell even on the powerful frame of Giles Scott, but no symptom did he show of fatigue, and so much reserve force did he possess that it is probable he would have exhibited as calm and unwearied a front if he had remained on duty for eighteen hours instead of eight.

About that hour, also, there came an unusual glut to the traffic, in the form of a troop of the horse-guards. These magnificent creatures, resplendent in glittering steel, white plumes, and black boots, were passing westward. Giles stood in front of the arrested stream. A number of people stood, as it were, under his shadow. Refuge-island was overflowing. Comments, chiefly eulogistic, were being freely made and some impatience was being manifested by drivers, when a little shriek was heard, and a child's voice exclaimed:—

"Oh! papa, papa—there's *my* policeman—the one I so nearly killed. He's *not* dead after all!"

Giles forgot his dignity for one moment, and, looking round, met the eager gaze of little Di Brandon.

Another moment and duty required his undivided attention, so that he lost sight of her, but Di took good care not to lose sight of him.

"We will wait here, darling," said her father, referring to refuge-island on which he stood, "and when he is disengaged we can speak to him."

"Oh! I'm *so* glad he's not dead," said little Di, "and p'raps he'll be able to show us the way to my boy's home."

Di had a method of adopting, in a motherly way, all who, in the remotest manner, came into her life. Thus she not only spoke of our butcher and our baker, which was natural, but referred to "my policeman" and "my boy" ever since the day of the accident.

When Giles had set his portion of the traffic in harmonious motion he returned to his island, and was not sorry to receive the dignified greeting of Sir Richard Brandon, while he was delighted as well as amused by the enthusiastic grasp with which Di seized his huge hand in both of her little ones, and the earnest manner in which she inquired after his health, and if she had hurt him much.

"Did they put you to bed and give you hot gruel?" she asked, with touching pathos.

"No, miss, they didn't think I was hurt quite enough to require it," answered Giles, his drooping moustache curling slightly as he spoke.

"I had hoped to see you at my house," said Sir Richard, "you did not call."

"Thank you, sir, I did not think the little service I rendered your daughter worth making so much of. I called, however, the same evening, to inquire for her, but did not wish to intrude on you."

"It would have been no intrusion, friend," returned Sir Richard, with grand condescension. "One who has saved my child's life has a claim upon my consideration."

"A dook 'e must be," said a small street boy in a loud stage whisper to a dray-man—for small street-boys are sown broadcast in London, and turn up at all places on every occasion, "or p'raps," he added on reflection, "'e's on'y a markiss."

"Now then," said Giles to the dray-man with a motion of the hand that caused him to move on, while he cast a look on the boy which induced him to move off.

"By the way, constable," said Sir Richard, "I am on my way to visit a poor boy whose leg was broken on the day my pony ran away. He was holding the pony at the time. He lives in Whitechapel somewhere. I have the address here in my note-book."

"Excuse me, sir, one moment," said Number 666, going towards a crowd which had gathered round a fallen horse. "I happen to be going to that district myself," he continued on returning, "what is the boy's name?"

"Robert—perhaps I should rather say Bobby Frog," answered Sir Richard.

"The name is familiar," returned the policeman, "but in London there are so many—what's his address, sir,—Roy's Court, near Commercial Street? Oh! I know it well—one of the worst parts of London. I know the boy too. He is somewhat noted in that neighbourhood for giving the police trouble. Not a bad-hearted fellow, I believe, but full of mischief, and has been brought up among thieves from his birth. His father is, or was, a bird-fancier and seller of penny articles on the streets, besides being a professional pugilist. You will be the better for protection there, sir. I would advise you not to go alone. If you can wait for five or ten minutes," added Giles, "I shall be off duty and will be happy to accompany you."

Sir Richard agreed to wait. Within the time mentioned Giles was relieved, and, entering a cab with his friends, drove towards Whitechapel. They had to pass near our policeman's lodgings on the way.

"Would you object, sir, stopping at my house for five minutes?" he asked.

"Certainly not," returned the knight, "I am in no hurry."

Number 666 stopped the cab, leaped out and disappeared through a narrow passage. In less than five minutes a very tall gentlemanly man issued from the same passage and approached them. Little Di opened her blue eyes to their very uttermost. It was *her* policeman in plain clothes!

She did not like the change at all at first, but before the end of the drive got used to him in his new aspect—all the more readily that he seemed to have cast off much of his stiffness and reserve with his blue skin.

Near the metropolitan railway station in Whitechapel the cab was dismissed, and Giles led the father and child along the crowded thoroughfare until they reached Commercial Street, along which they proceeded a short distance.

"We are now near some of the worst parts of London, sir," said Giles, "where great numbers of the criminal and most abandoned characters dwell."

"Indeed," said Sir Richard, who did not seem to be much gratified by the information.

As for Di, she was nearly crying. The news that *her* boy was a thief and was born in the midst of such naughty people had fallen with chilling influence on her heart, for she had never thought of anything but the story-book "poor but honest parents!"

"What large building is that?" inquired the knight, who began to wish that he had not given way to his daughter's importunities, "the one opposite, I mean, with placards under the windows."

"That is the well-known Home of Industry, instituted and managed by Miss Macpherson and a staff of volunteer workers. They do a deal of good, sir, in this neighbourhood."

"Ah! indeed," said Sir Richard, who had never before heard of the Home of Industry. "And, pray, what particular industry does this Miss Mac— what did you call her?"

"Macpherson. The lady, you know, who sends out so many rescued waifs and strays to Canada, and spends all her time in caring for the poorest of the poor in the East-End and in preaching the gospel to them. You've often seen accounts of her work, no doubt, in the *Christian*?"

