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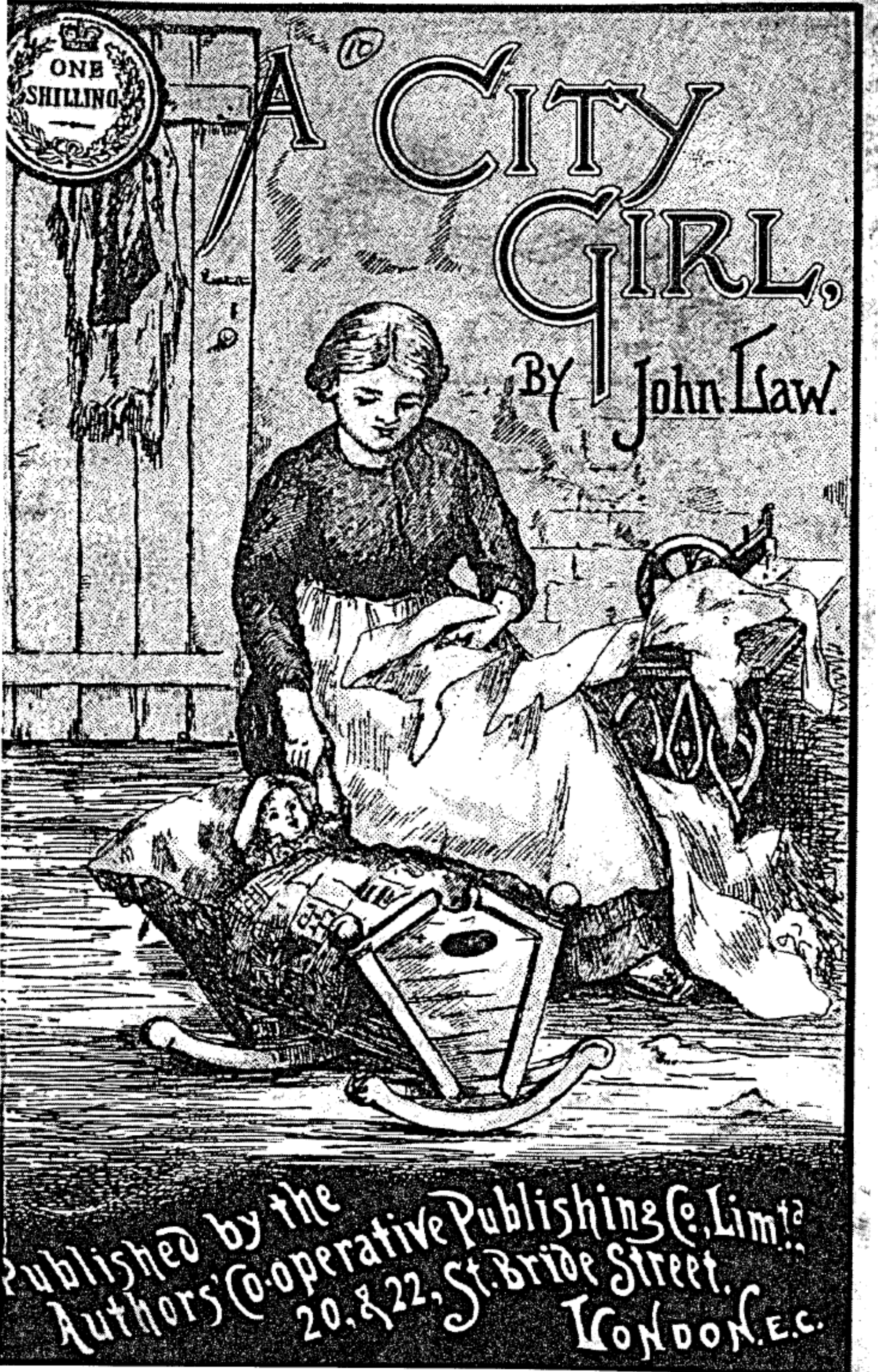
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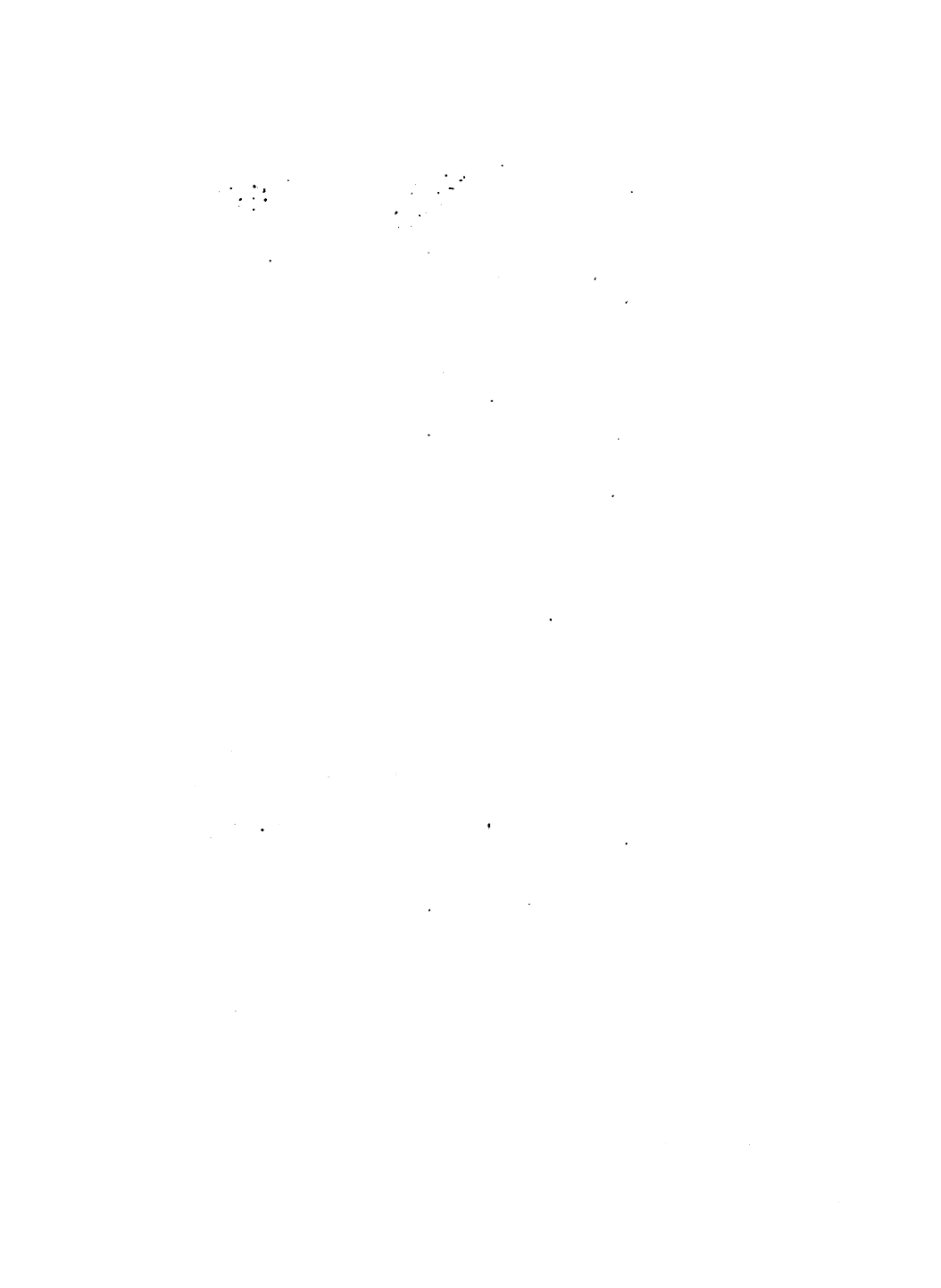

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A CITY GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

SATURDAY MARKET.

It was a July evening, and the declining rays of the sun beat like red-hot strokes upon Charlotte's Buildings. In the Buildings from six to eight hundred people stewed and panted, at doors and windows, upon beds, chairs and sofas. Some of the children lay asleep on the floor, with their little cheeks pressed to the boards, and their limp, moist hands and feet stretched, palms out, soles uppermost. They had dispensed with every bit of dispensable clothing; the boys had on only tattered shirts and torn breeches, the girls ragged dresses over rags of petticoats, and the babies apologies for shifts, frocks and pinafores. Some

of the elder children were out in the court, a piece of ground which stretched from one end of Charlotte's Buildings to the other. A group of small maidens sat there, under the wall of the Mint, rocking their bodies slowly backwards and forwards, fanning themselves with their pinafores, and singing an East End ditty—

"My Mary Anne
Does the best she can:
Keeps a shop for lollipop,
My Mary Anne."

A batch of little boys played ball against the washhouses; screamed, fought, and kicked, while the perspiration streamed from their faces and dropped in beads from their foreheads. A batch of bigger boys watched them, smoked the ends of cigars they had picked up in the streets, or twisted strings of spoiled tobacco into cigarettes. Occasionally a mother sallied forth to call in her progeny, to scold a girl or cuff a boy; but the maternal voices were drowsy, and the maternal strokes were languid, owing to the sultry weather.

Charlotte's Buildings were, at that time, about

two years old. They had been built by a company of gentlemen to hold casuals. The greater number of the people who lived in them thought that they belonged to a company of ladies.

Why?

"Because they are built cheap and nasty," said the men. "Women don't understand business. Depend upon it, some West End ladies fluked money in them."

"Because ladies collect the rents," said the women. "Men favour men; women favour women."

The outward and visible signs of government were manifest to the tenants in the form of lady-collectors. Several times in the week ladies arrived on the Buildings armed with master-keys, ink-pots, and rent-books. A tap at a door was followed by the intrusion into a room of a neatly-clad female of masculine appearance. If the rent was promptly paid the lady made some gracious remarks, patted the heads of the children and went away. If the rent was not forthcoming the lady took stock of the room (or rooms), and

said a few words about the broker. The Buildings were, in fact, under petticoat government, which, like everything else in this world, has its advantages and its disadvantages.

"She takes the bread out of a man's mouth, and spends on one woman what would keep a little family," grumbled a tenant to his neighbour, as the rent collector passed briskly along the balcony.

"I pity her husband," responded the neighbour. "She'll have the stick on him if he comes home a bit boosy."

"Females like 'er don't marry," mumbled a misanthropic old lady.

The Buildings were not beautiful to look upon; they might even have been termed ugly. Their long yellow walls were lined with small windows; upon the rails of their stiff iron balconies hung shirts, blankets and other articles fresh from the wash-tub. Inside their walls brown doors opened into dark stone passages; and narrow winding staircases led from passage to passage up to the roof.

"I suppose rich people think they'll keep us from coming nigh 'em by packing us close like this," said an old Irish woman.

Whatever the rich thought about it the poor liked the Buildings; at any rate, they liked them for a time, just as rich people enjoy hotel life for a season. The children played about the court, the mothers gossiped in the doorways, the men smoked and talked politics on the balconies. Moreover, the rooms were cheaper than ordinary lodgings, and if the tenants were "kept under" by female despots, the despots were kind enough. Many a sick baby was cured, many a girl was sent to service, many a boy was started in life by the ladies who collected the rents. Some tenants grumbled against petticoat government, but others liked it; and all agreed that "an eddicated female" was a phenomenon to be much watched, criticised and talked about.

On the one side the Buildings faced Wright Street, on the other the Mint. Four tall chimneys and a huge reservoir were constantly before the eyes of the tenants. Inside the reservoir rain,

hail, snow, fog, thunder, and lightning were made. So said the children. If anyone asked who had taught them these doctrines they answered, "We learned them ourselves." In this reservoir the stars slept, into its depths the sun disappeared, out of it came bits of moons and whole ones. So said the babies. Of course this creed disappeared with babyhood, but like babyhood it faded imperceptibly, no one knew how or when; alphabet and blackboard drove it away, and the schoolboys and schoolgirls smiled contemptuously when they heard it lisped by their little brothers and sisters.

A great many of the tenants were Roman Catholics, so their children went to a school on the other side of the railway-bridge which faces Wright Street. Tiny two-year-old creatures were carried under the bridge and deposited in a big room like a nursery. There they were taught to sing "God Bless the Pope," to answer, "Nicely, thank you, father," when the priest asked his usual question, "Well, babies, how are you?" and to say their prayers with the Sister's rosary. The bigger

children were drafted into boys' and girls' schools, when, under the superintendence of Fathers and Sisters they learned to read, write and do arithmetic, to sing by note, so that they might join in the annual service at the Crystal Palace, and to become good Catholics.

By profession the tenants were nearly all "casuals," dock-labourers, Billingsgate porters, hawkers and costermongers. A few superior people were scattered about the Buildings, but casuals occupied the greater number of the rooms; people who had no fixed rate of wages, who made a good deal one day, and next to nothing the day after. The wives of these men added to the family income by charing, tailoring and sack-making, besides doing all the housework. They were little better than beasts of burden, poor things, for East End husbands have but a low opinion of the weaker sex.

"I'm yer husband, ain't I?" is their invariable answer to any complaint, which means, "I can knock you over if I like."

The July evening of which I speak happened to

be a Saturday—the hardest day of all the week for East End wives and mothers. To rise early and go to bed late was the Saturday rule for women in the Buildings. They must clean their "place," get the children's clothes ready for Sunday, scrub, cook, and bake, whilst boys and girls hung about and husbands did nothing. Little wonder that public-houses enticed them on their way back from market. A glass of something took their thoughts off troubles, drove away headaches, and lifted the cloak of monotonous toil for a few minutes. Alas! one glass was never enough. They began with beer—and ended with spirits.

About six o'clock that evening a girl came out upon the first balcony, waved her hand to the children, and disappeared down the staircase into the street.

"There's Nelly!" cried a chorus of little voices.

"There goes the masher," said a young man, taking his pipe out of his mouth while he spoke, and craning his neck to watch the girl as she walked quickly along Wright Street.

"'Er mother was a lady's maid," he explained to a new-comer. "That's why she fancies 'erself."

Meanwhile Nelly had reached Abel Street, and stopped to examine herself in a shop window. She wore no hat or bonnet, only a black shawl and a black dress. On her arm she carried a large market basket. She put the basket down for a minute and smoothed the red-brown hair which lay against her low, white forehead. About her face and neck were the blue shadows which usually accompany auburn tresses. These blue shadows are wonderfully pretty to look at. They play about the white skin as sunbeams play about the red-brown hair. They vary in colour from light blue to violet as the hair varies in tint, from ruddiest gold to palest yellow. They fade when the hair loses its gloss, and disappear altogether when their owner sees the first grey hair in her looking-glass. Nelly did not notice the shades or the tints, she was only conscious of a pair of hazel eyes with long black lashes, a nose of no particular shape, and a mouth like her

mother's. She smoothed her hair, put her shawl straight, and hurried along to market.

The people in the streets were enjoying their Saturday "out." Brass bands played at the doors of public-houses; and men danced with their sweethearts. Strains of music came through swinging-doors, sailors performed hornpipes on the thresholds of gin-shops, and the friends of poor Jack lounged against walls with their arms a-kimbo.

Nelly took no notice of anybody or anything; she looked neither to the right nor the left, but walked quickly towards the market. Her mind was completely occupied by the fact that she was going to buy a new feather for her Sunday hat. Should the feather be red or blue? Blue suited her best, but red looked the smartest. She had but one ambition in dress, that was to wear something "stylish." "To look like a lady," she called it; and the sort of lady she admired was the only lady with whom she had ever come in contact, a friend in a West End place of business. To sit on a sofa, to read a novelette, to sip coffee

with a teaspoon, to have someone to put on and take off her boots, was her idea of being a lady. Her friend only did these things on Sunday; a real lady did them every day of the week. To ride in a carriage was to be a *great* lady, Nelly thought. Her ambition did not carry her so far as that. A life of complete idleness, with plenty of smart clothes, and good things to eat, was all the ladyhood Nelly coveted. To mimic this blissful state she strove her uttermost, during the odd minutes she had to spare, and with the few pence she could save from the housekeeping. To-night she would buy a feather to put in her hat; and to-morrow she would spend hours trying to make it look "stylish."

She reached the market, and went first of all to a butcher's shop, where she bought a small bit of beef. Then she purchased some potatoes from a greengrocer, who called out "Buy, buy, buy," in a stentorian voice, when the loitering multitude fingered his goods instead of producing money out of their pockets. Nelly put the meat and the potatoes into her basket, and paused to look at

the long rows of trucks covered with fish, meat, and vegetables. She counted the money in her little knitted purse, slipped a half-penny into the hand of a blind beggar, and made her way to a stall holding artificial flowers, feathers, ribbons, and lace. A smart young man exhibited these wares, twirled them round and round in his fingers, and advised customers to buy articles upon which he made no profit, which he sold "dirt cheap" for their benefit. Nelly lingered a long time by his stall. She admired everything; but not one of these things was quite what she wanted. In vain the young man gave her the benefit of his advice—told her which was the latest thing out, showed her the sweetest thing in feathers, the cheapest thing in lace, she could not make up her mind, and would not let him make it up for her.

"I'll go to Petticoat Lane to-morrow morning," she said aloud, much to the young man's disgust. "Maybe I'll see there what I want."

With a nod she left him, and turned her steps towards home, only stopping to buy a penny-

worth of sticky stuff from an old woman at a corner-shop. She had the Sunday dinner in her basket, and the potatoes made her arm ache; but she walked fast, in spite of the weight, and did not stop until she reached the railway-bridge opposite Wright Street. There she went into a Catholic church, crossed herself, stowed her basket under a seat, and knelt down to tell her beads. Father O'Hara was repeating "Hail, Mary" in the pulpit. His strong voice rose and fell loud enough for the people to hear it, although a barrel-organ was playing a tune out in the street.

"O my little darling, I love you," said the hurdy-gurdy.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women," said the priest, heedless of secular thoughts and noises, intent upon saving his soul, which he found a difficult business. Some priests flee the world, some the flesh, some the devil. Father O'Hara had run away from the demon Unbelief. He had looked into the yawning pit of Doubt, and had turned back shuddering. Since that time he had wrapt his

intellect up in a napkin, and on the Day of Judgment he would say to the Deity, "Here is Thy talent. I was afraid to use it."

The church had grown dark by the time Father O'Hara left the pulpit. He stood for a minute before the altar, under the red lamp; there he bent his knee, and gave the benediction. A few minutes later the service was finished, and the congregation went slowly out of church. Nelly took up her basket, and dipped her fingers in the shell of holy water fastened against the wall of the entrance. She held out her hand, before she crossed herself, to a lame girl who came down the chancel, carrying a bottle.

"What have you got in that bottle?" she asked, as they walked side by side down the church steps.

"Lourdes water," answered her companion.

"What's that?" inquired Nelly.

"Holy water. Father Gore brought it from Lourdes last week," replied the lame girl.

"Lourdes!" exclaimed Nelly. "Where's that?"

"A long way off, somewhere in France," said

the other with a heavy sigh. "Our Blessed Lady cures folks who go there to use the water. It cost twenty pounds to go and come back. Twenty pounds!"

"That's a lot," said Nelly.

By this time the two were girls passing under the railway-bridge, which had no lamp. It was very dark, so Nelly linked her arm in that of her lame friend until they reached Wright Street. Directly they came in sight of the Buildings a crowd of little boys and girls ran to meet them, shouting:—

"'Ulloa, Nelly! What have you got in your basket?"

Nelly sat down upon the first flight of stone steps she came to, and the children crowded round her. She slowly opened the lid of the basket, and showed them the bit of beef.

"Measly," remarked a small girl, looking critically at it. "Fourpence three-farthings the pound."

"'Tain't measly," cried a little boy. "Do yer think Nelly 'u'l buy measly meat?"

He squared his fist, but before his wrath could vent itself he caught sight of the sticky stuff in the basket, among the potatoes. He began to execute a sort of war dance, in which the other children joined, while Nelly broke the sweet with a stone. Then she threw it up in the air, whence it fell into a dozen little dirty hands and open mouths; and, with a laugh she ran upstairs to the first balcony, where a door stood half open. Pushing through this door, she came into a room fitted up as a shop. A long board, supported by boxes, ran from one end of the room to the other; and on this stood pots of jam and jars of treacle, the contents of which were sold at a penny the spoonful. Sugar, pepper, mustard, and other such condiments occupied holes in shelves fastened against the wall nearest the window; and in the window, on a ledge which slanted upwards, were sweets of all sorts and descriptions, toothsome brandy balls, huge peppermints, with appropriate mottoes; green, red, and yellow drops, chocolate, toffee, and new-fangled sugar-plums, which have not

been christened yet. A pile of wood lay in one corner of the room; and by it, on a three-legged stool, sat an elderly women, who was tying it up in bundles. She had a thin, peevish face; she wore an old black silk bonnet, a print body, a stuff skirt, and a large apron. Close to her, in a wooden arm-chair, sat a young man, smoking a short clay pipe. He was of the ordinary East End loafer type; he had a head shaped like a bullet, small round eyes, red hair cropped short, and a thick neck. He wore a bit of red flannel round his neck, fustian trousers, and a shabby brown coat.

"You've been gone long enough," grumbled the woman, as Nelly came into the shop. "My back's nigh breaking a-doing of these sticks. Take the jug, and look sharp."

"Can't Tom fetch the beer to-night?" inquired Nelly, looking while she spoke with some disgust at the young man in the arm-chair.

"Who's to mind the shop if I fetches it?" asked the loafer. "She's too grand a lady for us, ain't she, mother?"

Nelly said not another word. She put down her basket and took up a jug, with which she ran downstairs to the end of Wright Street. There she found a small public-house, where she bought some ale, enough to make the froth run over upon her dress. She returned to the shop, placed the jug beside her mother, threw another glance of disgust at her brother, and went silently into an adjoining room. This was a bedroom. It had in it a bed, a table, a few chairs and a horse-hair sofa. Upon its walls hung funeral cards in small black frames, and pictures of saints in large gilt ones. Opposite the fireplace was a shelf, holding an image of the Virgin Mary, two brass candlesticks and a small bottle of holy water. Above the fireplace was Nelly's friend and companion—a long narrow piece of looking-glass.

No sooner was the door between the bedroom and the shop shut than Nelly went to a box and took out her Sunday hat. She put it on, and, standing on tiptoe, looked up at the glass. In the glass's company she soon forgot her visit to the public-house, which had wrinkled her forehead

and brought a line between her eyebrows. She became lost in thought. To-morrow she must buy a feather in Petticoat Lane Market; to-night she must decide whether it should be red or blue. Blue suited her best; but red was so stylish—so very stylish.

CHAPTER II.

GEORGE, THE CARETAKER.

NEXT morning Nelly woke up with the pleased consciousness that she was going to Petticoat Lane Market. She sprang out of bed, leaving her mother there to sleep off the effects of Saturday night. She could hear Tom snoring heavily in the shop, where he had a bed under the counter. The canary tried to drown Tom's music from its cage, which hung in the window over her bit of garden—a green box, in which she had planted some musk and other cheap plants between two rows of oyster shells. She gave the canary a weed out of her garden when she had put on her dress; then she began to prepare breakfast. A fire was soon burning in the grate, a kettle shortly afterwards began to sing above it, and, last of all, the table was set with a white cloth, three cups and saucers, a loaf of bread and a half-a-pound of

salt butter. It was useless to wait for Tom and her mother to wake up, so she had breakfast by herself, and left the teapot ready for them upon the top of the oven. She put on her hat—the one for which she intended to buy a feather—and went out of the bedroom, through the shop, on to the balcony. The Buildings were very quiet that morning, for the men were nearly all in bed, most of the women had only just begun to get up, and the children were tired after their Saturday half-holiday. Nelly ran along the balcony to the end staircase, and thence downwards. As she reached the gate, George, the caretaker, came out of his house. He had on a light blue shirt, his Sunday trousers and a pair of scarlet braces. His shirt sleeves were turned up, so upon his brawny arms his tattooes were visible. On the right arm he bore a crucifix, on the left a variety of devices from wrist to elbow.

"Where are you going?" he asked Nelly.

"To Petticoat Lane Market."

"Alone?"

"Why, yes."

"Wait a bit and I'll come with you," said George. So saying he went back into the house, whence he presently returned, dressed in a black jacket, a bright blue necktie and a round hat. He found Nelly outside the Buildings on a plot of ground in which bricks and stones lay about, and a board showed that no one had as yet purchased it for a building site. There was a rumour current in the Buildings that the company who had built the Charlotte block meant to buy it and lay it out as a pleasure-ground for casuals. George, the caretaker, however, knew different. He advised the children to make the most of the open space while they had it, which they did, building houses with the stones and bricks, shaping mud pies in the puddles and playing horses from north to south, from east to west of it. Nelly sat on a heap of stones as George came up, and he looked with admiring eyes at her small, neat figure. She scarcely reached his shoulder when they stood side by side, and his hands could meet round her waist, thumbs and little fingers, easy. He liked to see

the sun shining on her red-brown hair, and he thought he had never met a pair of eyes like hers, although he had been a great traveller in his time and had seen lots of girls. Nelly ran to meet him, and they walked together down Wright Street, towards Petticoat Lane Market. It was very still everywhere, only church bells and occasional voices broke the stillness as they passed through Orange Street. Nelly examined George's Sunday toilet, looked from his ruddy, good-natured face, his blue eyes and light yellow moustache, to his boots.

"George, did you ever wear gloves?" she asked, as they crossed the Whitechapel Road.

George held up his big red hands, grinning.

"Lor! Nelly," he said, "what rubbish."

"Don't men wear gloves in the Service?"

"Officers do."

"Swells."

"Gentlemen."

"Swells are gentlemen."

"Some are and some ain't."

Just then they reached Petticoat Lane Market,

and Nelly's attention was diverted to a Cheap Jack, who stood in a cart, selling a little of everything. George stopped to look at a man who conjured water into any sort of drink you liked at a moment's notice. You could have beer or stout, sherry or port. You paid your penny, and took your choice.

"Won't you try it, Nelly?" he asked; "I'll stand treat."

Nelly pulled him impatiently away, and they walked down the middle of the crowded street, between stalls and barrows, amid jostling salesmen and purchasers. Here a man offered to cure you of any disease or illness by means of his pills and powders; there you could be rigged out complete for ten or twelve shillings; to the right you might furnish your house; to the left eat every luxury of the season, from hot peas to ice pudding, from eel-broth to sauer-kraut.

"What do you want to buy, Nelly?" George asked.

"A feather," answered Nelly.

"Well, here's a shop," said George, drawing

up on the pavement before a window which displayed East End hats and bonnets. "What sort of feather do you want?"

"I can't make up my mind if I'll have it red or blue," Nelly told him, feasting her eyes all the time on the hats and bonnets. "Blue suits me best, but red's so stylish. Oh, George, look at that little duck of a bonnet up there in the corner!"

"Have a blue feather," said George; "that's Marine Artillery, red's only Infantry. Have my colour, Nell."

So the point was settled at last, and a few minutes later Nelly tripped out of the shop, holding a small paper bag between her finger and thumb.

"Let's look in at the Radical Club before we go home," George said, when they left the market. "It's open to wives and sweethearts as well as men."

Nelly shook her head. But George insisted; so she gave way, and followed him up the Whitechapel Road to the place where the Radicals hold their Sunday meetings.

The Radical Club stands beside the Liberal Club, like a twin relation. No love, however, is lost between them. Members of one look down upon members of the other, and call them disparaging names. The Radicals call the Liberals milk-and-water Hartingtons, the Liberals call the Radicals crack-brained Gladstones. George belonged to neither; he only visited the Radical Club sometimes because one of his friends belonged to it, Jack Strange. He had just given his vote to a Conservative candidate who had canvassed the Buildings; for the good reason that a drive to the poll had suited him better than a walk on the day of the election. Which party had "the rights of it" he did not pretend to know; but the Conservatives had the most money, so it was best not to offend them, he used to say.

They reached the club, and found a placard on the railings announcing that Mr. Arthur Grant would deliver an address that morning on "The Future of Radicalism." Jack Strange leant against the wall just inside the room. He

laughed when he saw Nelly; and gave her a seat near the little platform, among about a hundred men, but only two women. George sat down behind her, resting his arms on the back of her chair, and talking to Jack about the Buildings, upon which, he said, the Company ought to have another caretaker besides himself. It was too much to expect of one man that he should keep order among six hundred people, who, this hot weather, drank more than ever, and slept on the stairs and the balconies—anywhere out of their hot, crowded rooms. Last night he had fetched in the police to stop two women fighting; he had been called up to the top balcony where a man was kicking his wife, and no sooner had he come down than he had found a man stabbing a pal with a knife.

"If I'd had any notion what it was to be out of the Service, I'd never have left it," said George, "not even to please the old lady. Nothing comes up to the Service."

"Not even a wife," remarked Jack to Nelly. But she was looking at the feather in the bag,

and took no notice. She was accustomed to hear George talk like that. He was always wishing himself back in the Service.

Presently a door opened upon the platform, and a gentleman came to the table.

"Who's that?" inquired Nelly.

"Mr. Arthur Grant," whispered Jack.

The gentleman began to speak. First he spoke of Radicalism upon the Continent; the expulsion of the Princes in France, and the increasing number of Socialists in Germany. Afterwards he drew the attention of his audience to the division in the Liberal camp; and said, as the Liberals were so divided, he hoped that the Conservatives would come into office, and give the Radicals time to organise themselves into a strong political party. He then began to point out the dangers which threaten the growth of such an organisation; and dwelt on the fact that a foolish love of glory led to a great deal too much money being spent on the army and navy. He talked of electro-plate Radicals, who rush to reviews, and cheer troops on their way home

from campaigns which take bread out of children's mouths and increase taxes.

George began to grow uneasy. He took his arms off Nelly's chair, and muttered that the fellow didn't know what he was talking about.

"Let's go," he whispered to Nelly.

Nelly's eyes, however, were fixed upon Mr. Grant. He was so like George in appearance, yet so different. He was tall and slight, looked about thirty, and had blue eyes, fair hair and a yellow moustache. He looked at Nelly more than once, perhaps because the place she sat in was conspicuous. When George said, "Let's go," Nelly hesitated; and Jack said to George:—

"Sit down, man. What are you in such a hurry about?"

By this time Mr. Grant was far away from the army and navy, inveighing against people who run after Royalties, who put up bunting directly they hear that a Prince or Princess is going to pass by their house. The expense of our foreign policy and the injustice of our

annexations next absorbed his notice, from which topics he returned to England and Ireland, Home Rule and coercion. Last of all he said a few words against English Socialists, and advised his fellow-Radicals to be content with a slice of beef instead of asking for a whole ox.

"Who is he?" inquired Nelly, when the meeting was over, and she was returning home with George and Jack.

"Treasurer of a hospital down here," said Jack. "He belongs to our club, and comes pretty often."

"He's a gentleman," Nelly said slowly.

"Gentleman or no, I don't like him," growled George. "I'm glad I voted for a Conservative last week, and not one of those chaps who want to do away with the army and navy."

When they came to the Buildings Nelly ran quickly upstairs, Jack said good morning, and George went to his work. He had all the staircases and the court to sweep. During the week he cleaned rooms out after tenants left, and white-washed walls and ceilings for the benefit

ot new-comers. He took rents which were not forthcoming when the lady-collectors were on the Buildings, and he kept order day and night. It was a hard place, and badly paid. He did not like it. He was on the look-out to "better himself"—which meant, to find a berth in which he would do more agreeable work and receive higher wages.

When these things were forthcoming he meant to marry Nelly, not before. Until then he was content to "keep company" with her, to take her out for walks, go with her occasionally—very occasionally, for he had to light the lamps at night—to a theatre, and gossip with her on the balcony when his work lay in her direction. He never spoke to her mother or her brother. He did not enter the shop. Nelly was the only one of the family he cared for, and why she was so very unlike the rest was a puzzle he often set himself to find out. He was accustomed to puzzle about things. Life was a puzzle to him. If he had had more education he might perhaps have been able to understand it, but he had never been good at

books, and at eighteen he had gone into the army, in which he had seen a great many things and a great many people to puzzle about. After spending twelve years in the Service he had left it, to please his old mother, and had taken this place, because it was the first thing that turned up, not because he liked it.

Directly after he had settled his mother comfortably in the caretaker's house she had died of bronchitis. If it had not been for Nelly, he would have left the Buildings that very same Christmas, but somehow or other he had grown fond of Nelly, and had asked her to be his wife. She was neat in her ways and tidy in her dress, just the wife for a man accustomed to the Service. He wished that he had not left the Service. He hated his present work—cleaning out rooms like pigsties, and covering filthy walls with whitewash.

Besides, he was lonely all by himself. He had had a woman to keep house for him after his mother's death, but she had put things away where he could not find them, and had made such

a litter about the place, he could not put up with her. Since she left he had done everything for himself. He had been accustomed to do so in the Service, but it came rather heavy now he had so much other work. He would be glad to have a wife directly he could afford it; that is, as soon as he could "better himself." Until then he must remain single, for he did not wish *his* wife to slave all day like the women in the Buildings. Besides, children cost such a lot. Sometimes, when he looked at the boys and girls who swarmed in the Court, he felt puzzled. It surely would not be right for a man to have half-a-dozen more mouths to feed than he had money to buy food with; yet, if a man was married, how could he help it? This was the question he asked himself a good many times while he cleaned rooms and splashed whitewash; one for which he could find no answer. But then he was perplexed on many other subjects, especially politics. In the Service he had had no vote; he had been forbidden to marry; his work had been fixed. Now he could do very much as he liked, for the lady-

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collectors did not interfere with him, and the Company of gentlemen merely paid him his wages. He was his own master for the first time in his life. Well, he meant to "better himself." When he had done that, he would marry Nelly, and see what came of it.

CHAPTER III.

MR. ARTHUR GRANT.

Two or three weeks later George arranged to have an afternoon out, and invited Jack and Nelly to go with him to the Albert Palace. They took a penny steamer from the Old Swan Pier to Battersea, and when they reached the park they sat down under a tree, on the grass, to drink a bottle of wine Jack had brought from the wine merchant's place of business in which he worked. Nelly produced a bag of cakes and a wineglass, so altogether they had a picnic. It was a beautiful afternoon. Everything looked fresher than usual, owing to the cool weather; the trees had on bright foliage, and the grass was green, except where the children had worn it short with playing cricket. Up and down the river went pleasure steamers towards Kew or Greenwich, with music on board, flags flying, and passengers dressed in their Sunday clothes.

Nelly sat with her back to the tree looking at these things, and thinking how pleasant life must be for people who kept perpetual holiday. She had taken off her hat, and the sun played upon her red-brown hair, which looked even prettier than usual. At her feet lay the two men, smoking and talking as they passed the wine-glass.

Just then a gentleman came up the path. His hat was tilted a little in front, his open coat showed a white waistcoat. As he passed the little group he put up his eye-glass and Nelly recognised him.

"Jack," she whispered, "it's the gentleman we heard speak at your club, isn't it?"

Jack looked up and saw Mr. Grant, who bowed to Nelly and wished her companions good morning. Instead of passing on, he then stood still, as though waiting for an invitation to join the picnic; and when Jack said, pointing to George, "That's my friend," and, with a nod at Nelly, "That's my friend's sweetheart," he sat down on the grass and took out his cigar-case. He offered the men

a cigar and began to smoke one himself, but refused the glass of sherry Jack poured out for him, saying that he only drank wine in the evening.

"I saw you at the Radical Club a few Sundays ago," he said to Nelly; "do you take an interest in politics?"