"Well—n–no. I read the *Times*, but, now you mention it, I have some faint remembrance of seeing reference to such matters. Very self-denying, no doubt, and praiseworthy, though I must say that I doubt the use of preaching the gospel to such persons. From what I have seen of these lowest people I should think they were too deeply sunk in depravity to be capable of appreciating the lofty and sublime sentiments of Christianity."

Number 666 felt a touch of surprise at these words, though he was too well-bred a policeman to express his feelings by word or look. In fact, although not pre-eminently noted for piety, he had been led by training, and afterwards by personal experience, to view this matter from a very different standpoint from that of Sir Richard. He made no reply, however, but, turning round the corner of the Home of Industry, entered a narrow street which bore palpable evidence of being the abode of deepest poverty. From the faces and garments of the inhabitants it was also evidently associated with the deepest depravity.

As little Di saw some of the residents sitting on their doorsteps with scratched faces, swelled lips and cheeks, and dishevelled hair, and beheld the children in half-naked condition rolling in the kennel and extremely filthy, she clung closer to her father's side and began to suspect there were some phases of life she had never seen—had not even dreamt of!

What the knight's thoughts were we cannot tell, for he said nothing, but disgust was more prominent than pity on his fine countenance. Those who sat on the doorsteps, or lolled with a dissipated air against the door-posts, seemed to appreciate him at his proper value, for they scowled at him as he passed. They recognised Number 666, however, (perhaps by his bearing), and gave him only a passing glance of indifference.

"You said it would be dangerous for me to come here by myself," said Sir Richard, turning to Giles, as he entered another and even worse street. "Are they then so violent?"

"Many of them are among the worst criminals in London, sir. Here is the court of which you are in search: Roy's Court."

As he spoke, Ned Frog staggered out of his own doorway, clenched his fists, and looked with a vindictive scowl at the strangers. A second glance induced him to unclench his fists and reel round the corner on his way to a neighbouring grog-shop. Whatever other shops may decay in that region, the grog-shops, like noxious weeds, always flourish.

The court was apparently much deserted at that hour, for the men had not yet returned from their work—whatever that might be—and most of the women were within doors.

"This is the house," continued Giles, descending the few steps, and tapping at the door; "I have been here before. They know me."

The door was opened by Hetty, and for the first time since entering those regions of poverty and crime, little Di felt a slight rise in her spirits, for through Hetty's face shone the bright spirit within; albeit the shining was through some dirt and dishevelment, good principle not being able altogether to overcome the depressing influences of extreme poverty and suffering.

"Is your mother at home, Hetty!"

"Oh! yes, sir. Mother, here's Mr Scott. Come in, sir. We are so glad to see you, and—"

She stopped, and gazed inquiringly at the visitors who followed.

"I've brought some friends of Bobby to inquire for him. Sir Richard Brandon—Mrs Frog."

Number 666 stood aside, and, with something like a smile on his face, ceremoniously presented Wealth to Poverty.

Wealth made a slightly confused bow to Poverty, and Poverty, looking askance at Wealth, dropt a mild courtesy.

"Vell now, I'm a Dutchman if it ain't the hangel!" exclaimed a voice in the corner of the small room, before either Wealth or Poverty could utter a word.

"Oh! it's *my* boy," exclaimed Di with delight, forgetting or ignoring the poverty, dirt, and extremely bad air, as she ran forward and took hold of Bobby's hand.

It was a pre-eminently dirty hand, and formed a remarkable contrast to the little hands that grasped it!

The small street boy was, for the first time in his life, bereft of speech! When that faculty returned, he remarked in language which was obscure to Di:—

"Vell, if this ain't a go!"

"What is a go?" asked Di with innocent surprise. Instead of answering, Bobby Frog burst into a fit of laughter, but stopped rather suddenly with an expression of pain.

"Oh! 'old on! I say. This won't do. Doctor 'e said I musn't larf, 'cause it shakes the leg too much. But, you know, wot's a cove to do ven a hangel comes to him and axes sitch rum questions?"

Again he laughed, and again stopped short in pain.

"I'm *so* sorry! Does it feel *very* painful? You can't think how constantly I've been thinking of you since the accident; for it was all my fault. If I hadn't jumped up in such a passion, the pony wouldn't have run away, and you wouldn't have been hurt. I'm so *very, very* sorry, and I got dear papa to bring me here to tell you so, and to see if we could do anything to make you well."

Again Bobby was rendered speechless, but his mind was active.

"Wot! I ain't dreamin', am I? 'As a hangel *really* come to my bedside all the vay from the Vest-end, an' brought 'er dear pa'—vich means the guv'nor, I fancy—all for to tell me—a kid whose life is spent in 'movin' on'—that she's wery, wery, sorry I've got my leg broke, an' that she's bin an' done it, an' she would like to know if she can do hanythink as'll make me vell! But it ain't true. It's a big lie! I'm dreamin', that's all. I've been took to hospital, an' got d'lirious—that's wot it is. I'll try to sleep!"

With this end in view he shut his eyes, and remained quite still for a few seconds, and when Di looked at his pinched and pale face in this placid condition, the tears *would* overflow their natural boundary, and sobs *would* rise up in her pretty throat, but she choked them back for fear of disturbing her boy.

Presently the boy opened his eyes.

"Wot, are you there yet?" he asked.

"Oh yes. Did you think I was going away?" she replied, with a look of innocent surprise. "I won't leave you now. I'll stay here and nurse you, if papa will let me. I have slept once on a shake-down, when I was forced by a storm to stay all night at a juv'nile party. So if you've a corner here, it will do nicely—"

"My dear child," interrupted her amazed father, "you are talking nonsense. And—do keep a little further from the bed. There may be—you know—infection—"

"Oh! you needn't fear infection here, sir," said Mrs Frog, somewhat sharply. "We are poor enough, God knows, though I *have* seen better times, but we keep ourselves pretty clean, though we can't afford to spend much on soap when food is so dear, and money so scarce—so *very* scarce!"