Nelly blushed, and replied that she knew nothing about politics; she had only gone to the club because George went. After that Mr. Grant began to discuss the Irish question with Jack, who was keen on the subject, and with George, who, however, said very little, and looked rather bad tempered.

When the bottle of wine was finished, Jack proposed that they should start for the Albert Palace, and Mr. Grant asked if he might go with them.

He looked at Nelly, as though she ought to give the invitation; Jack, however, answered "Yes" before she could say anything, and they set off. They walked four abreast across the park, but when they came to the garden Mr.

Grant fell a little behind with Nelly and let the two others go on in front.

"What is your name?" he asked. "I can't call you Miss Sweetheart, and I don't know what else to say."

"My name is Nelly."

"Nelly what?"

"Nelly Ambrose."

They had now reached the pond, and Nelly stopped to look at the little boats upon it. She had never been in Battersea Park before, and the bit of water seemed to her a beautiful lake. Some schoolboys were singing a part song as they pushed towards the island; and upon the island swans flapped their wings, and foreign birds walked about, waiting for their supper. Trees and shrubs bent their branches down to the water, and beneath them children played—children in white dresses.

"Isn't it lovely?" Nelly asked Mr. Grant. "It's like a picture in a book, isn't it?"

Mr. Grant was thinking that Nelly looked like a picture herself; one he had seen somewhere, he

could not remember exactly where, but he thought in Munich. He was wondering how a face like hers came to be in Whitechapel, and congratulating himself on this confirmation of his Radical opinions, for he believed that with the help of a good tailor, and a little polish, Whitechapel might sit down to dinner in Brook Street.

The pond, with boats, ducks, and screaming infants, seemed to him very commonplace; but this girl, with hazel eyes and long dark lashes, red-brown hair, and slight bending figure, was a picture worth looking at. He began to speculate about her character. He was accustomed to East End girls—his work lay among them—but Nelly was unlike those he had come across in the hospital, the streets, and places of amusement. He looked with increasing interest at George's sweetheart, and tried to recall the name of the picture she resembled, to remember when, and where, he had seen a face like Nelly's.

"I am so glad I met you this afternoon," he

said, as they left the garden, and walked down the dusty road to the Palace.

"I was wondering what I should do with myself when I saw you three sitting so comfortably on the grass. My wife and children are away, and I cannot join them until I have my holiday."

"I thought that gentlemen did nothing!" exclaimed Nelly.

Mr. Grant laughed, and asked, "Do you work, Miss Ambrose?"

"I machine trousers?" replied Nellie.

"Trousers?"

"Yes, for a sweater in Whitechapel. I can earn a pound a week now I machine the buttons; sometimes two-and-twenty shillings."

Before Mr. Grant could make any answer they reached the doors of the Palace, when George took possession of Nelly, and paid for her ticket. The caretaker looked rather cross, but his sulky looks disappeared directly he heard a band playing military music.

He had been to the Palace once or twice

before; but it was Nelly's first visit. She was delighted with everything. The diver and the mermaid afforded her the greatest amusement, and when she saw the ballet she declared that she had never seen anything so pretty before, not even in the dancing-halls at Christmas. Mr. Grant led the way to the Café Chantant and ordered tea at a little table, out of doors. As Nelly sat there eating cake, and listening to the music, she felt in Paradise; work and trouble were forgotten in the joys of the present; sweaters and trousers became things of the past; mother and brother were changed into fond relations; her companions were no longer George, Jack, and Mr. Grant, but the handsomest, the best, the kindest men on the face of the earth.

She was rudely awakened from her dream by George, who took out his watch and declared that it was time to go home. He had the lamps to light, and as it was a Saturday night there was sure to be a row, he said, on the Buildings, if he remained away after dark. Nelly's lip quivered, and, seeing it, George told her that

she could stay with Jack if she liked, that he would go back alone to Whitechapel. But he evidently did not like it; and poor Nelly, who was always anxious to please everybody, said: "No, thank you."

She rose from the table, and slowly followed George. The spell was broken. Paradise disappeared at the sight of the dusty road, and the real world, with all its hardships and difficulties, resumed its thrall over her senses, its hold upon her thoughts and feelings, as they entered the Park.

Mr. Grant accompanied his East End friends to the pier, talking to Jack Strange as they went about politics. He did not speak to Nelly, but once, when their eyes met, he smiled, as though he understood exactly what she was feeling, and sympathized with her disappointment. Nelly blushed and looked away from him across the river, at the steeple of a church opposite. When George spoke to her she tried to answer him pleasantly, but her thoughts were with some one else. She was fond of George, but he was not

the ideal lover she had dreamed about. The ideal lover was tall and slight, had melancholy eyes, and a moustache that curled at the tips, instead of sticking out in straight rough bristles like George's. The ideal lover had long white fingers and a diamond ring, not red hands and arms covered with tattooes from wrist to elbow. His voice was softer than George's; his clothes had a better fit.

Presently the London steamer came to the pier and Nelly stepped on board it, when she had shaken hands with Mr. Grant. She watched him walk away after the boat started, watched him leave the pier, and go along the path by the water towards the Chelsea bridge. She lost sight of him behind some tall trees, but she saw him still in her inner consciousness, saw a tall fair man, with blue eyes and yellow moustache, very like George, yet very different.

Mr. Grant crossed the bridge and went to inquire into the fate of a relation whose election had taken place that morning. The servant showed him a telegram just received from the

electioneering agent, from which it appeared that his cousin had come in with a good majority. After he had read the figures he wrote a few lines of congratulation, which he told the man to post; then he took a cab and drove to his club.

Mr. Grant belonged to a Wiltshire family, and was a third or fourth son. He had gone from school into the Indian Civil Service, in which he had done very well, until an attack of jungle fever had sent him home invalided. At the age of thirty he had arrived in his native country to begin life again, and he had brought with him a wife and two children. Now, thirty is an awkward age at which to commence a career in England. Places are all filled in with younger men, nothing is open in the professions, the army and navy are closed; there is little for a man to do unless he has a taste for land agency, or wishes to become a clergyman.

Mr. Grant looked about him, and decided that a secretaryship was the post for which he was best fitted. It would give him time to write a little, to lecture a little, and enough money to

live upon when added to his wife's income. Something better would, he thought, turn up later on. He had prospects. An old uncle in Ireland would probably leave him money; when his wife's father died his income would be doubled. He had political interest; relations and friends in the Liberal party, and a prospective constituency in his native place. He might scrape enough money together by-and-bye to go into Parliament. They wanted men in the House who understood Indian politics. But many men are on the look-out for secretaryships; men who have left the army and navy, Irish landlords who cannot get their rents, men whose time is up in the army and navy, men who have failed in business or broken down in health—all these and others. In vain did Mr. Grant try to become secretary to a member of Parliament, a company, or a club; he was forced to take whatever appointment presented itself. He became treasurer to a hospital for women and children in the East End, where he did a modicum of work for which he received moderate pay.

Mr. Grant had a taste rather than a talent for

politics. He enveloped the jargon other people talked in his own phraseology, and thought it original. He had a knack of transposing other people's ideas, not only in politics, but in everything else he talked and wrote about. He was not conscious of doing this himself, and he did not talk or write enough for other people to make him aware of it. He knew a little of everything. He could play a little, paint a little, write a little, and lecture a little. He was a pleasant companion, being good-natured in small things and only selfish in large ones. His temperament was artistic, with tendencies in all directions, neither bad nor good, for any length of time, but capable of being either the one or the other for a limited period. His wife was a sweet-tempered, phlegmatic woman—a woman whose children would one day rise up and call her blessed, whose husband called her virtuous.

During the six years of their married life, Mr. Grant and his wife had drifted a good deal apart. She rather pitied his variable disposition, and he had little sympathy with her limited intelligence.

He always appealed to her if people were present; tried to draw her into the conversation, for he did not like men to think her stupid and women to talk while she remained silent; but when they were alone they merely interchanged family gossip, and he read a newspaper while she knitted socks. He was fond of his wife and devoted to his children. He would not have given up an iota of his domesticity on any account; sometimes he broke away from it, but he always came back, feeling sure that his wife would greet him with a smile of motherly forbearance, forgive him for playing the truant. She was polite to his men friends, encouraged him to bring them home, spent hours cooking for them, and afterwards sat by, with folded hands, while he and they discussed what she called "subjects." If he had a touch of fever she nursed him day and night; when he was well she let him go his own way without making any comment. She liked him to dine at his club, if she had only cold mutton at home for dinner; to spend his evenings out, if the children had whooping-cough.

Such was the man about whom little Nelly Ambrose was thinking as she lay wide-awake in the Buildings the night after her visit to the Albert Palace. From her bed she could see a bright star above the Mint, and she loved to watch it. Her mother and Tom were drinking in the shop, for customers came in late of a Saturday, and they must while away the time with doing something. It seemed to Nelly that the Buildings were unusually noisy that night. She could hear two women using Billingsgate language above her head, and George remonstrating with them, bidding them go into their respective rooms and keep quiet.

Down in the court children played about, boys and girls whose fathers and mothers would not be home before twelve or one o'clock from the public-houses.

Nelly knew how it was on the staircases; babies lay there in one another's arms fast asleep, with their heads on the stone steps, waiting for their parents to return and unlock their "place." Those tired babies often made Nelly's heart ache.

It was terrible to hear them crying at midnight, when their fathers and mothers came home drunk, and gave them cuffs and kicks. Nelly would have liked to spring out of bed and remonstrate with the drunken parents, but that would have done no good; only have made matters worse, for when they were drunk the casuals did not know what they were saying or doing. Men, who at other times were civil and pleasant enough, became like wild beasts the night after they received their wages, and women who worked hard to make husbands comfortable and keep children tidy during the week, grew rough and reckless on Saturday night. George was quite right in saying that the Company ought to employ another caretaker besides himself; that it was too much to expect of one man that he should keep order among six hundred casuals.

But the Company did not wish to be extravagant. The Company wished to put money in their pockets; and, so long as the rents were forthcoming, did not care what went on in Charlotte's Buildings.

"Some day there will be a murder," said George; "then things will be brought before the police-court, and questions will be asked that the Company won't find pleasant."

Nelly heard the men and women fighting and swearing, the children crying, the boys shouting and singing, as she lay on her bed. Above the Mint shone the bright star; she fixed her eyes on it, and her thoughts flew away from the noisy Buildings to a pair of blue eyes that had looked sympathetically into her face that evening, and a voice that was like music when compared with Whitechapel voices. She wondered where Mr. Grant was, and what he was doing.

"Shall I see him again?" she asked herself.

"No," she thought; "it isn't likely."

"He's forgotten me by now," she said, turning restlessly on her pillow, wondering when her mother would come to bed and the Buildings grow quiet; "forgotten me altogether."

So he had. And he would never have thought of her any more, had he not happened to meet her again, and that soon after the first time of meeting.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EAST-END THEATRE.

ONE evening, about the beginning of August, Nelly went to the sweater's house to take home some trousers. She found the door open; and the form, which ran along the passage, occupied by three or four pale-faced women, waiting for work. She sat down beside them, and undid the piece of calico in which the trousers she had been machining were wrapped. Presently the sweater's wife came down the passage, and beckoned her into a room littered with bits of calico, cloth, and shreds of other materials.

Here, by a table, stood the sweater, in his shirt-sleeves. He was sprinkling water on trousers, and ironing them afterwards. A woman brought him irons from a large fire which burned at one end of the room; and carried them back again. How many times she did that during the

day it is impossible to speculate, for the sweater began work at four o'clock in the morning, and worked until eleven or twelve o'clock at night. Consequently his back ached; he had a chronic back-ache. He was a tall man and very thin. His large bony hands showed his joints and knuckles, as though the skin must crack for want of flesh to ease it. His face was lean. His mouth was long and narrow, the lips being drawn out in a straight line above his square jaw-bones. His grey eyes glittered like steel beads; they always looked angry, sometimes they looked ferocious.

The sweater's wife was square, short, and rather stout. She had grey eyes, and nondescript features. The expression of her face was a perfect complement to that of her lord and master. She was what is called, in East End language, "a driving woman." When the sweater went courting he must have thought, "she'll do my business"; and each kiss must have been sweetened by the conviction that she would drive the nail in where he placed it, run it down to the

quick without compunction, if it suited her pocket. There was a complacence in her stony eyes that made them even worse to look at than the eyes of her husband; and a suavity in her voice that grated ten times worse than his rasping tones. She could walk into a "hand's" room, and demand why trousers were not finished, without a look at the hand's dying baby; and grind a hand down if food were scarce at home, if hungry children made work a necessity.

The sweater went every morning to a place where trousers were cut out by machinery, and competed with hundreds of other sweaters to do them cheapest; the sweater's wife gave them out to hands at the lowest possible rate of payment, and examined them when they were brought home finished. With spectacles on her nose she twisted round the buttons, looked critically at the stitches, and dragged at the lining; then she haggled about an extra twopence, and ground down hands who could not afford to be independent. She talked about the wickedness of "the poor," as though a gulf were fixed between the

people who can afford a butcher's bill and those who can only buy meat once a week in a Saturday market. According to her, hands were all bad; they drank, they pawned trousers, they were idle and good-for-nothing.

"If I had my way I'd put them all in a leaking vessel and send them out to sea," she was wont to say, if anyone asked her opinion of hands in Whitechapel.

In her pocket she kept a thong, which she applied to the backs of her children; and she would have dearly loved to bring that bit of leather down upon the shoulders of her hands had the law not prevented. As it was, her tongue was the only weapon she might use in dealing with them; and this she employed without any stint, stinging hungry women with bitter gibes, and making hands writhe by means of taunts and sneers.

Of all the hands she liked Nelly the best. She was sure to have the work well done if she entrusted it to Nelly Ambrose, and no saucy answer if she happened to be in a bad temper when the

girl brought it home. She kept Nelly waiting sometimes, she haggled and scolded; but she gave the girl regular work and good wages. And all this she did because her best hand would have found work elsewhere had she acted differently. So it was "Good evening, Miss Ambrose," when Nelly tripped into the room; and "Good night, Miss Ambrose," when she ran out again. And sometimes the sweater set his thin lips in a fixed grin when Nelly put the trousers down on the table, and wished the girl also, "Good evening."

After Nelly had given in her work and received her money she left the sweater's house and turned her steps homewards. She walked slowly, looking into the shop windows as she went, stopping to listen every now and then to a hurdy-gurdy, or to watch an acrobat performing tricks inside a ring of men, women and children. There was nothing particularly new to look at, but the streets were a change from the Buildings, and the evening air was pleasanter than the stuffy shop and bedroom. All the week she had been hard at work bending over her machine, finishing

off long rows of stitches; before she began another week like the last she sorely wanted a little diversion, a little amusement.

As she stood outside a bookseller's shop trying to read the name of a book in a bright blue cover, she heard a voice saying, "Good evening, Miss Ambrose," and looking up she saw Mr. Grant standing on the doorstep.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

She answered, "Nothing."

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

She spoke in rather a disconsolate voice, for she was tired of work, and home meant getting supper ready and washing up. She had had no "outing" since her visit to the Albert Palace, because George had been busy whitewashing the wash-houses and superintending men lay down asphalte in the court. Hands want holidays like other people; they feel the monotony of "the daily round, the common task" quite as much as, if not more than, their richer sisters, and Nelly longed for a little change before she set about a new

batch of trousers. Her mind was weary, so weary she took it almost as a matter of course that Mr. Grant should happen to be in the bookseller's shop when she paused to look in at the window, that he should come out before she moved away, recognise her, and wish her good evening. It was two weeks since she had met him in Battersea Park, and she had almost forgotten his existence, although at first she had thought of him all day and dreamt of him all night. She had made up her mind that she would never see him again, and he had faded in her memory, had become mixed up with the ideal, nameless lover who played so great a part in her thoughts and occupied such a prominent place in her feelings. Now she was mentally exhausted, unable to take much interest in him or anyone else unless something happened to rouse her flagging senses, to wake her up.

"Which way are you going?" he asked.

"Back to Wright Street."

She began to move slowly in the direction of home, and he walked beside her, looking down

on her tired face and watching her languid movements.

"Have you had another picnic since I met you in Battersea Park?" he inquired.

"No, I have been nowhere," answered Nelly; "I have done nothing."

They were passing a theatre as she spoke. Its doors were wide open, its lamps lit. A West End Company had engaged it for a week, and were drawing a full house. Wives and husbands, young men and maidens were hurrying into it; people with a holiday-look on their faces filled the hall, thronged the staircase.

"Shall we go in?" asked Mr. Grant. "I have nothing to do this evening. Would you like to see what is going on?"

Nelly's eyes danced with delight. She did not answer for half-a-minute. Then she said, hesitatingly, "George wouldn't like it."

Mr. Grant laughed, and suggested that it would be time enough to consider George's wishes when she was married.

"Come in to please *me*," he said, "*I* want to see it."

He led the way up the staircase, showed the manager a card, and asked for a private box. Then he took Nelly into a place where heavy red curtains hid her from view when she did not want to watch the stage and the audience, and told her to take off her hat and jacket.

She looked down into the pit, in which she had always sat on previous visits, and felt a "lady" for the first time in her life. Resting her arms on the red velvet cushions she gazed at the people below, thinking that they must notice where she was, and what she was doing; but they were drinking beer and eating three-cornered puffs; they were altogether oblivious. Mr. Grant began to whistle the music, and, hearing him, Nelly became conscious of a strange exhilaration, her feet kept time with the waltz. She looked at him, and quick as lightning came back the thoughts and feelings he had awakened a fortnight before, which for two weeks had lain dormant with the ideal lover.

"So you have done nothing since I saw you last," he said.

"Nothing but work," replied Nelly.

"Poor little thing! how dull you must find it," said Mr. Grant.

The curtain rose. The play commenced. There was a French villain, who had nothing French about him but his necktie, a virtuous wife, a man who tried to make love and could not do it, a funny old man, and some stupid young women. When the curtain fell the man who could not make love was being courted by a Frenchwoman, and the Frenchwoman's brother was scheming how he could make his sister a countess.

"Will you have an ice?" inquired Mr. Grant. And before Nelly could answer a waiter had brought her some soapy stuff wrapt in paper, and a bit of paste.

She looked so pretty as she sat there eating it. Her complexion was dazzling by gas-light, and excitement made her eyes sparkle between their long dark lashes. Absolutely unselfconscious,

trembling with pleasure, she was a picture worth looking at. Mr. Grant drew his chair close to her, and began to talk of actors and actresses in a way which astonished little East End Nelly. She was overwhelmed with his cleverness and said "Yes, sir," "No, sir," with charming diffidence. What astonished her most was the way in which he laughed at the ladies and gentlemen on the stage; the disparaging manner in which he spoke of this gentleman who spoke so well, and that lady who looked so beautiful. She thought them all such wonderful people; he seemed to think them quite commonplace.

The curtain rose again. The plot thickened. The virtuous wife was forced, to shield the honour of her mother, to become the victim of a secret by reason of which her brother appeared as her lover and was shot by her enraged husband.

"My lover!" she exclaimed, in a tragic voice, which made the house applaud in a way most refreshing to an actress accustomed to a jaded West End audience; "my lover!"

Her noble self-sacrifice was altogether too much

for Nelly's feelings. The little East End maiden hid her face behind the curtain and wept. Scarcely an eye was dry in the pit when the actress came before the lights to kiss her hand; the men shouted, the women wiped their eyes with aprons and pockethandkerchiefs.

Arthur Grant put his arm round Nelly's waist. He could not help it, the red-brown hair looked so wonderfully picturesque with the lamp shining on it, the white neck was so artistic in shape now Nelly's face was hidden in the red velvet cushions. She raised her head and gazed at him, half crying, half laughing, as he told her that things would all come right, that the virtuous wife would be reconciled to her husband and live happy ever afterwards, as a reward for her self-sacrifice.

"But the brother is dead," said Nelly, whose mouth was still tremulous. "The others may be happy, but he won't."

"Yes, he will," laughed Mr. Grant. "He will come to life and enjoy a champagne supper, Nelly."

All turned out as Mr. Grant had predicted; the

virtuous wife, after having been divorced, disowned by father and mother, starved and robbed of her child, was given back to her sorrowing husband by a strange hocus-pocus of events, in which the funny man played a prominent part. The French villain retired amid the hisses of the audience, and the rest of the company settled their differences in an amicable manner, cheered by the galleries and the pit.

"Your life must be very dull if you can find pleasure in watching a thing like that," said Mr. Grant, as they left the theatre, in which, before they started, he had written a few words of criticism on the piece. (The card he had shown to the manager had had the names of half-a-dozen newspapers on it, and he was obliged to send a notice of the play to a daily in return for the box.) "Very monotonous," he continued, when he had dropped the critique into a letter-box and lighted a cigar. "You ought to have more amusement."

"Sometimes I don't mind work," the girl answered; "but days come when I feel I must see something fresh."

"Do you ever go on the river?" he asked.

"I went once," replied Nelly, thinking of the day George had taken her, in a tub, from the Tower Steps to the Hermitage Stairs. "We mostly go by penny boat; little ones cost so much."

"I'll tell you what we will do, if you like," said Mr. Grant. "We will have a row, Nelly. If you come to Kew next Saturday, by the steamer, I will take you out in a boat. I was down there last week and found it awfully dull by myself. Would you like it?"

They were close to Wright Street when he said this, and they stood still while Nelly turned over the suggestion in her mind—wondered what George would think of it. The night air was so cool, so delicious. Mr. Grant's cigar was so different from Whitechapel smoke. Mr. Grant himself was so good, so kind, the little hand thought. She hesitated, then said "Yes"—for her thoughts conjured up a picture in which she saw herself far away from the Buildings and work; out of doors, in the sunshine, enjoying herself. She promised to meet him on the Kew

Pier that day week, and to tell George nothing about it."

"I'm sure, sir," she said, shyly, "Mother would be very pleased to see you for A. B. C. in the shop, if you would look in some evening. We are but poor folk, perhaps you'll excuse us."

"A. B. C.," echoed Mr. Grant. "What is that?"

"Ale, bread and cheese," replied Nelly. "We have supper at eight."

"I am afraid, Nelly, I cannot manage it," he said, gravely; "I am so busy."

He wished her "Good night," and she ran swiftly down Wright Street, for she was afraid that she might meet George in the Court. At twelve o'clock the gates of the Buildings were locked, and he often walked up and down, with a pipe, until it was time to close them. But that night he had gone out with Jack Strange, and Nelly did not see him as she ran quickly up the staircase. She found her mother and brother putting up the shutters in the shop when she reached her "place." They did not ask her why

she was late. In the East End girls come and go at all hours of the day and night without comment, especially "hands," like Nelly, who help to pay the rent. Her brother grumbled when she brought home less money than usual; her mother accused her of "gadding about" if she had a holiday; otherwise they took little notice of her, and said nothing. They did not care for her much. Tom felt that she was his superior and was jealous. Her mother liked Tom the best. Her mother could perhaps have told why she and Tom were so very different; could have said whence she inherited the ways and looks which caused her to be called the Masher of the Buildings. But her mother kept her secret, if she had one to keep. Nelly was only aware that her mother had been a lady's maid before she married a pale, consumptive invalid; an invalid Nelly had called father, until a hearse carried him away from the Buildings, and Tom took his place in the wooden arm-chair and behind the shop-counter, "a year ago come Christmas."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE RIVER.

WHEN Nelly reached Kew the following Saturday afternoon, Mr. Grant stood on the pier in his flannels, ready to receive her. He put her into a boat and rowed her down the river between the fields and the bulrushes. He taught her to steer, which she at first found difficult, and he wondered how it was that this little Whitechapel girl never looked awkward, although shy and rather nervous. Presently she gained confidence, and began to talk of George, her mother and Tom. She told him stories about the lady collectors, gave him quaint descriptions of their ways and doings and described their "followers," as she called the philanthropic gentlemen who conducted clubs and reading-rooms in the Buildings. It amused Mr. Grant to have an East End opinion on West End manners and customs,

especially that of a girl like Nelly, who was so unselfconscious, who spoke without malice, yet said things which sounded malicious. Once or twice he put up his eye-glass, feeling not quite certain that she was in earnest, but the hazel eyes met his with such soft diffidence that he dropped it.

"Would you like to pick some flowers?" he asked, drawing the boat to the side of a field; "there are some about."

She sprang on the bank, and he moored the boat. Then he sat down under a tree while she picked daisies.

He felt very well satisfied with himself that evening. He had cause, he thought, for contentment. Not only was he giving a little East End girl great pleasure, but he had just run away from the charms of a married lady, with whom he had been greatly tempted to flirt. He thought complacently of his wife at Margate, the children and the new baby. In two or three weeks he would join his family, eat shrimps and dig in the sand, until it was time to finish his holiday on the Continent. His hands were full

of work. He was translating a book, writing an article on Indian politics, and preparing a set of lectures to be delivered at Christmas. He meant to start a novel when he came back to town, into which he would introduce some curious psychological studies he had come across, and some strange events. He would have no plot in it. Plots had gone out since the time of Thackeray and George Eliot. His novel should be a study of character, that is, an epitome of Arthur Grant.

It was a beautiful evening, just enough breeze to lift the leaves of the trees and drive soft, fleecy clouds onwards, a glorious sunset and perfect silence but for the singing of birds and humming of insects. Nelly, who had picked all the daisies she wanted, sat beside him, framed in dark green leaves and bulrushes. Her long, red-brown hair fell over her shoulders, her hat lay on the ground, her hands were busy tying flowers with grass.

"I know who you are like," exclaimed Mr. Grant; "you are like Pharaoh's daughter when she found Moses; I mean the picture of a girl bending over a cradle with a look of awe on her

face and her hair all about. I can't remember where I have seen it, but that's it."

Nelly laughed. She knew very little Bible history, being a Catholic; but it pleased her to think that she resembled a picture, and she smiled as Mr. Grant spoke of the King's daughter, who had gone down to bathe in the river, and had there discovered a Hebrew baby in a cradle of bulrushes. She was no psychological study, this little Whitechapel girl, only something pretty to look at. She had not much to say for herself; but she put on her wreath and looked like a wood-nymph, while Mr. Grant told her that dog-roses had all been white in Paradise until Eve kissed them, after which they became tinted pink; that a great poet had fallen in love with a little country girl because she had said that, if Adam named the animals, God let Eve christen the flowers and plants, and half-a-dozen other things not worth repeating.

When it grew dusk they went back to Kew. Nelly put her hair up, and sighed to think that the afternoon and evening were over. She could

not even take the flowers back to Whitechapel, for her mother and Tom would want to know where they came from; a dozen voices would ask what she had been doing if she walked into the Buildings laden with spoils from the country.

"Never mind," said Mr. Grant; "we will have another day on the river and you shall pick some more flowers, Nelly. Next Saturday we will go somewhere else."

Intrigues with married ladies he knew to be dangerous; he quite forgot that "hands" have hearts.

"I can't think what's come over Nelly," her mother said to Tom, after the girl returned home that evening. "She sits a-doing of nothing, and she hasn't been to market."

"Nell, wake up!" said the loafer, walking into the bedroom, in which his sister sat by her little bit of garden. "Go and get Sunday's dinner before the shops shut."

Nelly did as she was told and went downstairs, dreaming. She heard confused voices in the

Court, but she took no notice. Someone spoke to her—George, she thought—she said good evening, and went into Wright Street. She forgot to take her change in the butcher's shop, and bought so many potatoes she could not carry them home. When the children ran to meet her she had nothing to give them; she even spoke peevishly to a little boy who asked why she had not been to market. She went to bed directly she had washed up the plates and dishes and put things straight for Sunday; but when in bed she could not sleep. The star shone brightly above the Mint; she did not care to watch it. She turned restlessly from side to side, and at last she fell asleep, with hot, flushed cheeks and dry lips.

Sunday morning she woke up with a headache, and all that day she stayed at home, refusing to go for a walk with George, saying that she felt tired when the church bell rang for Mass.

In the evening she roused herself and went to see a friend who lived a little further along the balcony. This woman was a kind, motherly sort of creature, and Nelly often ran into her rooms

for a chat. She was the wife of a costermonger, an old soldier, with a wooden leg. He drove a good trade in the city, where his barrow stood outside some large warehouses, and was patronized by business men. His wife helped him. At five o'clock on summer mornings the two went to market, and carried thence large baskets of fruit on the barrow to the stand in the city.

The old soldier had his pension, his wife took in washing, besides which they made between two and three pounds a week by their costermongering during the summer months, and from twelve to fifteen shillings in the winter, when they sold oranges, nuts and chocolate. They were looked upon as millionnaires by the other tenants; and on Saturday night youngsters knocked at their door to say, "Please, mother wants to borrow twopence," "Father wants to know if you can lend him a shilling till next week." They were very good-natured people—in fact, too generous, for their generosity often led them into trouble. They could not help occasionally "treating" a friend, sometimes inviting a few neigh-

bours into a public-house. When sober they were excellent folk; when drunk they fought, and the old soldier generally had the worst of it, owing to his wooden leg.

The Sunday evening Nelly went to see them they had not recovered from a drinking bout at which they had assisted the previous night. The costermonger lay on a sofa with his head bound up, and beside him sat his wife, who was telling him in maudlin tones that she would never knock him over again, and comforting herself with draughts from a jug that stood beside her on a table.

Seeing them in this state, Nelly would have left the room immediately had she not noticed that their linnet, which had a cage in the window, wanted water. The poor little thing was piping in a thin, thirsty voice that fell on deaf ears, and brains too dull to hear it. Nelly went to fill its glass, and while she was doing this she heard firm, heavy footsteps coming down the passage. A knock at the door followed, then Father O'Hara walked into the room and stood silently

looking at the drunken man and woman. After a short scrutiny he went to the table and took up the jug.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"Sure, Father, it's only ale for Pat and meself," said the woman, rising up and steadying herself against the sofa.

The priest strode to the open window and emptied the jug out into the road.

"What's this?" he asked, opening the cupboard and bringing out a bottle.

"Jist a drop of something, Father, to raise me spirits."

Father O'Hara dashed the bottle under the fireplace.

"Down on your knees!" he said. "Before our Blessed Lady you shall both of you take the pledge this very minute."

The drunken woman knelt on the floor as she was ordered, and dragged her husband with her. Then, before an image of the Virgin, which stood on a little shelf above the bed, the priest administered to them an oath, and when they

rose up he entered their names in a book which he took out of his pocket.

"Now, you have sworn never to touch beer or spirits again," he said, after they had put two crosses to their names with trembling fingers. "If you break your oath you shall both be turned out of the Holy Catholic Church, and when you are dying you shall not receive the blessed Sacraments."

He was gone in another minute, and Nelly followed him, leaving the drunken couple to meditate on what had taken place, to realize that henceforth they must drink nothing but water.

Father O'Hara was Nelly's confessor. She had been thinking all Sunday that she would make her confession before she saw Mr. Grant again, and hear what the priest had to say about her holiday on the river. But as she watched him administer the oath, looked at his stern face and heard his firm voice, she said to herself, "I cannot tell him"; and she went back to her "place," where she sat down by her little bit of garden until it grew dark. When the

church bell rang for vespers, her head sank on the box of mould and she murmured:—

"I can't tell him; I can't, I can't."

So the following Saturday she met Mr. Grant on a pier a short way down the river, and he rowed her to Greenwich. The water was rather rough, rough enough to make him glad to lie on the grass when they reached the park. He talked to her about the great telescope on the hill yonder; spoke of stars as suns, like the one she had seen sinking into the west while they were on the river; of stars as worlds, like the one in which she was now feeding deer with biscuits, in which they had just had tea together. He thought it amusing to give her bits of astronomical gossip; to watch her hazel eyes widening beneath their long dark lashes and her face growing perplexed and troubled. She only knew one star, she told him, that was the one above the Mint, opposite the Buildings. He said from her description it must be a planet, and asked if she thought it lived there always. He spoke of the way in which stars move

about till she grew nervous, oppressed with vague fears and wonderings. She left off feeding the deer and came to sit beside him on the slope under the chestnuts, and presently the stars began to show themselves, dark shadows fell across the grass, the park became quiet.

> "Vraiment
> C'est charmant
> Cette nuit
> Hors du bruit,"

sang Arthur Grant. "Wouldn't it be nice to spend the night here, Nelly, instead of going back to Whitechapel?"

It was very late when she returned home that night. For three weeks she had not been to market, and as she passed through the shop Tom thought fit to remonstrate.

"What do yer stop out till this time o' night for?" he asked. "Things cost a sight more in Abel Street than at the market."

"Wait till you pay for 'em before you speak," replied Nelly, in a sharp voice.

"I can't think what's come over the lass,"

said Mrs. Ambrose. "She knocks about o' nights and talks gibberish in 'er sleep fit to frighten a body. To my certain knowledge she only made ten shillings last week by 'er work, and I don't marvel at it, for she's always a-leaving her machine, gadding to the balcony, or lookin' out o' the winder. She's 'ad words with George, I expect."

"A good thing if she 'as," remarked the loafer, who did not like the caretaker, and was loth to see Nelly's money leave the shop. "The airs them two gives theirselves is rediculus."

A week later Nelly came back one afternoon from the sweater's house, laden with work, walking slowly, with her head bent down and her eyes fixed on the ground. As she passed the vacant space opposite the Buildings, she looked up for a minute, and there, sitting on a heap of stones, she saw the lame girl who had shown her the Lourdes water some weeks before. On a mound opposite the lame girl sat a little deformed shoeblack, with his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees. These two "kept com-

pany." They had been keeping company for about a year, to the great amusement of the tenants on the Buildings, who thought it a joke that poor lame Susan should want a husband or hunchbacked Tim a wife.

The two lovers were looking so very disconsolate that Nelly could not help asking them what was the matter. She went through the gate, put her bundle of work down and leant against the railings, waiting for an answer. But neither spoke. Tim looked at Susan, and Susan looked at Tim, without speaking.

"What is it?" asked Nelly.

"Tell 'er, Tim," said the lame girl.

"No, you tell 'er, Susan," said the hunchback.

"Well," said Susan, slowly, "you know as Tim and me've been keeping company this twelvemonth. We wants now to be married, so we goes this afternoon to Father O'Hara and asks 'im to marry us. We rings the bell, and when Father O'Hara comes to us Tim speaks up and tells 'im about 'is bits of savings and

the money 'e makes cleaning boots. 'E pulls 'is 'air in front, an' says, 'Seeing, Father, as we're both afflicted-like, we wants to be married." Father O'Hara looks at us, and says nothing at first; then he tells us, 'Yer mustn't think no more about it. The priest who'd marry yer 'ud merit to be 'orsewhipped.' "

"We mustn't think no more about it," repeated the shoeblack mournfully; "no more—never!"

Nelly looked silently at the lovers—the lame girl, whose crutches lay on the ground before her, and the little hunchback with large black eyes and pale face. Then she asked:—

"Do you love one another very much?"

"I've saved this to buy a weddin' breakfast," answered the shoeblack, taking a shilling out of his pocket and twirling it round on his little finger. "We meant to 'ave cockles and tripe."

"If only we could go to Lourdes," sighed the lame girl, "our Blessed Lady might take pity on us. Father 'Hara 'ud marry us if we weren't so afflicted like."

"You don't know what love is," cried Nelly

with a weak, hysterical laugh; "you don't know anything about it."

She took up her bundle of work and ran quickly through the gate, so quickly she did not see George, and gave a start when he called out—

"Nell, wait a minute, I want to speak with you."