"Forgive me, my good woman," said Sir Richard, hastily, "I did not mean to offend, but circumstances would seem to favour the idea—of—of—"

And here Wealth—although a bank director and chairman of several boards, and capable of making a neat, if weakly, speech on economic laws and the currency when occasion required—was dumb before Poverty. Indeed, though he had often theorised about that stricken creature, he had never before fairly hunted her down, run her into her den, and fairly looked her in the face.

"The fact is, Mrs Frog," said Giles Scott, coming to the rescue, "Sir Richard is anxious to know something about your affairs—your family, you know, and your means of—by the way, where is baby?" he said looking round the room.

"She's gone lost," said Mrs Frog.

"Lost?" repeated Giles, with a significant look.

"Ay, lost," repeated Mrs Frog, with a look of equal significance.

"Bless me, how did you lose your child?" asked Sir Richard, in some surprise.

"Oh! sir, that often happens to us poor folk. We're used to it," said Mrs Frog, in a half bantering half bitter tone.

Sir Richard suddenly called to mind the fact—which had not before impressed him, though he had read and commented on it—that 11,835 children under ten years of age had been lost that year, (and it was no exceptional year, as police reports will show), in the streets of London, and that 23 of these children were *never found*.

He now beheld, as he imagined, one of the losers of the lost ones, and felt stricken.

"Well now," said Giles to Mrs Frog, "let's hear how you get along. What does your husband do?"

"He mostly does nothin' but drink. Sometimes he sells little birds; sometimes he sells penny watches or boot-laces in Cheapside, an' turns in a little that way, but it all goes to the grog-shop; none of it comes here. Then he has a mill now an' again—"

"A mill?" said Sir Richard,—"is it a snuff or flour—"

"He's a professional pugilist," explained Giles.

"An' he's employed at a music-hall," continued Mrs Frog, "to call out the songs an' keep order. An' Bobby always used to pick a few coppers by runnin' messages, sellin' matches, and odd jobs. But he's knocked over now."

"And yourself. How do you add to the general fund?" asked Sir Richard, becoming interested in the household management of Poverty.

"Well, I char a bit an' wash a bit, sir, when I'm well enough—which ain't often. An' sometimes I lights the Jews' fires for 'em, an' clean up their 'earths on Saturdays—w'ich is their Sundays, sir. But Hetty works like a horse. It's she as keeps us from the work'us, sir. She's got employment at a slop shop, and by workin' 'ard all day manages to make about one shillin' a week."

"I beg your pardon—how much?"

"One shillin', sir."

"Ah, you mean one shilling a day, I suppose."

"No, sir, I mean one shillin' a *week*. Mr Scott there knows that I'm tellin' what's true."

Giles nodded, and Sir Richard said, "ha–a–hem," having nothing more lucid to remark on such an amazing financial problem as was here set before him.

"But," continued Mrs Frog, "poor Hetty has had a sad disappointment this week—"

"Oh! mother," interrupted Hetty, "don't trouble the gentleman with that. Perhaps he wouldn't understand it, for of course he hasn't heard about all the outs and ins of slop-work."

"Pardon me, my good girl," said Sir Richard, "I have not, as you truly remark, studied the details of slop-work minutely, but my mind is not unaccustomed to financial matters. Pray let me hear about this—"

A savage growling, something between a mastiff and a man, outside the door, here interrupted the visitor, and a hand was heard fumbling about the latch. As the hand seemed to lack skill to open the door the foot considerately took the duty in hand and burst it open, whereupon the huge frame of Ned Frog stumbled into the room and fell prostrate at the feet of Sir Richard, who rose hastily and stepped back.

The pugilist sprang up, doubled his ever ready fists, and, glaring at the knight, asked savagely:

"Who the—"

He was checked in the utterance of a ferocious oath, for at that moment he encountered the grave eye of Number 666.

Relaxing his fists he thrust them into his coat-pockets, and, with a subdued air, staggered out of the house.

"My 'usband, sir," said Mrs Frog, in answer to her visitor's inquiring glance.

"Oh! is that his usual mode of returning home?"

"No, sir," answered Bobby from his corner, for he was beginning to be amused by the succession of surprises which Wealth was receiving, "'e don't always come in so. Sometimes 'e sends 'is 'ead first an' the feet come afterwards. In any case the furniture's apt to suffer, not to mention the in'abitants, but you've saved us to-night, sir, or, raither, Mr Scott 'as saved both us an' you."

Poor little Di, who had been terribly frightened, clung closer to her father's arm on hearing this.

"Perhaps," said Sir Richard, "it would be as well that we should go, in case Mr Frog should return."

He was about to say good-bye when Di checked him, and, despite her fears, urged a short delay.

"We haven't heard, you know, about the slops yet. Do stop just one minute, dear papa. I wonder if it's like the beef-tea nurse makes for me when I'm ill."

"It's not that kind of slops, darling, but ready-made clothing to which reference is made. But you are right. Let us hear about it, Miss Hetty."

The idea of "Miss" being applied to Hetty, and slops compared to beef-tea proved almost too much for the broken-legged boy in the corner, but he put strong constraint on himself and listened.

"Indeed, sir, I do not complain," said Hetty, quite distressed at being thus forcibly dragged into notice. "I am thankful for what has been sent—indeed I am—only it *was* a great disappointment, particularly at this time, when we so much needed all we could make amongst us."

She stopped and had difficulty in restraining tears. "Go on, Hetty," said her mother, "and don't be afraid. Bless you, he's not goin' to report what you say."

"I know that, mother. Well, sir, this was the way on it. They sometimes—"

"Excuse me—who are 'they'?"

"I beg pardon, sir, I—I'd rather not tell."