He had on no coat, and his hat was splashed with whitewash; but a smile lit up his ruddy, good-natured face, and his voice softened when he spoke to Nelly.

"I want you to come with Jack and me to the Rosherville Gardens on Saturday," he said. "It's a long time since we had an outing, but now I ain't so busy."

"Oh, George, I can't come," she answered; "I really can't."

"Why?" inquired the caretaker, looking disappointed. "Why can't you come, Nell?"

The girl burst into a fit of crying.

"What ails you, lass?" asked George, tenderly. "You don't look well, Nelly. Has Tom been bullying you?" he continued, throwing an angry

glance up at the shop window. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing," answered Nelly. "Let me go. I can't come Saturday. Let me go upstairs."

"Well, when will you come?" asked George. "Will you come next week?"

"Yes, if you like," she answered. "Any day next week; which day then don't matter a bit."

She ran away, leaving George with a perplexed look on his face, and when she reached her "place" she flung herself on the bed and sobbed as if her heart would break. Any day next week she would be free to go out with George and Jack, for the Saturdays, the Wednesdays and the other days she had been wont to spend with Mr. Grant would be things of the past. He would be at Margate, and she would have nothing to do but work, work.

CHAPTER VI.

EAST AND WEST.

Autumn gave way to winter, and Christmas found Nelly still busy at work. Tom and her mother had no cause to complain now that she took too many holidays, for her machine was scarcely ever silent, and often it was heard until late in the night. The girl bent over the long rows of stitches with pale, tired face, taking no notice of what went on around her, refusing to go anywhere but to church and market. Concerts given on the Buidings by philanthropic West End people did not entice her into the club-rooms, and when a marriage took place between a lady-collector and a "follower" she refused an invitation to the wedding breakfast which Mr. Whiteley provided for the tenants. Only once did she appear to take any interest in her fellow-casuals; that was when lame Susan returned

from Lourdes. Some rich Catholics (friends of Father Gore) had furnished funds for the pilgrimage, and the lame girl had gone to the South of France in charge of a nun, who, also, had a favour to ask of the Virgin Mary. She had started amid prayers and blessings, with five shillings from the casuals in her pocket, amid bonfires of rags which her neighbours had made on the balconies. Tim had waved his hat as she drove away to the station, and had burnt candles for her in church until she came back. Nelly did not go to see her off, but when she heard that poor Susan had returned no better, if anything rather worse, she left her machine and went to the lame girl's "place," a small cupboard, for which its owner paid eighteenpence a week. She found Susan sitting on a stool in front of a little bit of fire, which she was feeding with cinders. Nelly did not speak, but she put her arms silently round the lame girl's neck.

"Our Blessed Lady didn't wish it," sobbed Susan. "Our Blessed Lady knows best."

That evening Nelly went to church. She looked at the Confessional boxes, and read the names written above the green curtains. Father O'Hara's box stood beneath the station which shows the Christ bending under His Cross. A little further up the aisle was Father Gore's box. Nelly glanced at that box, but was afraid to enter it, for she always confessed to the stern priest, never to the Father whose gentle face and voice were so welcome on the Buildings. She would have given all she possessed to change her Confessor, but she lacked courage to do it. She knelt down before an altar for a few minutes, then she left the church.

On the church steps sat an old Irishwoman, named Bridget, and coming up to them was Father O'Hara.

"Is it Father Gore or yerself?" asked old Bridget, raising her blurred eyes to the priest's face.

"It's myself," answered Father O'Hara. "I'll give you in charge if you don't move on at once."

"Sure and if it's yerself I want nothing with

yer," muttered Bridget, rising up and shaking out her ragged petticoats. "Honey," she whispered to Nelly, "give me summat to buy a bit o' bread with, honey."

Nelly dropped a penny into the withered hand the Irishwoman held out towards her, then she went slowly back to the Buildings. She did not confess after that, so on Christmas Day she could not take the Sacrament. She went to Mass, and as she knelt in a corner of the church she saw the lame girl leave the altar with a calm, happy face.

"Our Blessed Lady knows best," Susan said, as the two girls walked home together; "I knows and feels it."

Directly dinner was finished Nelly left her mother and Tom drinking, and went to the caretaker's house. She had to thank George for a Christmas present and Jack for a bottle of wine he had brought her from the wine merchant's office in the city. She found the two men sitting over the fire, and sat down in an armchair with them, while George spun a yarn

about Christmases he had spent in "foreign parts."

"Jack," said Nelly, when the caretaker had gone out to light the lamps, "does that gentleman we met in Battersea Park come to your club now?"

"He hasn't been for a long while," answered Jack; "but he's going to give us a lecture after Christmas."

"Where does he live?" asked Nelly.

"In a road almost opposite the West Kensington Station," Jack answered. "I forget the name of it, but I took him a letter there once from our chairman. Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, I've no reason to ask," replied Nelly, rising out of the chair. "I think I'll go now. Tell George I couldn't wait for him. I have to tidy things and wash up."

She left the house and went slowly back to her place. Inside the Buildings the casuals were eating and drinking, the children decked the furniture with "bits of Christmas," friends and

relations shared roast beef and plum pudding. Out in the Court were sounds of music, for some of the tenants played on brass instruments, and others danced. Nelly took no notice of anyone or anything. She shivered as she crept along the balcony, and when she reached her place she drew her beads out of her pocket and kissed her little wooden crucifix.

"I wish I could better myself," said the caretaker, after he returned to the house and found the armchair empty. "Nell's killing herself making them d—— trousers."

"She looks ill and no mistake," answered his friend. "Why don't you marry her out of hand, George?"

The caretaker shook his head and said, as he lit his pipe, "I wish I'd never left the Service."

Christmas was scarcely over when one evening Nelly went out of the Buildings wrapped in a shawl. She walked past the Tower, which stood large and grim in the twilight, through the streets, in which the lamps were already lighted, towards the Bank. At the Mansion

House Station she took a ticket to West Kensington, and seated herself in a third-class carriage just as the guard gave the signal for the train to start. When she reached her destination it was quite dark, and snow was falling in small, crisp flakes. She put her hand up to her forehead as she left the station and looked round her, bewildered. There were very few people about, so if she wanted to ask her way she must go to a shop or walk half a mile in search ot a policeman. She walked a little to the right, a little to the left, then she went down a street which slants to the west. As she walked slowly along the pavement she looked in at all the uncovered windows; she peered into the rooms, straining her eyes to see if they had any occupants. Most of the houses had the shutters up or the blinds down, only a few remained open to view. She came to the end of the road, crossed over and walked up it on the other side, halting as before at each uncovered window to continue her scrutiny. Her face

was very pale; her hazel eyes looked careworn and anxious.

Suddenly she gave a start, drew in her breath, and stopped short in front of a bow window. She leant her arms on the railings, then put her chin on her hands, and gazed through the white curtains at a gentleman and two children. The children lay on the hearthrug listening to a book the gentleman was reading; sometimes they asked him questions, sometimes he bent down to show them a picture. Nelly could not see his face, but something in his figure seemed familiar. She leant forward, and into her eyes came a hungry look; while she watched her face grew older.

Then the door of a room was opened and a lady walked in, carrying a baby, which she placed on the gentleman's knee. She laid her hand on his shoulder and stood watching the children with a smile upon her face and her hands folded across her wrapper, which fell in long folds from her neck to her feet and lay behind her on the carpet.

Now Nelly could see the gentleman's face, for the baby dropped a shoe on the hearthrug and he bent down to pick it up.

"It's he," murmured Nelly. "But he never looked at me like that; never."

Her arms shook on the railings; she could hear her teeth chattering; but she remained with her eyes fixed on the gentleman and the baby. She was wondering about his changed expression, dumbly feeling that it had something to do with the little child he held on his knee, whose tiny hand was clasped round the ring he wore on his finger. She paid no attention to the other children, she scarcely looked at their mother, but she gazed at the gentleman and the baby. With large round eyes and clenched hands she watched every movement of the baby's arms and legs as it clutched at the gentleman's eye-glass; marked every kiss its father gave it, every look that passed over its father's face, as he sat there with his arm round it in the semi-light, semi-darkness.

"He never looked at me like that," murmured

Nelly, drawing back behind a stone pillar near the steps, "never."

Standing behind the pillar, she did not notice Mr. Grant give the child to its mother and come to the window. Had she seen him there, looking out at the night, thinking whether he would go to his club or see what his wife had at home for dinner, saying to himself that it was a nuisance to be poor and forced to live in the suburbs, yawning, and putting up his eye-glass, she would have been astonished. Whitechapel knows nothing of metempsychosis; it is the land of dumb thought and dumb feeling, unless it visits the gin shop and takes to dram drinking.

The next time Nelly looked at the window she found the shutters closed and the picture she had been watching vanished into darkness. Slowly, very slowly, she left the spot, and walked back to the station. As she went she seemed to see Mr. Grant's face bending over the baby. His changed expression perplexed her; she could not understand it. But she felt that he lived in a different world from the one she had imagined—

a world shut in by the golden gates of domestic peace and happiness. This was the man she had seen in the parks, and on the river; only then he had looked as men look at "sweethearts," not as men look at babies.

When she drew near the station she put her hand into her pocket to find her return ticket. To her surprise her pocket was empty. In vain she searched the road and the pavement, her purse was gone—gone altogether. Either she had dropped it or it had been stolen; there was no trace of it left, although she turned her pocket inside out, and shook her dress. A forlorn, forsaken feeling come over Nelly. She sat down on a doorstep, and sitting there she felt how far, how very far the East is from the West. She realized that Whitechapel may talk to Kensington, and Kensington may shake hands with Whitechapel, but between them there is a great gulf fixed, the thought of which made her head ache and her heart sink.

At last she rose up and gazed about her, vaguely wondering how she should get back to

the Buildings. It was a long way to walk, and she did not know in which direction she ought to begin walking. The roads looked all alike; the rows of houses showed no difference. Snow was falling fast; and as she stood there, with the snowflakes beating upon her face, she heard a church bell strike nine. She felt tired, and very cold. Her body shook, her legs were unsteady in their movements. She could not spend the night in the streets; she must go home, and she must go home on foot because she had no money to pay for train or omnibus.

She went slowly and painfully past the railway station, and when she came to some steps she asked a man the way to the Bank. He stared at her, and, seeing her stagger, turned on his heel. She did not ask again, but went straight on in one direction. Sometimes people jostled against her, boys almost knocked her over, but she stumbled forwards, and came at last to a place where some omnibuses were waiting outside a tavern. "Bank" was written on the door of one omnibus, and she looked with longing eyes at the

red seats inside it. She was so very weary. She leant against a wall opposite the omnibus and wondered how she could possibly get back to Whitechapel.

"I can't walk one step further," she said to herself. "If I can't ride home I must lie down in the street, put my head somewhere, and go to sleep."

While she was wondering what would become of her a young man passed by. His face was marked with lines of work; its expression was very earnest, very benevolent. He looked at Nelly; and she, not knowing what gave her courage to speak, said:—

"Oh, sir, I've lost my purse. Won't you lend me twopence?"

The young man put his hand into his pocket, but before he could answer a policeman came up.

"Move on," said the policeman roughly, to Nelly.

"Leave the girl alone!" exclaimed the young man.

"I've nothing to do with you, sir," said the policeman; "but this young woman——"

"Has lost her purse," interrupted the young man. "Will you have a cab, or go by the omnibus?" he asked, turning to Nelly.

"I only want twopence," faltered Nelly. "I'll send it back. But I am so tired, sir; so tired."

"She's drunk," muttered the policeman.

"Let me lend you five shillings," said the young man. "You won't? Well, here is an omnibus."

He helped her into a seat, paid the conductor her fare, and wished her a pleasant "good night." As he walked away he raised his hat. That young man is well known in London; his name is fast becoming famous; but, surely, if our actions were measured by their real worth, not as they are talked about, his kindness to Nelly would be reckoned of greater value than all his pleadings in Court—than all his future eminence!

CHAPTER VII.

A CAPTAIN IN THE SALVATION ARMY.

WINTER was over, and spring was making its first appearance, when Nelly went one day to the sweater's house with a bundle of trousers. She walked slowly, for she knew that the work ought to have been carried home some days previously, that the sweater's wife would be cross. Besides, she was tired and the distance seemed long, longer than it used to be last year! Last year! "Ah!" wondered Nelly, "when was that?" She rested on doorsteps as she went, and put her bundle down every five or ten minutes. Her dress was draggled, the feather in her hat was limp; evidently she had not lately seen much of her friend the looking-glass.

When she came to the house she found the sweater's wife in the passage scolding the maid-servant. It is a curious fact that people

who only keep one servant generally find in her more faults, if not vices, than are found by mistresses of large households in ten or twelve domestics. The sweater's wife never kept a servant more than a month, for sometimes the servant ran away, and invariably the servant gave notice within four weeks. Servants were all bad in Whitechapel, said the sweater's wife, and no country servant would live in such a wicked neighbourhood; so her voice was generally heard scolding in the kitchen, when it was not scolding in the workshop. Nelly could not have arrived at a more unfortunate moment, for the sweater's wife had worked herself into a state of excitement in which she longed to have some just cause for wrath. Her children were all at school, so she could not bring the thong out of her pocket, and the maid-servant had retired weeping into the kitchen as Nelly, tired and exhausted, came up the stone steps.

The girl sat down on a form in the passage and began to count the trousers she had stitched during the week. She knew that it was useless

to make excuses for bringing the work home late, so she waited for the sweater's wife to speak. But the sweater's wife remained silent. Nelly looked up, and something in the woman's face made her turn pale. Her head sank down, she covered her face with her hands, and the trousers fell on the ground at her feet.

Then the sweater's wife gave vent to her feelings. She called Nelly by the most terrible names that have ever been invented, no term in the feminine vocabulary seemed to her bad enough for the poor "hand" who trembled before her. There is nothing in this world so hard, so cold, as a woman who prides herself upon being virtuous; no one so barren of comfort as a wife who has had no temptation to leave the path of righteousness. Poor little trembling Nelly only half understood the paragon's speech, but she felt as though she were being thrust down, down into a pit, the bottom of which she could never reach, into which she must sink, alone, helpless. At last she rose up and crept through the open door, into the street, having heard that only

"honest" women should make trousers for virtuous sweaters, not girls like Nelly Ambrose.

"Where shall I go?" she wondered. "What shall I do?"

She sat down on a doorstep to think. They would not care to have her at home unless she had work, she said to herself. In her life work meant mother, brother, food, rent. She had forgotten to wait for her money; she had left the trousers in the passage, and come away without it. She could not make up her mind to go back; yet she was afraid to meet Tom penniless. She went a little way towards the sweater's house—then she stopped.

"No," she thought. "I will face Tom sooner than that dreadful woman. I will try to get work somewhere else. I will do anything."

She knew other sweaters; so she started off to inquire where a hand was wanted. Necessity made her walk fast, and she hurried along, although hungry and weary, determined to find employment. Alas! each sweater told her that he had no need of her services; times were bad,

work was slack, she might be wanted later on,. but not at present. She looked in at the shop windows, hoping to see cards saying that hands were wanted, but no cards were hung up. Last year she had seen numbers of such notices; she had felt so independent; now she grew every minute more hopeless, more desperate.

The spring afternoon changed into chilly evening, and still she wandered on, afraid to go back to the Buildings, trembling at the thought of telling Tom and her mother that she was "out of work." Once it flashed into her mind that she had better make her way to the priest's house and let Father O'Hara know all about it; but she had not sufficient courage to go there, she was afraid of the tall, stern priest, who looked as though sin were a thing to be trampled upon rather than pitied, whose voice frightened penitents into hiding instead of confessing faults.

Father O'Hara lived in an atmosphere of doctrine and ritual, scourging himself free from intellectual weakness. He had little sympathy with sinful flesh; he thought it ought to be

scourged into holiness. The death of a saint was pleasing in God's sight, for the Deity rejoiced in witnessing pain borne for His sake; the death of a sinner satisfied His righteousness. Such was Father O'Hara's faith, and he clung to it, knowing that it would slip from his grasp unless he blinded his intellect, held it fast.

At last Nelly went back to the Buildings. It was growing dark when she reached the shop, so she did not notice her mother and Tom talking together in the window; see the looks they threw at her as she passed into the bedroom. But presently the bedroom door opened, and the loafer came in. Directly the girl saw him she gave a wild piercing shriek, for in his hand he held a stick. She cowered, and called aloud on the Virgin Mary, while the bully advanced towards her. Shriek followed shriek. Then Nelly rushed wildly out of the room, past her mother, into the street.

She ran into the vacant space opposite the Buildings, with her red-brown hair streaming behind her, and her eyes full of terror and

anguish. There, in a corner, she lay down on the ground—alone at last. No one came to disturb her; she was left to herself, in cold, hunger, and darkness. Bruised in body and wounded in spirit, with visions of sweaters' wives and bullying brothers, she shivered and wept; while Tom enjoyed the consciousness of having done his duty, and her mother drank.

She fell asleep, with her head on a heap of stones and bricks, and there she slept until the caretaker came to look for her. He had heard strange tales on the Buildings (in them gossip travels fast). He had been told that the sweater's wife had paid Nelly's mother a visit, and that Tom had, in consequence, turned his sister out into the street. He could not believe it: but a little boy had said that at nine o'clock Nelly had been seen flying into the vacant space, that she had not come back, but lay there still, quite quiet, "all of a heap." The caretaker then took a lantern and went to look for his sweetheart. He was still incredulous, and yet—and yet?

He found Nelly stretched on the ground, with

her red-brown hair across her pale face and her eyes shut. As he bent over her the light of the lantern woke her up. She started, looked at him, pushed her hair back, and turned on her elbow. George thought that he had never seen her look so beautiful as she did that night.

"Nell, lass," he said, "it isn't true, is it?"

Into her hazel eyes came a look like that you see in the eyes of an animal caught in a trap.

"Nell, tell me it isn't true," George said. "Just say it isn't true, Nelly."

She made no answer, and he let the light fall full on her face. He did not speak for some minutes. He stood silently thinking. Then he said:—

"Follow me, Nelly. You can't stay out here all night."

She rose up and walked by his side out of the vacant space into Wright Street. Very few people were about, and those who saw her were afraid to make any remark, for the caretaker was feared as well as liked on the Buildings. He blew out the light and left the lantern on his door-step; afterwards he walked slowly in the direction of

the Aldgate Station, followed by Nelly. The girl plaited her hair as they went, and tried to put her dress straight. George could hear her sobbing, but he walked on without looking at her, taking no notice. They reached a small street leading towards Bishopsgate, and there he knocked at a door. When it was opened he asked for Captain Lobe, and hearing that the Captain was upstairs he mounted a staircase and knocked again.

"Come in!" shouted a voice inside a room.

They went in. There, sitting on a table, with his arms crossed and his legs hanging down, was a little fellow in uniform. He had an "S" on his collar, otherwise he might have been taken for a Volunteer Captain. There was a smartness about him which spoke of the army; he was neat from his short-cropped hair to his boots—so spick and span, no corps need have been ashamed to own him. He looked eighteen; but was older most likely, for his eyes had a wider range of sympathies than those of boys have, and his voice was the voice of a man.

By a fire stood an elderly woman. She was making tea, and as George and Nelly came in she held out a cup to the little Salvation Captain. Her face was careworn, but placid and contented.

The two were alone in the room, but evidently other people were expected, for chairs stood by the fire, and half-a-dozen cups and saucers were on the table. In the fender was a plate of buttered toast, and by the side of the grate puffed a large black kettle. The room was barely furnished; it had no carpet, no table-cloth; in fact, no ornament of any sort except a large placard nailed against the wall, which stated:—

"In wet weather all female officers are ordered to wear goloshes."

Directly the little Captain saw George and Nelly he sprang down from the table and went to meet them, asking:—

"What can I do for you?"

Then, without waiting for an answer, he pointed to a chair, and said to Nelly:—

"Sit down; the sergeant will give you some tea. How cold and tired you look, lassie."

His voice was strangely gentle and sympathetic. You do not often hear a voice like it, either in the East or the West End of London; but then there is in this world only one such little Salvation Captain. In another minute he was back on the table swinging his legs, while the sergeant poured out a cup of tea for Nelly and took up the buttered toast from the grate, hoping that the girl would eat some of it.

Nelly sank down on the chair the Captain pointed out to her, and leant her head against the wall. She tried to thank the sergeant for the tea, but could not manage to make her voice audible. She shook her head at the toast. She stopped sobbing, but tears fell on her knee; her hands trembled so much, she would have dropped the teacup had not the little Captain jumped off the table in time to catch it.

"I'll get you some brandy," he said, going to a cupboard. "Sergeant, give me a glass."

Meanwhile George looked on, twirling his hat in his fingers, without speaking. He refused to sit down, and would not take tea or toast. He

waited until Nelly had finished the brandy, then he was about to say something, when the door opened, and two girls, with shawls on their heads, came into the room. They wished the Captain and the sergeant good evening, and sat down by the fire to drink tea, while the elderly woman made inquiries about the weather, and asked if they had on dry boots.

"Whose beat are you on to-night?" inquired the Captain.

They answered, "X.'s."

"O, that's all right; but don't be late," said the Captain. "Sergeant Grey always gets nervous if you are out later than usual, even if X. is on duty. Good night, lassies!"

After the girls went away George took the Captain aside and they had a long talk, in which the sergeant joined them, at the Captain's request. Nelly sat by, with her eyes shut, enjoying a sense of peace and comfort which she had not experienced for nearly a twelvemonth. The room felt so warm after the cold, dreary streets; the people in it had voices so unlike those of Tom and

the sweater's wife. Her only fear was that all this warmth and kindness would suddenly vanish. Then, what would become of her? Who would give her a place to lie down in? All she wanted was to lie down and be quiet.

"Nelly," said George, coming up to the fire-place, "would you like to go home with the sergeant? She has a room to let."

"Oh, George," sobbed the girl, "I'm out of work."

"I know that," the caretaker answered. "I'll pay for it."

"How can you find the money?"

"I shall take it out of the post-office."

"The post-office!"

"Why, yes," said George, slowly. "I've been saving money to furnish a house directly I could better myself; I'll take that."

He turned away, and as he left the room with the Captain, Nelly heard him mutter, "I wish I'd never left the Service."

Directly the two men departed the sergeant cleared the table, raked the fire out of the grate,

and told Nelly that she was ready to go home. "Mine's a poor place," she said, "but nice and quiet. I work all day and only help the Army of an evening, so you mustn't mind the fire being out when we get back. I'll give you some supper, lassie; then you shall go to bed. You look almost worn out."

It was not far from the Rescue Lassies' Room to the sergeant's place, only about five minutes' walk, and Nelly did not find the way long, for the motherly woman gave the girl an arm to lean on and talked to her all the time about household matters, how they should manage with the oven, who should use the copper first on washing days, the cheapest grocer and the best milkshop. When they reached the house she took Nelly downstairs into a little kitchen, hung her bonnet on a nail, and cooked the supper. George had, she said, arranged everything; Nelly was not to trouble about payment.

"You mustn't cry, lassie," she told the girl. "Cheer up. I'll get your room ready and you shall go to bed at once."

Nelly could scarcely believe that it was not all a dream, that she would not awake and find herself back in the noisy Buildings. She looked at the neat little kitchen, with its whitewashed walls and red brick floor; she stroked the cat that purred as it rubbed its back against her dress; she watched the sergeant bustling about with sheets and blankets, and wondered how she came to be sitting there instead of with Tom and her mother in the shop.

"You're at home now, lassie," said the sergeant as she wished Nelly good night. "You belong to us."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO IS IT?

THE following evening George paid the little Salvation Captain a visit. He lived in lodgings near the barracks, and when the caretaker came into his room he was lying curled up on an old sofa, studying some rules just issued by the General. There was one thing about him which all must have noticed; namely, he never sat in the same position for two consecutive minutes. The position he liked best was one on the table, where he could swing his legs, but if he was obliged to be in a chair he twisted himself into the oddest shapes. He threw his arms round the back of the seat; he sat now on one leg, and now on the other; he crossed his knees, he drew in his feet, he contorted his body, he *could* not keep quiet for more than one minute. When George knocked at the door he had just finished

his tea. The remains of it were on the table—all except the eggshells, which he had pitched into the grate. He was not in uniform. He had on an old jacket frayed at the neck and wrists, some very old trousers, and slippers bought in Whitechapel for eighteenpence. The large bare room he sat in looked out on the Whitechapel Road—that road, so full of interest, which fascinates people who watch it more than any other thoroughfare in London. He was too busy to spend much time in looking at it, but sometimes he put his head out of the window to lament over the sinners he consigned to the burning pit, to offer up a prayer for Whitechapel.

George wished the Captain good evening, and sat down. He took a good-sized envelope out of his pocket and slowly spread its contents on the table, smoothing the papers as he laid them one above the other before him.

The little Captain sprang into his favourite position and sat swinging his legs, wondering what was going to happen.

"This," George told the Captain, putting his finger on a letter with a large monogram, "is from the colonel."

"These," he continued pointing to other letters, "are from the officers who had me as servant."

"And that," he said, looking proudly at a bit of parchment, "is my character when I left the Service. Eight years and twenty-three days on water, the rest on land—twelve years' character altogether. I've kept it as it is, because I couldn't be taking it in and out of a frame while I was trying to better myself; but I meant to have it framed when I married—framed and hung up."

Then George laid his head down on the table and cried like an infant.

The little Captain slung his arm round the caretaker's neck and sat looking at the big man beside him in silence. His eyes rested on the characters, especially upon the bit of parchment of which George was so proud. At last he said:—

"You won't give her up?"

"Would you marry her now?" asked the caretaker.

"Oh, I'm different," answered the little Captain. "The General doesn't set his face against marriages, but he's very particular. Names have to be sent in to headquarters before officers get married, and they can only marry if the General gives his consent. If I wanted to marry a girl like your sweetheart I doubt if he'd let me do it. But you're different."

"I mightn't marry while I was in the Service," said George. "I wish I'd never left it. There's nothing like the Service."

"I can't say how it would have been with me for certain," continued the little Captain, thoughtfully. "The General sets his face against jilts. If a man gets a woman to care for him, or a woman lets a man think she loves him and nothing comes of it, there's a court martial. Jilts are turned out of the Army. You see the Army preaches dead against jilting."

"It's so rum to hear you talking of the Army," said George, looking up at the little fellow. "To

hear you talk, one would think yours was a real Service."

"So it is, isn't it?"

"What! With women in it!"

"I don't know how we'd do without them," said the Captain. "Women have a way of putting things that men haven't. For the matter of that, I've seen the biggest sinners brought home by the littlest saints. The General sets great store on women, I can tell you. He thinks no end of them and their work. They over-do it sometimes, make themselves ill and nervous; but the devil would have a lot more people to fill his place if it weren't for women in the Army."

"Well, I'm all for women keeping quiet myself," said the caretaker. "I don't like to hear them preaching and singing in the streets; but that's my taste, and if others think different I've nothing to say against it. Do you know why I came to you last night?"

"No."

"I heard of you from the police. I thought of being a bobby myself when I left the Service,

and I'd have done it but for the old lady. Now it's too late."

"The police are very good to us," said the Captain. "They took against us at first; but now there's nothing they won't do for the Army. They keep order at our holiness meetings and walk with us through rough streets. Yours is a rough place. We've often been pelted with rotten eggs and had water thrown on us in Wright Street."

"Rough's no name for it," groaned the caretaker. "You should come in some Saturday night; then it's like a madhouse. It was better once, for the gates were left open and the police walked through it, but the Company would have had to pay if it had been put on a bobby's beat, so they ordered the gates to be shut at twelve o'clock. I'm there by myself, and if it hadn't been for my pal, I'd have had my head cut open long before this. I wish one of those committee gentlemen would spend a night on the Buildings. But they pocket the rents, and until there's a murder they'll make no difference."

"And they call themselves philanthropists!"

"I don't know what they call themselves; that's what they do, at any rate. And the ladies who collect the rents, they're a mistake. I don't mean to say they do the work badly, but women aren't made for rent-collecting, I take it. It would make your blood curdle to hear the names the tenants call them on Saturday nights. When a man's drunk he don't care a bit who he talks about, and the women are worse than the men in the names they call those poor ladies. I suppose the Company had them because they are cheap. It would come heavier to do the thing properly—I mean as Peabody's do it, with a caretaker and two men under him. The Company wouldn't like to spare money for that."

"I should think you'd be glad to leave it," said the Captain.

"Yes, I mean to better myself; but what's the good of leaving now?" asked George taking up the bit of parchment.

"You mustn't be hard on the lass," answered the little Captain. "I suppose when you were in

the Service you had sweethearts. You've had more than one, I expect."

"That's different," replied the caretaker.

"Well, I don't see myself why women should have only one sweetheart and men half-a-dozen," remarked the Captain. "In the Army we have the same set of rules for both men and women. The General favours neither sex."

"In our service," said George, "it's different."

The little Captain looked at his watch; then he jumped off the table, saying that he must put on his uniform, that he had to conduct a meeting in a few minutes and must be there early, as his lieutenant had received a black eye the previous night, when a lot of roughs had come into barracks. The roughs had tried to upset the meeting, so he had been obliged to turn the ring-leader out, with the help of his lieutenant.

"We charged him," said the Captain, "and he's got a month. We were forced to make an example. The General doesn't like us to show fight if we can help it, but if roughs come

in bent on mischief we must turn the ringleader out."

"I wish I was your height," he continued, as the caretaker stood up; "it would be better for me—they'd show me more respect."

"You wouldn't have been taken into the real Service," said George. "But, I suppose, in your Army size doesn't matter, especially as you take in women."

The little Captain laughed, and when the caretaker had put his bit of parchment into his pocket, said, "Pray, I mean think over it. You need not decide all at once. Good night, and God bless you."

The caretaker thought it over for a couple of months. After that he went to see Nelly. He found her sitting in the sergeant's little kitchen, where the warm June sunshine came through the window, and some roses stood in a glass on a table. She looked very pale, very delicate. Her long red-brown hair fell over the back of the seat and covered her shoulders. She had on a simple black dress, an old one of the sergeant's.

When she saw George her face flushed scarlet, then she turned deadly pale and rested her thin cheek on her hand, while he took a seat on the opposite side of the fireplace. He sat twirling his hat, without speaking. On the way to the sergeant's house he had framed a speech; in fact, during the last two months he had thought of many things he would say to Nelly; but now that he found her looking so pale, so delicate, words forsook him. He was paying her rent, she was dependent upon him, she looked as if a breath of wind would blow her over. How could he say anything?

At last he blurted out, "Who is it?"

She hid her face in her hands.

"Who is it?" repeated the caretaker. "Jack thinks maybe it's that chap we met in Battersea Park. If it is," said George, getting up, "I'll smash every bone in his body; I'll thrash his very soul out."

He waited for Nelly to speak, and as he stood there asking "Who is it?" they heard a faint noise upstairs, the cry of a baby.

"Who is it?" demanded George, as Nelly sprang out of the chair. "Is it that man?"

"No," said Nelly, "it isn't."

She pushed past him and hurried towards the staircase, but she could not go up. She fell on the steps, and when George raised her in his arms he found that Nelly had fainted.

That evening she received another visit. Tom knocked at the door and asked to see his sister. He meant to be very magnanimous.

"Fust of all," he said to himself, "I'll tell 'er what I think of 'er, then I'll offer to take 'er back. She's fit for work now, and it's difficult to get on without 'er. We owe three weeks' rent. If she don't come 'ome, they'll send the brokers in upon us."

He walked into the kitchen, and there he found Nelly nursing her baby. The sergeant's wife had gone out after she had opened the door for him, thinking, perhaps, that the brother and sister would like to be alone together. Nelly wished him a quiet "Good evening," and, as she spoke, the loafer felt that somehow or other a change

had come over his sister, that she was no longer the Masher of the Buildings.

"Put down that brat while I talk to yer," said Tom; "I've summut to say, Nelly."

Instead of putting down the baby Nelly only held it closer. She rocked it in her arms while she waited for Tom to go on speaking, and held its tiny head to her face, kissing it.

"There's no denying," said Tom, "we've cause to complain. After all the airs yer gived yerself we'd a right to expect yer'd do different. Miss Marsh was quite taken back when she came for the rent, and mother told her about it. And Father O'Hara——"

"What did he say?" interrupted Nelly.

"Well, I forget; but I know he said summat."

There was a pause. Then the loafer continued, "Notwithstanding yer've behaved so badly, mother and I've made up our minds to let bygones be bygones. Yer can come back to the Buildings when yer've got rid of the baby."

"Got rid of the baby!" ejaculated Nelly.

"Well, we can't have that squalling brat in the shop. Yer can't expect it. You must put it out to nurse, and when yer've done that we'll take yer back."

"Do you think I'd part with my baby?" cried Nelly, "my own little baby."

She looked lovingly at the small red face on her knee, the little shrunken fingers and the wrinkled neck about which she had already placed her coral necklace. She had dreams of clothes her machine would make by-and-bye; of wonderful little cloaks and dresses her fingers would stitch. And as she looked she repeated, "'Tain't likely I'd part with my baby, my own, own little baby."

"Well, if yer won't part with that brat we'll put up with it," said Tom.

But Nelly hesitated.

"Yer can come home to-night and bring it along with yer. If yer put yer bits of things together I'll fetch the bundle; that's more than most brothers 'ud do for yer, I can tell yer."

"No," said Nelly, shaking her head, "I'll never come back to the Buildings."

"Yer wun't?"

"No, Tom, never."

CHAPTER IX.

A CHRISTENING.

It was some time before Nelly could find work again. Captain Lobe went to see the sweater's wife, hoping that she would take her best hand back; but although she missed Nelly she would not own it, she scoffed at the idea of having such a hand on her premises. The sweater did not look up from his ironing while Captain Lobe stood in the workroom; he left his wife to deal with hands, children and servants. He disapproved of the thong she kept in her pocket, but if one of the children hid under his table he told the child to "go and take it."

Captain Lobe left the house, having failed in his mission, but determined to find work for Nelly. He knew of no sweater belonging to the Salvation Army, although it boasted of men and

women plying many trades, following a great variety of professions. A converted chemist had the previous evening begged people to take "the pill of salvation"; a shoeblack had compared sinners with dirty boots, and saints with leather after it had been anointed with Day and Martin's blacking; but no sweater had ever come to the penitent's bench that he was aware of, or sweater's wife either. He suggested that Nelly should make a pair of trousers for himself. They would give her something to do, he said; and when they were finished he would go in them to sweaters' houses. He saw nothing ridiculous in this sort of advertisement (there is probably no body of people so wanting in humour as the Salvation Army); he only thought how he could put the doctrines he preached into practice. At length he found work for her with a sweater in Bishopsgate—a man without a wife, who looked upon hands as human beings. Captain Lobo took Nelly to his shop, and she returned home with a bundle of trousers under her arm, feeling once more independent.

Those were very happy days for Nelly. She sat in the sergeant's little kitchen making trousers, with the baby in a cradle beside her. If she was tired of work she had the baby to look at, and after work was finished she took it out for a walk. When the sergeant came home at night she always had some important piece of news about it to communicate; it had smiled while she dressed it, its hair had grown the hundredth part of an inch; it had only cried three or four times and then not much; a woman in the street had stopped to look at it. Many an hour the two women spent talking over babies; for the sergeant had "buried" six children, and knew all about infant ailments, also when babies cut teeth, how soon they ought to be vaccinated, the time for short and long petticoats.