"Very well. I respect your feelings, my girl. Some slop-making firm, I suppose. Go on."

"Yes, sir. Well—they sometimes gives me extra work to do at home. It do come pretty hard on me after goin' through the regular day's work, from early mornin' till night, but then, you see, it brings in a little more money—and, I'm strong, thank God."

Sir Richard looked at Hetty's thin and colourless though pretty face, and thought it possible that she might be stronger with advantage.

"Of late," continued the girl, "I've bin havin' extra work in this way, and last week I got twelve children's ulsters to make up. This job when finished would bring me six and sixpence."

"How much?"

"Six and sixpence, sir."

"For the whole twelve?" asked Sir Richard.

"Yes, sir—that was sixpence halfpenny for makin' up each ulster. It's not much, sir."

"No," murmured Wealth in an absent manner; "sixpence halfpenny is *not* much."

"But when I took them back," continued Hetty—and here the tears became again obstreperous and difficult to restrain—"the master said he'd forgot to tell me that this order was for the colonies, that he had taken it at a very low price, and that he could only give me three shillin's for the job. Of—of course three shillin's is better the nothin', but after workin' hard for such a long long time an' expectin' six, it was—"

Here the tears refused to be pent up any longer, and the poor girl quietly bending forward hid her face in her hand.

"Come, I think we will go now," said Sir Richard, rising hastily. "Good-night, Mrs Frog, I shall probably see you again—at least—you shall hear from me. Now, Di—say good-night to your boy."

In a few minutes Sir Richard stood outside, taking in deep draughts of the comparatively fresher air of the court.

"The old screw," growled Bobby, when the door was shut. "'E didn't leave us so much as a single bob—not even a brown, though 'e pretends that six of 'em ain't much."

"Don't be hard on him, Bobby," said Hetty, drying her eyes; "he spoke very kind, you know, an' p'raps he means to help us afterwards."

"Spoke kind," retorted the indignant boy; "I tell 'ee wot, Hetty, you're far too soft an' forgivin'. I s'pose that's wot they teaches you in Sunday-school at George Yard—eh? Vill speakin' kind feed us, vill it clothe us, vill it pay for our lodgin's!"

The door opened at that moment, and Number 666 re-entered.

"The gentleman sent me back to give you this, Mrs Frog," laying a sovereign on the rickety table. "He said he didn't like to offer it to you himself for fear of hurting your feelings, but I told him he needn't be afraid on that score! Was I right, Missis? Look well after it, now, an' see that Ned don't get his fingers on it."

Giles left the room, and Mrs Frog, taking up the piece of gold, fondled it for some time in her thin fingers, as though she wished to make quite sure of its reality. Then wrapping it carefully in a piece of old newspaper, she thrust it into her bosom.

Bobby gazed at her in silence up to this point, and then turned his face to the wall. He did not speak, but we cannot say that he did not pray, for, mentally he said, "I beg your parding, old gen'l'm'n, an' I on'y pray that a lot of fellers like you may come 'ere sometimes to 'urt our feelin's in that vay!"

At that moment Hetty bent over the bed, and, softly kissing her brother's dirty face, whispered, "Yes, Bobby, that's what they teach me in Sunday-school at George Yard."

Thereafter Wealth drove home in a cab, and Poverty went to bed in her rags.

Chapter Seven.
Bicycling and its Occasional Results

It is pleasant to turn from the smoke and turmoil of the city to the fresh air and quiet of the country.

To the man who spends most of his time in the heart of London, going into the country—even for a short distance—is like passing into the fields of Elysium. This was, at all events, the opinion of Stephen Welland; and Stephen must have been a good judge, for he tried the change frequently, being exceedingly fond of bicycling, and occasionally taking what he termed long spins on that remarkable instrument.

One morning, early in the summer-time, young Welland, (he was only eighteen), mounted his iron horse in the neighbourhood of Kensington, and glided away at a leisurely pace through the crowded streets. Arrived in the suburbs of London he got up steam, to use his own phrase, and went at a rapid pace until he met a "chum," by appointment. This chum was also mounted on a bicycle, and was none other than our friend Samuel Twitter, Junior—known at home as Sammy, and by his companions as Sam.

"Isn't it a glorious day, Sam?" said Welland as he rode up and sprang off his steed.

"Magnificent!" answered his friend, also dismounting and shaking hands. "Why, Stephen, what an enormous machine you ride!"

"Yes, it's pretty high—48 inches. My legs are long, you see. Well, where are we to run to-day?"

"Wherever you like," said Sam, "only let it be a short run, not more than forty miles, for I've got an appointment this afternoon with my old dad which I can't get off."

"That'll do very well," said Welland, "so we can go round by—"

Here he described a route by country road and village, which we pretend not to remember. It is sufficient to know that it represented the required "short" run of forty miles—such is the estimate of distance by the youth of the present day!

"Now then, off we go," said Welland, giving his wheel—he quite ignored the existence of the little thing at the back—a shove, putting his left foot on the treadle, and flinging his right leg gracefully over.

Young Twitter followed suit, but Sammy was neither expert nor graceful. True, he could ride easily, and travel long distances, but he could only mount by means of the somewhat clumsy process of hopping behind for several yards.

Once up, however, he went swiftly enough alongside his tall companion, and the two friends thereafter kept abreast.

"Oh! isn't it a charming sensation to have the cool air fanning one's cheeks, and feel the soft tremor of the wheel, and see the trees and houses flow past at such a pace? It is the likest thing to flying I ever felt," said Welland, as they descended a slight incline at, probably, fifteen miles an hour.

"It is delightful," replied Sam, "but, I say, we better put on the brakes here a bit. It gets much steeper further down."

Instead of applying the brake, however, young Welland, in the exuberance of his joy, threw his long legs over the handles, and went down the slope at railway speed, ready, as he remarked, for a jump if anything should go wrong.