Nelly generally accepted the sergeant's advice about the management of her baby, but on one point they were at variance. Nelly said that her boy must be a Catholic—a believer in the virtues of holy water, the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the saints. The sergeant wished him

to be a soldier, enrolled as a member of the Salvation Army from the very beginning.

"You're a Catholic," she told Nelly, "but that's no reason why your baby should be brought up in darkness. I don't say anything against your religion, but I should like the boy to begin right, seeing he has been born in my house."

Nelly felt the force of this argument, but she had not the courage to break through fixed habits. Besides, she was afraid to let the baby be baptized as a Protestant. She had heard of purgatory, and knew that all who died must enter there for years or minutes. If her baby died—Nelly shuddered—if it died she could not go with it, so she ought to place it under the protection of the Virgin Mary—give it a guardian angel. But she shrank from taking it to the Catholic Church. She had not seen Father O'Hara since she left the Buildings, and she was afraid to meet him. She put off the christening, although she felt that it was wrong to do so; she contented herself with talking

about it. She knew that in case of illness babies may be christened by any "staid" person; that the sergeant might baptize her boy if he had a fit, convulsions, or any sudden attack that seemed dangerous. But for that purpose she must keep some holy water in the house; it would not do to use water that was not consecrated. How could she get holy water without going to the priest's for it? She puzzled her brains to answer this question, and at last she decided that she would pay Susan a visit. The lame girl had Lourdes water, which was the best water of all for christening babies. It was wonderful stuff; it kept cold in the hottest place, it remained always fresh; it could not only christen babies, but cure them of illnesses too, if the Blessed Lady wished it to do so. She would ask Susan for a little Lourdes water, she thought, then, if anything happened, the sergeant could christen the baby; if the worst came to the worst she would baptize it herself.

The evening of the day on which she made up her mind to visit Susan she set off for the

Buildings with a bottle in her pocket. She waited about until it grew dark, then she went to the lame girl's place, hoping to slip in without being noticed; but around the door she saw a crowd of women and children. When she entered the little room she found it full of people. Susan lay on her low chair-bedstead, and one look at her face told Nelly that she was dying. Beside her, on a box, with his head in his hands, sat the shoeblack. His great dark eyes were fixed mournfully on his companion; he knew that she was about to leave the world in which she had been so afflicted. The women elbowed their neighbours, for Susan was delirious. She spoke of ice mountains, noisy rivers, grottoes and pilgrims. She whispered an Ave Maria. She talked to unseen presences—guardian angels.

Steps were heard in the passage. Father O'Hara stood at the door. He said a few words in Latin before he entered the room, then he walked in, followed by an acolyte. With a glance he cleared the place of everyone but the shoeblack and Nelly. They crept into a corner,

whence they could see the priest anointing Susan's head, hands and feet. He repeated a Latin service and the acolyte said the responses, while Susan babbled of mountains and glaciers, rivers and grottoes, wholly unconscious of what was going on around her. Every minute her voice grew weaker, her arms refused to stretch themselves so far out, her head became more feeble, more stiff, but her face was radiant, a smile transfigured the features of the poor afflicted Catholic. Father O'Hara looked at her and crossed himself. Having done that he left the room, followed by the acolyte, without taking any notice of the sobbing shoeblack or speaking a word to Nelly. The women crowded about the dying girl directly he had gone down the staircase; they discussed the wake, talked of the funeral, and wondered who would have "the bits of things" Susan had to leave behind her.

Nelly returned home thinking about the ceremony she had witnessed, and asking herself if the holy oil with which the priest had anointed Susan would have had the same effect had she or

Tim applied it. She came to the conclusion that Latin words said by a priest must be more efficacious than English words said by an ordinary man or woman; that it would be safest to let Father O'Hara baptize her baby. He always stood by the font at four o'clock on Sunday afternoons, ready to christen infants; she would gather up her courage and carry her baby to church the following Sunday, she said to herself. Purgatory was a very real place to Nelly. The Pope, she thought, had the key of it; priests were its jailers. The Virgin Mary could limit the time sinners must spend in torment by interceding with her Son for them; guardian angels hovered about good Catholics; but unbaptized babies—Nelly shivered when she thought of what happened to unbaptized babies.

The following day she was all the more determined to have her baby properly christened, because it did not seem quite the same as usual. She could not see or hear anything the matter with it, but she FELT a change in its cries and movements. The sergeant noticed no difference.

Nelly, however, who knew all her boy's ways and noises, was anxious about him. He slept, ate, and behaved as he had done from the day of his birth, yet she fully felt that it was a different baby.

"Perhaps," she said to the sergeant, "it's only because he's growing older."

She bought some cherry-coloured ribbons to tie his sleeves with, washed and ironed a long white robe the sergeant produced out of an old box in which were still kept some of the buried children's garments, and cut up a shawl of her own to make him a cloak. When all this finery was ready she dressed him and walked off with him to the Catholic church. Her love of smart things for herself had vanished; she never seemed to care now what she had on, to give her hats and feathers any attention; but she spent a great deal of time adorning her child.

The sergeant shook her head when she saw fresh ribbons and smart woollen shoes on the baby. She told Nelly it was a good thing that the child happened to be a boy.

Nelly promised not to buy any more infant

toggery; but the next time she went out she was sure to see something unusually pretty—something she MUST purchase. She could do a few extra pairs of trousers to pay for an addition to the baby's wardrobe, she said to the sergeant; and, curious to say, those extra pairs never made her tired or gave her a headache.

When she drew near the church that Sunday afternoon she became strangely agitated. The sense of peace and happiness she had experienced during the last few weeks changed to uneasiness. She stumbled on the doorstep, and on entering the church her mind became flooded with memories. She saw the place where she had made her first confession—the spot on which she had knelt when she had first received the Sacrament. These events had really happened, yet they seemed so far away they might have been the acts of another Nelly. Trembling and pale she dipped her fingers in holy water and made the sign of the cross on her baby's forehead. Then she went to the font and sat down to wait for Father O'Hara.

Sitting there she remembered that she had no sponsors for the baby; that she had entirely forgotten to find him godfather and godmother. The sergeant had refused to enter a Catholic church. Captain Lobe, had he been allowed by Army regulations to stand sponsor, would not have had time to do it. She had not thought of other god-parents. She looked at the clock, and found that she had still ten minutes. But if she went out of chnrch, whom should she fetch? Susan was dead; she had no friend now on the Buildings. She sighed when she thought of Jack, the costermonger's wife, and half-a-dozen more people who would have stood sponsors had things been different.

While she sat thinking, wondering if Father O'Hara would baptize her boy without gód-parents, she caught sight of the little shoeblack. He was burning candles for Susan, watching the flickering lights, and meditating on what he could do to lessen his sweetheart's time in purgatory. His face was very lugubrious. On the sleeve of his jacket he wore a bit of rusty crape, which he

had bought in a rag-shop, another bit adorned his hat, a third was tied round his neck.

"Tim," said Nelly, going up to him, "will you stand godfather to my child?"

The little shoeblack looked delighted. He greatly admired Nelly, and he thought it an honour to stand godfather to her baby. By his advice she asked the old woman who sold candles to be the baby's godmother, and after Nelly had negotiated the business, she took her place at the font among half-a-dozen other mothers and babies.

She bent down to unfasten her baby's bonnet and cloak, and when she looked up she saw Father O'Hara. He had come to the font unnoticed, and stood with his eyes fixed on her face. He seemed to be reading her thoughts, probing her conscience. She had confessed to him ever since she went to school; he knew her as well as any priest can know a human being—any man can know a woman. Lately she had kept away from him—he understood why—and he thought that he read in her face much less

humility and self-abasement than he would have inculcated had she come to the confessional box. There was a pride of maternity on Nelly's countenance, a look of delight in her hazel eyes when she turned them on her boy, which the priest thought very sinful, very unholy. With a word to the acolyte, he separated Nelly from the other mothers, placed her on his left and wedding rings on his right. At first Nelly did not recognize the difference, but when she saw the women gather in their petticoats and look coldly at her baby she realized what had happened—she had brought her boy into the world without consulting a priest about it, without letting him place on her finger the magic badge which makes it right to have babies.

"Name this child," said Father O'Hara, taking in his arms, last of all, Nelly's child.

"Arthur," replied the god-parents.

The priest looked at Nelly; then the boy was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, under the name of Arthur.

The service was soon finished, and nothing

remained to be done but to write in a book the names of the newly-baptized infants. Father O'Hara went to a little table and entered the children in a register without looking up, until he came to Nelly's baby. Then he paused, fixed his solemn eyes on Nelly, and asked:—

"Whose child is it?"

"Mine," answered Nelly.

"The father's name?"

Nelly began to cry, but said nothing.

"The father's name is Arthur what?" asked the priest, throwing while he spoke a stern look at Nelly, and dipping his pen in the ink.

"He hasn't got a father; he's only got me," sobbed Nelly.

CHAPTER X.

THE BABY FALLS ILL.

THE next day there was certainly something the matter with the baby. The sergeant owned it, but could not say what it was. She advised Nelly to take the child to a chemist, who gave advice gratis, in return for which he expected patients to purchase pills or powders made on the premises. Nelly carried the baby to him, and waited a long time in a small place at the end of his shop, where the sun beat through a closed window, and a hundred flies buzzed about, lean-looking creatures that fed on pills and powders and lived among surgical instruments. At last the chemist came in. He looked at the baby, and asked Nelly a few questions concerning it. He pulled it about, tapped its chest, examined its tongue, felt its pulse, then declared that there

was nothing the matter with it, that Nelly was nervous.

"You keep it too clean," he told her. "Let it grub a bit."

Nelly had often heard mothers say in the Buildings that it was a mistake to keep children too clean, that babies did not thrive if kept too tidy. She knew that Whitechapel mothers contrasted their children with those they had nursed in service, and pitied the latter while they caressed their own dirty infants. It was all right to bathe children once a week, to wash their hands and face night and morning; to do more than that was very bad for their health, made them delicate, said East End ladies. Nelly had, however, a prejudice in favour of soap and water, inherited from her father most likely, for neither Tom nor her mother cared about such frivolities; in fact, Tom had often called her love of cleanliness "rediculus." She shrank from the idea of letting her baby "grub a bit," much as a West End mother shrinks when a certain well-known medical baronet suggests

that bones should lie about the nursery for the children to suck. She left the shop with a packet of powders in her pocket, feeling anxious and nervous.

The baby grew daily worse. It lost flesh, its little limbs shrank, its face grew shrivelled, it became peevish and sleepless. Its constant cries hurt Nelly; yet she was forced to make trousers from morning to night. Often she was obliged to leave it whining in its cradle, instead of taking it on her knee, for the work must be done to buy its food and provide its medicine. At night she sat up with it; and at first she looked forward to the hours of darkness, knowing that she could then attend to all its wants; but soon the sleepless nights made her drowsy—nights and days grew both alike.

She had written to George directly after the Salvation Captain had found her work; and in the letter she had thanked him very humbly for his help; had told him rather proudly that she need not trouble him any more, as she was now able to support the baby and provide for her-

self. She had received no answer, and had heard nothing of the caretaker since she posted his letter; she did not like to write again, to tell him all she was suffering.

Perhaps if Captain Lobe had called to see her, something might have been done for the child, but his time in Whitechapel had almost run its course, and he was busy winding up accounts before he went to fresh barracks. So she must work; for the sergeant was poor like herself, and the sweater could not afford to keep a hand doing nothing, although he treated hands as human beings.

She worked slowly and pricked her fingers, because the baby often lay in her lap. Great tears splashed down on its forehead, its mother's hazel eyes were so weary. "If only I could bear the pain for you!" sobbed Nelly; "if only I could do ANYTHING for you, my poor little, wee boy!" She said Pater Nosters and Ave Marias while she fed the machine; she whispered prayers which would surely have touched the heart of the Virgin Mary had our Blessed Lady

been able to hear them. She learnt the saddest of all sad lessons as she looked at her child—namely, that vicarious suffering is a boon denied to men and women, because our nature is such that we could make joy out of anguish, if only we might bear the pains and the sorrows of those we love. There is a theory current that East End mothers do not love as West End mothers love. Let those who believe it go down to Whitechapel, and there they will find love intensified, because love is dumb.

Acting upon the sergeant's advice, she carried her baby to a children's hospital in Whitechapel. She went with it into a room full of mothers and children, and waited until her turn came to consult a doctor who sat at a table. The doctor listened to all she had to say about it, then he examined it carefully. The examination lasted several minutes; afterwards he told her to bring it again.

The next time she brought it he showed it to another man. Nelly listened eagerly to all they said about it, watched their grave faces,

and tried to find out if they thought it very ill. But she could not discover much from their words or looks; and when the consultation was finished they merely told her to have some medicine made up for it, to let them see it the following week. The third time she took it the doctor said that he would like it left in the hospital.

"Alone?" exclaimed Nelly.

"You can come to see it twice a week," said the doctor, "and if it grows worse you will be allowed to remain with it altogether."

"Is it so very ill?" asked Nelly.

"We can tell you more about it when we have it in the hospital," answered the doctor.

"I can't leave it to-day," said Nelly, turning away from him. "I'll bring it to-morrow if it isn't better. I can't leave it this evening."

When the sergeant returned home from work she found the baby worse, and Nelly sitting with it in her arms, sobbing. Its tiny face had become drawn about the mouth, its feeble cries had grown shrill, it had refused to take its food,

its head had fallen away when Nelly had tried to feed it. All that night the two women sat up with it; they talked in whispers when it dozed, and walked with it in turn up and down the kitchen.

The sergeant said that Nelly ought to have left it in the hospital, and tried to soothe her fears about strange nurses. "Even if you had no work to do, and could mind it properly, you ought to let it go where it can have the best food and doctors," she told Nelly. The mother knew that the sergeant was right, but when she looked at her baby she could not help doubting whether strangers could do what she did for it—watch it and love it every minute. It fell asleep in the early morning while the sergeant was making a cup of tea, and slept so peacefully Nelly hoped that it was better. She would not feel the parting so much if she were less anxious about it, she told the sergeant, if only it looked brighter, and stopped crying. But directly it woke up it began to wail louder than before; it turned away when she tried to feed it; its little

limbs grew clammy and cold. She owned to herself that it would have been best to leave it in the hospital, that she had acted selfishly in bringing it home.

"Kiss it," she said, in a broken voice to the sergeant, as the mother of six buried babies prepared for her day's work; "it will be gone before you come back again."

She had every intention of starting for the hospital directly the baby's "bits of things" had been put together; but it took a long time to make up the bundle, and it was afternoon before she left the house. Then she walked slowly, lengthening out the minutes, putting off the moment of parting. The child had become drowsy; its head lay heavily on her shoulder, and its eyelids were closed. The little arms fell limply downwards; its little hands seemed to have lost all their strength; its little fingers were stretched out instead of curling up as usual.

Nelly often stopped to look at it, and each time she looked, a terrible, sinking feeling came over

her, a feeling called in Whitechapel "heart-ache." She sat down on the hospital doorstep before she went in, knowing that this was the last time she would have the baby all to herself for days, perhaps for weeks, wanting to say good-bye to it before she left it among strangers, wishing to give it a good-bye kiss which none but our Blessed Lady and its guardian angel would witness. As she sat there a carriage stopped at the door, and a lady—"a great lady" Nelly called her—stepped out of it; a tall, stately woman, with a long, thin neck, high shoulder-bones, and skin like parchment. Nelly looked at the lady, and while she was looking a powdered footman said, "Make way for her ladyship." Nelly rose up, and followed the lady through the hospital doors into a room full of babies, when a nurse, in blue dress, smart apron and cap, spotless collar and cuffs, hastened to welcome "her ladyship."

"Sis—ter, how co—ld you—r hands a—re," said the visitor, in a languid voice, as she shook hands with the nurse. She made the same remark every time she came to the hospital, in

summer or winter, and the sister always answered "yes." She was a pretty woman, this sister; a little widow, who had taken to nursing because she was poor—because she thought a nurse held a better position in the eyes of the world than a governess.

She knew that many rich ladies try to get rid of *ennui* in hospitals, but no rich ladies make the same experiment in schoolrooms. She had relations in the House of Commons, a cousin in the House of Lords, and connections in all the professions, more especially, she was wont to say, in the army. She was always afraid that people were forgetting her rank—was on thorns about her social position; and she had reasons for this most likely, considering the odd dips the social scales give when people have large pretensions and little money. Thus she welcomed "a great lady" into her ward, and gracefully acknowledged that her hands were always cold, that from childhood she had suffered from cold fingers. She spoke to "the great lady" with a lisp, almost a drawl; in quite a different voice from the one

she used when talking to patients or nurses, even to doctors.*

This hospital for women and children was quite an aristocratic place, although in Whitechapel. It had a Prince as its president, noblemen on its committee, and endless titled ladies for visitors. Occasionally a Princess paid it a visit; then the young doctors danced attendance, the committee spread out a red carpet, the matron bowed and scraped, and the secretary wrote a long report of the Royal visit to a newspaper, in which he said that the Princess seemed quite at home in the place, was evidently great friends with the matron, and had been induced to visit the hospital by young Dr. ——, the son of the well-known Dr. ——, of —— Street.

"The great lady" turned away from the sister, and walked down the ward to the bed of a little boy—"a sweet little sufferer" she called him.

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* I trust my readers will not fail to recognize this sister as an exceptional member of the noble band of hospital nurses; for which band no one has a greater respect than myself.

She took a chair, and drew out of her pocket a camphor lozenge, a bottle of salts, and a scented pocket-handkerchief. This gave the sister time to notice Nelly, who stood at the door silently watching what was going on around her. The room seemed to her very like a large doll's house, such as she had seen in West End shop windows, only it was larger, the nurses moved about, and the children made a noise. Everything in the room was perfect. The walls were ornamented with all sorts of devices, the doors had painted panels, the tables were covered with flowers, the floor was stained to match the doors and windows. Nurses tripped in and out, wearing dainty dresses, roses at their throats, and steel instruments at their waists. Children played with costly toys sent from Royal nurseries, and looked at picture-books made up by West End ladies. Everything was pretty to look at except the little suffering faces in some of the cots, pleasant to hear but the cries of pain which came from a few cradles.