Twitter was by no means as bold as his friend, but, being ashamed to show the white feather, he quietly threw his shorter legs over the handles, and thus the two, perched—from a fore-and-aft point of view—upon nothing, went in triumph to the bottom of the hill.

A long stretch of smooth level road now lay before them. It required the merest touch on the treadles to send them skimming along like skaters on smooth ice, or swallows flying low. Like gentle

ghosts they fleeted along with little more than a muffled sound, for their axles turned in ball-sockets and their warning bells were silent save when touched.

Onward they went with untiring energy, mile after mile, passing everything on the way—pedestrians, equestrians, carts and gigs; driving over the level ground with easy force, taking the hills with a rush to keep up the pace, and descending on the other sides at what Welland styled a "lightning run."

Now they were skimming along a road which skirted the margin of a canal, the one with hands in his coat-pockets, the other with his arms crossed, and both steering with their feet; now passing under a railway-arch, and giving a wild shout, partly to rouse the slumbering echoes that lodged there, and partly to rouse the spirit of a small dog which chanced to be passing under it—in both cases successfully! Anon they were gliding over a piece of exposed ground on which the sun beat with intense light, causing their shadows to race along with them. Again they were down in a hollow, gliding under a row of trees, where they shut off a little of the steam and removed their caps, the better to enjoy the grateful shade. Soon they were out in the sunshine again, the spokes of their wheels invisible as they topped a small eminence from the summit of which they took in one comprehensive view of undulating lands, with villages scattered all round, farm-houses here and there, green fields and flowering meadows, traversed by rivulet or canal, with cattle, sheep, and horses gazing at them in silent or startled wonder, and birds twittering welcome from the trees and hedge-rows everywhere.

Now they were crossing a bridge and nearing a small town where they had to put hands to the handles again and steer with precaution, for little dogs had a tendency to bolt out at them from unexpected corners, and poultry is prone to lose its heads and rush into the very jaws of danger, in a cackling effort to avoid it. Stray kittens and pigs, too, exhibited obstinate tendencies, and only gave in when it was nearly too late for repentance. Little children, also, became sources of danger, standing in the middle of roads until, perceiving a possible catastrophe, they dashed wildly aside—always to the very side on which the riders had resolved to pass,—and escaped by absolute miracle!

Presently they came to a steep hill. It was not steep enough to necessitate dismounting, but it rendered a rush inadvisable. They therefore worked up slowly, and, on gaining the top, got off to breathe and rest a while.

"That *was* a glorious run, wasn't it, Sam?" said Welland, flicking the dust from his knees with his handkerchief. "What d'ye say to a glass of beer?"

"Can't do it, Stephen, I'm Blue Ribbon."

"Oh! nonsense. Why not do as I do—drink in moderation?"

"Well, I didn't think much about it when I put it on," said Sam, who was a very sensitive, and not very strong-minded youth; "the rest of us did it, you know, by father's advice, and I joined because they did."

Welland laughed rather sarcastically at this, but made no rejoinder, and Sam, who could not stand being laughed at, said—

"Well, come, I'll go in for one glass. I'll be my own doctor, and prescribe it medicinally! Besides, it's an exceptional occasion this, for it is awfully hot."

"It's about the best run I ever had in the same space of time," said Welland on quitting the beer shop.

"First-rate," returned Sam, "I wish my old dad could ride with us. He *would* enjoy it so."

"Couldn't we bring him out on a horse? He could ride that, I suppose?"

"Never saw him on a horse but once," said Sam, "and that time he fell off. But it's worth suggesting to him."

"Better if he got a tricycle," said Welland.

"I don't think that would do, for he's too old for long rides, and too short-winded. Now, Stephen, I'm not going to run down this hill. We *must* take it easy, for it's far too steep."

"Nonsense, man, it's nothing to speak of; see, I'll go first and show you the way."

He gave the treadle a thrust that sent him off like an arrow from a bow.

"Stay! there's a caravan or something at the bottom—wild beasts' show, I think! Stop! hold on!"

But Sam Twitter shouted in vain. Welland's was a joyous spirit, apt to run away with him. He placed his legs over the handles for security, and allowed the machine to run. It gathered speed as it went, for the hill became steeper, insomuch that the rider once or twice felt the hind-wheel rise, and had to lean well back to keep it on the ground. The pace began to exceed even Welland's idea of pleasure, but now it was too late to use the brake, for well did he know that on such a slope and going at such a pace the slightest check on the front wheel would send him over. He did not feel alarmed however, for he was now near the bottom of the hill, and half a minute more would send him in safety on the level road at the foot.

But just at the foot there was a sharpish turn in the road, and Welland looked at it earnestly. At an ordinary pace such a turn could have been easily taken, but at such a rate as he had by that time attained, he felt it would require a tremendous lean over to accomplish it. Still he lost no confidence, for he was an athlete by practice if not by profession, and he gathered up his energies for the moment of action.

The people of the caravan—whoever they were—had seen him coming, and, beginning to realise his danger to some extent, had hastily cleared the road to let him pass.

Welland considered the rate of speed; felt, rather than calculated, the angle of inclination; leaned over boldly until the tire almost slipped sideways on the road, and came rushing round with a magnificent sweep, when, horrible sight! a slight ridge of what is called road-metal crossed the entire road from side to side! A drain or water pipe had recently been repaired, and the new ridge had not yet been worn down by traffic. There was no time for thought or change of action. Another moment and the wheel was upon it, the crash came, and the rider went off with such force that he was shot well in advance of the machine, as it went with tremendous violence into the ditch. If Welland's feet had been on the treadles he must have turned a complete somersault. As it was he alighted on his feet, but came to the ground with such force that he failed to save himself. One frantic effort he made and then went down headlong and rolled over on his back in a state of insensibility.

When Sam Twitter came to the bottom of the hill with the brake well applied he was able to check himself in time to escape the danger, and ran to where his friend lay.

For a few minutes the unfortunate youth lay as if he had been dead. Then his blood resumed its flow, and when the eyes opened he found Sam kneeling on one side of him with a smelling bottle which some lady had lent him, and a kindly-faced elderly man with an iron-grey beard kneeling on the other side and holding a cup of water to his lips.

"That's right, Stephen, look up," said Sam, who was terribly frightened, "you're not much hurt, are you?"

"Hurt, old fellow, eh?" sighed Stephen, "why should I be hurt? Where am I? What has happened?"

"Take a sip, my young friend, it will revive you," said the man with the kindly face. "You have had a narrow escape, but God has mercifully spared you. Try to move now; gently—we must see that no bones have been broken before allowing you to rise."

By this time Welland had completely recovered, and was anxious to rise; all the more that a crowd of children surrounded him, among whom he observed several ladies and gentlemen, but he lay still until the kindly stranger had felt him all over and come to the conclusion that no serious damage had been done.

"Oh! I'm all right, thank you," said the youth on rising, and affecting to move as though nothing had happened, but he was constrained to catch hold of the stranger rather suddenly, and sat down on the grass by the road-side.

"I do believe I've got a shake after all," he said with a perplexed smile and sigh. "But," he added, looking round with an attempt at gaiety, "I suspect my poor bicycle has got a worse shake. Do look after it, Sam, and see how it is."

Twitter soon returned with a crestfallen expression. "It's done for, Stephen. I'm sorry to say the whole concern seems to be mashed up into a kind of wire-fencing!"

"Is it past mending, Sam?"

"Past mending by any ordinary blacksmith, certainly. No one but the maker can doctor it, and I should think it would take him a fortnight at least."

"What is to be done?" said Stephen, with some of his companion's regret of tone. "What a fool I was to take such a hill—spoilt such a glorious day too—for you as well as myself, Sam. I'm *very* sorry, but that won't mend matters."

"Are you far from home, gentlemen?" asked the man with the iron-grey beard, who had listened to the conversation with a look of sympathy.

"Ay, much too far to walk," said Welland. "D'you happen to know how far off the nearest railway station is?"

"Three miles," answered the stranger, "and in your condition you are quite unfit to walk that distance."

"I'm not so sure of that," replied the youth, with a pitiful look. "I think I'm game for three miles, if I had nothing to carry but myself, but I can't leave my bicycle in the ditch, you know!"

"Of course you can't," rejoined the stranger in a cheery tone, "and I think we can help you in this difficulty. I am a London City Missionary. My name is John Seaward. We have, as you see, brought out a number of our Sunday-school children, to give them a sight of God's beautiful earth; poor things, they've been used to bricks, mortar, and stone all their lives hitherto. Now, if you choose to spend the remainder of the day with us, we will be happy to give you and the injured bicycle a place in our vans till we reach a cabstand or a railway station. What say you? It will give much pleasure to me and the teachers."

Welland glanced at his friend. "You see, Sam, there's no help for it, old boy. You'll have to return alone."

"Unless your friend will also join us," said the missionary.

"You are very kind," said Sam, "but I cannot stay, as I have an engagement which must be kept. Never mind, Stephen. I'll just complete the trip alone, and comfort myself with the assurance that I leave you in good hands. So, good-bye, old boy."

"Good-bye, Twitter," said Stephen, grasping his friend's hand.

"Twitter," repeated the missionary, "I heard your friend call you Sam just now. Excuse my asking—are you related to Samuel Twitter of Twitter, Slime, and Company, in the city?"

"I'm his eldest son," said Sam.

"Then I have much pleasure in making your acquaintance," returned the other, extending his hand, "for although I have never met your father, I know your mother well. She is one of the best and most regular teachers in our Sunday-schools. Is she not, Hetty?" he said, turning to a sweet-faced girl who stood near him.

"Indeed she is, I was her pupil for some years, and now I teach one of her old classes," replied the girl.

"I work in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel, sir," continued the missionary, "and most of the children here attend the Institution in George Yard."

"Well, I shall tell my mother of this unexpected meeting," said Sam, as he remounted his bicycle. "Good-bye, Stephen. Don't romp too much with the children!"

"Adieu, Sam, and don't break your neck on the bicycle."

In a few minutes Sam Twitter and his bicycle were out of sight.

Chapter Eight.
A Great and Memorable Day

When young Stephen Welland was conducted by John Seaward the missionary into a large field dotted with trees, close to where his accident had happened, he found that the children and their guardians were busily engaged in making arrangements for the spending of an enjoyable day.

And then he also found that this was not a mere monster excursion of ordinary Sunday-schools, but one of exceedingly poor children, whose garments, faces, and general condition, told too surely that they belonged to the lowest grade in the social scale.

"Yes," said the missionary, in reply to some question from Welland, "the agency at George Yard, to which I have referred, has a wide-embracing influence—though but a small lump of leaven when compared with the mass of corruption around it. This is a flock of the ragged and utterly forlorn, to many of whom green fields and fresh air are absolutely new, but we have other flocks besides these."

"Indeed! Well, now I look at them more carefully, I see that their garments do speak of squalid poverty. I have never before seen such a ragged crew, though I have sometimes encountered individuals of the class on the streets."

"Hm!" coughed the missionary with a peculiar smile. "They are not so ragged as they were. Neither are they as ragged as they will be in an hour or two."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that these very rough little ones have to receive peculiar treatment before we can give them such an outing as they are having to-day. As you see, swings and see-saws have been put up here, toys are now being distributed, and a plentiful feast will ere long be forthcoming, through the kindness of a Christian gentleman whose heart the Lord has inclined to 'consider the poor,' but before we could venture to move the little band, much of their ragged clothing had to be stitched up to prevent it falling off on the journey, and we had to make them move carefully on their way to the train —for vans have brought us only part of the way. Now that they are here, our minds are somewhat relieved, but I suspect that the effect of games and romping will undo much of our handiwork. Come, let us watch them."

The youth and the missionary advanced towards a group of the children, whose souls, for the time being, were steeped in a see-saw. This instrument of delight consisted of a strong plank balanced on the trunk of a noble tree which had been recently felled, with many others, to thin the woods of the philanthropist's park. It was an enormous see-saw! such as the ragged creatures had never before seen—perhaps never conceived of, their experiences in such joys having been hitherto confined to small bits of broken plank placed over empty beer barrels, or back-yard fences. No fewer than eight children were able to find accommodation on it at one and the same time, besides one of the bigger boys to straddle in the centre; and it required the utmost vigilance on the part of a young man teacher at one end of the machine, and Hetty Frog at the other end, to prevent the little ragamuffins at either extremity from being forced off.

Already the missionary's anticipation in regard to the undoing of their labour had begun to be verified. There were at least four of the eight whose nether garments had succumbed to the effort made in mounting the plank, and various patches of flesh-colour revealed the fact that the poor little wearers were innocent of flannels. But it was summer-time, and the fact had little effect either on wearers or spectators. The missionary, however, was not so absorbed in the present but that he felt impelled to remark to Welland: "That is their winter as well as summer clothing."

The bicyclist said nothing in reply, but the remark was not lost upon him.

"Now, Dick Swiller," said the young man teacher, "I see what you're up to. You mustn't do it!"

Richard Swiller, who was a particularly rugged as well as ragged boy of about thirteen, not being in the habit of taking advice, did do it. That is, he sent his end of the plank up with such violence that the other end came to the ground with a shock which caused those who sat there to gasp, while it all but unseated most of those who were on the higher end. Indeed one very small and pinched but intelligent little boy, named by his companions Blobby, who looked as if Time, through the influence of privation and suffering, had been dwindling instead of developing him,—actually did come off with a cry of alarm, which, however, changed into a laugh of glee when he found himself in his teacher's arms, instead of lying "busted on the ground," as he afterwards expressed it when relating the incident to an admiring audience of fellow ragamuffins in the slums of Spitalfields.

Blobby was immediately restored to his lost position, and Swiller was degraded, besides being made to stand behind a large tree for a quarter of an hour in forced inaction, so that he might have time to meditate on the evil consequences of disobedience.

"Take care, Robin," said Hetty, to a very small but astonishingly energetic fellow, at her end of the see-saw, who was impressed with the notion that he was doing good service by wriggling his own body up and down, "if you go on so, you'll push Lilly Snow off."

Robin, unlike Dick, was obedient. He ceased his efforts, and thereby saved the last button which held his much too small waistcoat across his bare bosom.

"What a sweet face the child she calls Lilly Snow has—if it were only clean," observed Welland. "A little soap and water with a hair brush would make her quite beautiful."

"Yes, she is very pretty," said the missionary and the kindly smile with which he had been watching the fun vanished, as he added in a sorrowful voice, "her case is a very sad one, dear child. Her mother is a poor but deserving woman who earns a little now and then by tailoring, but she has been crushed for years by a wicked and drunken husband who has at last deserted her. We know not where he is, perhaps dead. Five times has her home been broken up by him, and many a time has she with her little one been obliged to sit on doorsteps all night, when homeless. Little Lilly attends our Sunday-school regularly, and Hetty is her teacher. It is not long since Hetty herself was a scholar, and I know that she is very anxious to lead Lilly to the Lord. The sufferings and sorrows to which this poor child has been exposed have told upon her severely, and I fear that her health will give way. A day in the country like this may do her good perhaps."

As the missionary spoke little Lilly threw up her arms and uttered a cry of alarm. Robin, although obedient, was short of memory, and his energetic spirit being too strong for his excitable little frame he had recommenced his wriggling, with the effect of bursting the last button off his waistcoat and thrusting Lilly off the plank. She was received, however, on Hetty's breast, who fell with her to the ground.

"Not hurt, Hetty!" exclaimed the missionary, running forward to help the girl up.

"Oh! no, sir," replied Hetty with a short laugh, as she rose and placed Lilly on a safer part of the see-saw.

"Come here, Hetty," said John Seaward, "and rest a while. You have done enough just now; let some one else take your place."

After repairing the buttonless waistcoat with a pin and giving its owner a caution, Hetty went and sat down on the grass beside the missionary.

"How is Bobby?" asked the latter, "I have not found a moment to speak to you till now."

"Thank you, sir, he's better; much better. I fear he will be well too soon."

"How so? That's a strange remark, my girl."

"It may seem strange, sir, but—you know—father's very fond of Bobby."

"Well, Hetty, that's not a bad sign of your father."

"Oh but, sir, father sits at his bedside when he's sober, an' has such long talks with him about robberies and burglaries, and presses him very hard to agree to go out with him when he's well. I

can't bear to hear it, for dear Bobby seems to listen to what he says, though sometimes he refuses, and defies him to do his worst, especially when he—"

"Stay, dear girl. It is very very sad, but don't tell me anything more about your father. Tell it all to Jesus, Hetty. He not only sympathises with, but is able to save—even to the uttermost."

"Yes, thank God for that 'uttermost,'" said the poor girl, clasping her hands quickly together. "Oh, I understood that when He saved *me*, and I will trust to it now."

"And the gentleman who called on you,—has he been again?" asked the missionary.

"No, sir, he has only come once, but he has sent his butler three or four times with some money for us, and always with the message that it is from Miss Diana, to be divided between Bobby and me. Unfortunately father chanced to be at home the first time he came and got it all, so we got none of it. But he was out the other times. The butler is an oldish man, and a very strange one. He went about our court crying."

"Crying! Hetty, that's a curious condition for an oldish butler to be in."

"Oh, of course I don't mean cryin' out like a baby," said Hetty, looking down with a modest smile, "but I saw tears in his eyes, and sometimes they got on his cheeks. I can't think what's the matter with him."

Whatever Mr Seaward thought on this point he said nothing, but asked if Bobby was able to go out.

Oh yes, he was quite able to walk about now with a little help, Hetty said, and she had taken several walks with him and tried to get him to speak about his soul, but he only laughed at that, and said he had too much trouble with his body to think about his soul—there was time enough for that!

They were interrupted at this point by a merry shout of glee, and, looking up, found that young Welland had mounted the see-saw, taken Lilly Snow in front of him, had Dick Swiller reinstated to counterbalance his extra weight, and was enjoying himself in a most hilarious manner among the fluttering rags. Assuredly, the fluttering rags did not enjoy themselves a whit less hilariously than he.

In this condition he was found by the owner of the grounds, George Brisbane, Esquire, of Lively Hall, who, accompanied by his wife, and a tall, dignified friend with a little girl, approached the see-saw.

"I am glad you enjoy yourself so much, my young friend," he said to Welland; "to which of the ragged schools may you belong?"

In much confusion—for he was rather shy—Welland made several abortive efforts to check the see-saw, which efforts Dick Swiller resisted to the uttermost, to the intense amusement of a little girl who held Mrs Brisbane's hand. At last he succeeded in arresting it and leaped off.

"I beg pardon," he said, taking off his cap to the lady as he advanced, "for intruding uninvited on—"

"Pray don't speak of intrusion," interrupted Mr Brisbane, extending his hand; "if you are here as Mr Seaward's friend you are a welcome guest. Your only intrusion was among the little ones, but as they seem not to resent it neither do I."

Welland grasped the proffered hand. "Thank you very much," he returned, "but I can scarcely lay claim to Mr Seaward's friendship. The fact is, I am here in consequence of an accident to my bicycle."

"Oh! then you *are* one of the poor unfortunates after all," said the host. "Come, you are doubly welcome. Not hurt much, I hope. No? That's all right. But don't let me keep you from your amusements. Remember, we shall expect you at the feast on the lawn. You see, Sir Richard," he added, turning to his dignified friend, "when we go in for this sort of thing we don't do it by halves. To have any lasting effect, it must make a deep impression. So we have got up all sorts of amusements, as you observe, and shall have no fewer than two good feeds. Come, let us visit some other—Why, what are you gazing at so intently?"

He might well ask the question, for Sir Richard Brandon had just observed Hetty Frog, and she, unaccustomed to such marked attention, was gazing in perplexed confusion on the ground. At the same time little Di, having caught sight of her, quitted Mrs Brisbane, ran towards her with a delighted scream, and clasping her hand in both of hers, proclaimed her the sister of "my boy!"

Hetty's was not the nature to refuse such affection. Though among the poorest of the poor, and clothed in the shabbiest and most patchy of garments, (which in her case, however, were neat, clean and well mended), she was rich in a loving disposition; so that, forgetting herself and the presence of others, she stooped and folded the little girl in her arms. And, when the soft brown hair and pale pretty face of Poverty were thus seen as it were co-mingling with the golden locks and rosy cheeks of Wealth, even Sir Richard was forced to admit to himself that it was not after all a very outrageous piece of impropriety!

"Oh! I'm *so* glad to hear that he's much better, and been out too! I would have come to see him again long long ago, but p—"

She checked herself, for Mrs Screwbury had carefully explained to her that no good girl ever said anything against her parents; and little Di had swallowed the lesson, for, when not led by passion, she was extremely teachable.

"And oh!" she continued, opening her great blue lakelets to their widest state of solemnity, "you haven't the smallest bit of notion how I have dreamt about my boy—and my policeman too! I never can get over the feeling that they might both have been killed, and if they had, you know, it would have been me that did it; only think! I would have—been—a murderer! P'raps they'd have hanged me!"

"But they weren't killed, dear," said Hetty, unable to restrain a smile at the awful solemnity of the child, and the terrible fate referred to.

"No—I'm *so* glad, but I can't get over it," continued Di, while those near to her stood quietly by unable to avoid overhearing, even if they had wished to do so. "And they do such strange things in my dreams," continued Di, "you can't think. Only last night I was in our basket-cart—the dream-one, you know, not the real one—and the dream-pony ran away again, and gave my boy such a dreadful knock that he fell flat down on his back, tumbled over two or three times, and rose up—a policeman! Not *my* policeman, you know, but quite another one that I had never seen before! But the very oddest thing of all was that it made me so angry that I jumped with all my might on to his breast, and when I got there it wasn't the policeman but the pony! and it was dead—quite dead, for I had killed it, and I wasn't sorry at all—not a bit!"

This was too much for Hetty, who burst into a laugh, and Sir Richard thought it time to go and see the games that were going on in other parts of the field, accompanied by Welland and the missionary, while Hetty returned to her special pet Lilly Snow.

And, truly, if "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin," there were touches of nature enough seen that day among these outcasts of society to have warranted their claiming kin with the whole world.

Leap-frog was greatly in favour, because the practitioners could abandon themselves to a squirrel-and-cat sort of bound on the soft grass, which they had never dared to indulge in on the London pavements. It was a trying game, however, to the rags, which not only betrayed their character to the eye by the exhibition of flesh-tints through numerous holes, but addressed themselves also to the ears by means of frequent and explosive rendings. Pins, however, were applied to the worst of these with admirable though temporary effect, and the fun became faster and more furious,—especially so when the points of some of the pins touched up the flesh-tints unexpectedly.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.