Just as the sister advanced towards Nelly a

noise was heard, and "the great lady" rose in haste from her chair. She had found the "sweet little sufferer" asleep, and had fancied that he had fainted, thereupon she had put her scent bottle under his nose, and he, roused out of his dreams, had struck out at "her ladyship." In the confusion that followed Nelly was forgotten. It was only after "the great lady" had said, "How co-ld you-r hands a-re, sister," and had gone to her carriage, that the sister had time to inquire what Nelly wanted.

"Please ma'am," said Nelly, "have you had a baby?"

The sister stared at the speaker. She looked at Nelly's hand, glanced at the rim of gold on her own finger, and asked, haughtily, "Is the child a patient?"

"Is there NO ONE here who has had a baby?" inquired Nelly, in a trembling voice. "The doctor said I must leave my child in the hospital, but I thought I'd be sure to find a nurse that had had a baby."

The sister did not condescend to make any

reply. She thought Nelly mad or tipsy, for otherwise, she said to herself, an East End woman would scarcely dare to ask such an impertinent question of a West End lady. She told a nurse to take the baby and send the mother away. Then she went into her room and shut the door.

"Have you had a baby?" Nelly asked a girl in uniform.

The nurse blushed, and answered, "No."

"Have NONE of you had babies?" she repeated, after she had watched the nurse lay the baby in a cradle, "NONE of you?"

The nurse looked annoyed, and said that she should call the sister if Nelly stayed any longer, that the mother must kiss her baby and go.

"Oh, don't call that sister," sobbed Nelly, kissing the little white face on the pillow. "She couldn't look and speak like that if she had had a child of her own. How can women understand babies that have never had 'em? I wish I'd kept him at home."

CHAPTER XI.

A CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

SHE went slowly out of the ward downstairs into the hall. There she stopped to speak to the porter. She asked him when she would be allowed to visit her baby; and he, seeing tears in her eyes, said that she might come early next morning. He had children at home, so he knew a little of what she was feeling. He tried to cheer her, and told her that the doctors would have allowed her to remain if they had thought her child's illness dangerous. "It's a good sign that you mayn't stop," he said. "I had a child in here once, and they made my missus bide the first night along with it, though, like you, she didn't suckle her infant. You see, they thought my kid might die sudden; but they don't think so with your boy. Cheer up, young woman; you'll find him better in the morning."

Nelly left the hospital, looking back as she went, feeling her arms very empty now she had no baby in them. The streets were full of noisy men and women, so she wandered towards the river. She could not make up her mind to go home to face the lonely kitchen, to look at the empty cradle. She sat down on a large triangle of grass, around which she saw boats, barges, and vessels with and without masts.

The craft reminded her of the days she had spent on the river with Mr. Grant. The memory of those days brought with it no bitterness, it was not in Nelly's nature to feel bitter against anybody. She did not blame herself much; she only wished she had acted differently. As to Mr. Grant she scarcely gave him a thought, he seemed so far off. "Besides," said Nelly, "it wasn't all his fault."

Presently it began to rain, and she went into a shed until the storm was over. She could see the hospital from the place where she sat, and she wondered which window stood above the baby's cot. The window must, she thought, be

rather high up, because she had mounted so many steps to reach the ward. "It is one of the top windows," she said to herself, "somewhere near the roof." While she was looking at the hospital a light appeared in a tower above it. Nelly clasped her hands together and gave a sigh of relief. "Now I'll know just where my baby is," she murmured; "I'll not quite lose sight of it."

She took her beads out of her pocket and began to say an Ave Maria. Soon they dropped on her lap. She fell asleep, and slept a disturbed sleep, broken by starts, but out of which she could not rouse herself. For several weeks she had not had a good night's rest; now she was thoroughly exhausted. The baby no longer needed her constant attention; she could do nothing but wait. In her dreams she seemed to see it smiling as it used to smile before its face changed so much, stretching out its little hands and feet, crowing, and making the strange music which mothers alone find melodious. She thought that she heard it crying when she woke up, and she put out her hand to rock its cradle. She drew

her hand quickly back, for there was no cradle there, only something hard and cold—a plank.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed, starting up. "What is it?"

She could see a lamp in the distance, and she groped her way towards it. She started when she reached the lamp-post, for all around her was water, nothing but water. The light shone feebly on the triangle of grass, and washing against its walls was the river, grim and dark. A few weird-looking masts were visible, coloured lights were dotted about, otherwise all was darkness. She was on an island, and there was no way of getting off; she must stay on it until the morning.

Nelly was not timid, but the idea of spending a night thus made her tremble. She had gone to sleep in the shed; no one had noticed her; the drawbridge had been lifted. Was she alone? It she was she did not mind; but supposing she was not? She shook all over as women shake when they realize their feebleness and masculine strength. She was not afraid of ghosts, only of her own weak muscles opposed to brute force

and loneliness. She would have expressed her feelings somewhat differently, but this was what she dreaded as she looked at the shed out of which she had just crept, and then at the lights and the masts on the river. All at once she raised her eyes up, and there, opposite, she saw the lamp above the hospital. Her fears vanished. She sat down close to the wall, and, fixing her eyes on the light, she said an Ave Maria.

So the night passed. She could not sleep any more, but she listened to the city clocks as they chimed the hours, and she counted the minutes until she would see her baby. Was he asleep? Were the nurses good to him? If only she could have found anyone in that place who had been a mother, who had had a baby! What could single women know about children? How could married women understand babies if they had never had them?

"It's cruel and wicked," said Nelly, "it's cruel and wicked to let women nurse children that have never had them."

Morning rose cold and grey above the river,

showing the barges and the boats anchored near the triangle of grass upon which she sat. The lamp went out in the tower of the hospital, and the coloured lights disappeared one by one until the last was extinguished. A mist hung about the river, and when the sun made its appearance the grass was covered with dew-drops. Nelly got up, feeling very cold and stiff. She ought to have been hungry, for she had had nothing to eat since the previous morning, and then she had only eaten some cold potatoes. But she had no appetite, her head ached, she felt faint; if she had had breakfast set out before her she could not have eaten it. When the drawbridge was lowered she ran across, heedless of questions, and made her way to the hospital, where she found the door open. She went quickly up the staircase to the ward and stood still on the threshold. The sister was busy fastening some steel instruments to her waist, the nurses were flitting about, washing and dressing children, preparing breakfast. No one noticed Nelly, and she went straight to her boy's cradle.

It was empty!

She started back, turned pale as the little white sheet she had lifted, and stared round the room. Then she tottered up to the sister, and asked, "What have you done with my baby?"

The sister dropped her steel instruments to look at the East End mother, and Nelly's eyes made her hesitate. "He has been very ill in the night," she said, "very much worse."

"Where is he?" demanded Nelly.

The sister answered, "I will show you."

She led the way downstairs, through the hall, into the basement. There she paused, with her hand on a door, and said, slowly, "You must be prepared for the worst. Your child has been very ill in the night, very ill indeed."

"Open the door, you cruel woman," cried Nelly. "Let me go to my boy."

"He is dead," the sister said, slowly.

"Dead! dead!" cried Nelly. "You lie!"

The sister opened the door of a small, dark room. It was beautifully decorated. If death could be rendered loveable, that little mortuary

would have made mourners love life's great enemy, instead of hating it. "There is a Reaper whose name is Death" was written in front of the entrance, and upon the walls flowers and grass, corn and poppies, scarlet berries covered with hoar frost, were painted.

A small altar stood in the east, and on it were two tall, lighted candles and the Book which gives hope that mothers will again meet their little ones, that fathers will one day see their lost children. The room had only one occupant, held but one dead baby.

Nelly paused for a minute, then went to a little coffin on tressels and bent down to look into it. As she looked an expression of awe and astonishment came over her face. The child was like wax—so exquisitely delicate, so marble-like. Again and again she looked. She put her ear to its mouth.

"It isn't dead," she said. "It can't be dead. It's only sleeping!"

She took it out of the coffin and sat down with it on the altar steps. There she felt it carefully

all over, undid its flannel shroud, examined its pale lips, its long dark eyelashes. She held it up to her cheek. She did not believe it was dead until she kissed it.

Then she opened her mouth and showed the astonished sister what it is to be an East End mother. She made the West End lady shiver and shake, for she vowed that the nurses had killed her boy, and she swore the most terrible oaths against childless wives and unmarried women who dared to call themselves nurses. Her bonnet dropped on the ground, her red-brown hair fell over her shoulders, her hazel eyes glittered as she shook her fist at the sister.

"Take that!" she said, and with one blow she knocked the childless nurse to the ground.

Then she wrapped her shawl round the little stiff, cold body, and ran with it out of the mortuary, up the staircase. The sister lay on the floor. The porter was having his breakfast. No one stopped her, until she reached the street. There a voice asked:—

"What's the matter?"

She looked up and saw Mr. Grant. He was coming into the hospital for a few hours' work, with a black bag (a thing he detested) in his hand, and his head full of psychological studies. At first he did not recognise Nelly. He had not seen her for months; and she had slipped from his memory. The novel he was writing exhausted so much of his energies he found his domestic life all-sufficient; he had not time to think about "hands" in Whitechapel. Directly Nelly lifted her head up, he knew her; and he was struck by her changed looks, her haggard face and tired eyes.

"What is it, Nelly?" he asked, with a touch of the old tenderness.

"It's your baby," said Nelly.

She fell down at his feet, exhausted; and when she opened her shawl he saw the little child dead in its shroud.

CHAPTER XII.

"WHAT CAN I DO FOR HER?"

Of course he was dreadfully sorry. He tried to walk it off, to row it off, to drown it in champagne and whisky. That night tears came into his eyes when he looked at his West End baby. He was very proud of his tears—they were sentimental as those of a German lover. His wife thought that he had a touch of fever, and laid her cold hands on his forehead. For a moment he felt inclined to tell her about the "hand" in Whitechapel. He thought of Rousseau's confession to Thérèse after the adventure in the Rue des Moineaux. He often compared his wife to Thérèse and himself to Rousseau. But he remembered that Thérèse was not an Englishwoman with strong maternal instincts; that his wife was a mother *par excellence*. That was why she suited him so exactly,

he said to himself. Artistic nature always wanted practical, phlegmatic complements. No; he would say nothing to his wife about the drive from the hospital to the sergeant's house. It made him shudder to think of it. Nelly had sat like a stone, and had shrunk away when he tried to comfort her. Her eyes had remained fixed on the little dead child opposite. Only once had she said anything, that was when the cab jolted. Then she had given a scream and had cried out to the cabman:—

"Oh, take care, you'll hurt it!"

Poor little Nelly! her face had had such a hopeless expression when they reached the kitchen. She had not cried; but she had looked unutterably miserable as she placed the dead body in the empty cradle.

What could he do for her? He must do something.

The next day he called at the sergeant's house. He arrived rather late, for he had been obliged to put some hospital accounts straight, and to attend a committee meeting before he started. When

he knocked, the door was opened by the little Salvation Captain, who looked gravely at him, and said that Nelly was busy. He could hear her machine in the kitchen. "Hands" must work, even if they have dead babies.

"Can't I see her, then?" he asked the Captain.

"I think you had better not," Captain Lobe answered. "Why should you? What good would it do?"

Mr. Grant looked at the little fellow in uniform, and repeated, "What good would it do?"

"No good," said the Captain, coming out of the house, and slamming the door.

"Which way are you going?"

"Back to barracks. My time's up to-morrow. This is my last evening in Whitechapel. To-night I give my farewell address. I say good-bye to my people."

The little Captain's face was very earnest, and Mr. Grant liked the look of it. He had a prejudice against the Salvation Army, but Captain Lobe had such kind eyes, such a genial expression, he could not help wondering what

sort of stuff such little Captains are made of. He began to talk of the Army, hoping to lead up to Nelly.

"May I walk with you?"

"Certainly," Captain Lobe answered.

"Where are your next quarters?"

"I don't know. I was with the General this morning and he asked me how I should like to go to America. I said I would rather stay in the old country, but I can't tell what he will do with me. I may get orders to leave England to-morrow, so I have been to see my mother's grave, and now I have only to pack up."

"How long have you been in the Salvation Army?"

"Two years. I joined it because I found less hypocrisy in it than in other religions, and I shall leave it directly I find anything better."

"Do you know Widgett, an Oxford man, who joined the Army and left it six months afterwards?"

"Oh, yes; I knew him. He was too grand for the Army. He was always afraid of soiling his

fingers. We go down among the people. Widgett wanted them to come up to us."

"Where did you get your training?"

"We have a college. This book will tell you all about it."

The little Captain took a thin red book out of his pocket and gave it to Mr. Grant, who opened it and read that officers were ordered to take a cold bath every morning, eat light suppers, and wear flannel.

"I see you go in for fire and brimstone," he said, turning to a much-thumbed page. "I never can understand how people reconcile these things with love and mercy. How do they manage it?"

"By the blood of Jesus," said the little Captain, lifting his cap.

Mr. Grant looked at him; then said, "I'm an agnostic."

"You might be worse."

They walked on in silence; for the Captain was thinking of his farewell address, and Mr. Grant was wondering how he could lead up to

Nelly. The two men formed a great contrast. The hospital treasurer looked handsome and languid; his face showed that he had come to the end of everything, had experienced (so far as he was able) all sensations. Captain Lobe looked a mere boy beside Mr. Grant; his expression showed knowledge without experience, his voice had the thrill which touches hearts and unlocks secrets; his manner was that of an enthusiast.

"Have you known Nelly Ambrose long?" Mr. Grant asked at length.

"About two months."

"May I ask how you came across her."

Captain Lobe then told him how the caretaker had brought Nelly to the Rescue Lassies' Room. He described things just as they had happened, without making any comment, and ended by saying that she was a good lass—a very good lass.

"I thought that she was going to be married," said Mr. Grant.

"Her sweetheart was very much cut up about

the baby," replied the Captain. "I hope, now it's dead, he will go to the poor lass; but I have not had time to let him know that she has lost it, and she is not likely to tell him herself."

"Why not?"

"Do you think she has no feelings?"

Mr. Grant was silent. He had thought that "hands" took babies as a matter of course; he had imagined that babies made very little difference to East End sweethearts. When the Captain told him about George's visit and the bit of parchment, he was very much touched; all the more so because Captain Lobe made him no reproach. He began to realize the caretaker's feelings; to be afraid he had worked a life-long trouble for Nelly.

"I wish I could do anything for her," he said.

The little Captain remained silent.

"I think I had better call on the caretaker."

"No; don't do that. He's a very strong chap."

Mr. Grant laughed.

"If he had wanted to fight he would have found me out before this."

"He does not know that you are the baby's father. Nelly has always told him that you are not. She said this morning that she was afraid he would do you some mischief; that she had told a lie about it. She is a Roman Catholic."

Mr. Grant could not help smiling as the old Protestant prejudice crept to the surface; but the smile vanished when he realized that Nelly had kept his name secret—that she had tried to shield him from what she thought dangerous. Her pale face rose before him, so different from the face he had seen in the parks and on the river; an older, sadder face. He called himself by some bitter names when he thought of it—when he realized what a heavy price she had paid for a few hours' amusement.

"Can't I do anything for her?" he asked.

"You might pay for the funeral," the Captain suggested. "She is very poor, and she was saying this morning that she was afraid the baby would have to be buried by the parish. If you like you can send her a five-pound note."

"I will take it at once."

"No; you had better send it."

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Grant, slowly. "Here are the barracks."

"Won't you come in?" Captain Lobe asked.

Mr. Grant followed the little Captain into a hall full of people; and took a place under the gallery. The room was crowded. On a raised platform sat the officers; and below them stood a table surrounded by benches. Captain Lobe's face literally shone with benevolence as he made his way through the men and women. He stopped to speak to a row of girls half-way up the room; then he jumped on the table. He gave out a hymn and led it himself, while the soldiers played on brass instruments. All the congregation helped to sing it; and Mr. Grant found himself joining in the chorus, which was set to popular music. Beside him sat a girl with rough hair and a dirty face, beating time on a pewter pot. In front were three men in flannel neckties and fustian, who evidently thought the whole thing a joke, and made inquiries about the state of one another's souls between the verses.

The congregation was composed entirely of Whitechapel refuse; for the lowest of the low patronize the Army, people who refuse to enter chapels or churches go to Salvation Barracks.

After the hymn was finished, Captain Lobe requested a newly-converted member to speak; and a girl came to the table. She told the people how she had been saved; and the men and women nudged one another, for she was a well-known character in Whitechapel. Her manner was rather theatrical; it was easy to see that she was very excited, but she was evidently in earnest. She spoke of hell-fire, and the blood which saves sinners from it, as though the things were realities; and more than one woman grew grave while she spoke; even the mockers looked serious.

Then the little Captain stood upon the table to say farewell to Whitechapel. First he spoke to the officers—his family he called them. He told them that he was a very young father, but that he had tried to do his duty—to act the part of a parent. "We shall not meet again on earth,

perhaps," he said; "but, brothers and sisters, we shall meet in Heaven." Afterwards he turned to his "dear, dear people." "I had always heard that Whitechapel was a terrible place before I lived in London," he said, looking fondly down upon them. "I came here expecting a lot of trouble, but I was mistaken. If it were the will of God I would like to live always in Whitechapel.

"My hands are clean of your blood," he continued, solemnly. "I have told you the truth without flinching; I have warned you of hell and spoken of Heaven, as these things are written in the Bible. Come, come, my dear people, if there is one among you who is not saved—who is not at peace with Jesus—come to the table."

"Almost persuaded now to believe!" sang the officers, softly. "Almost persuaded Christ to receive."

"Let us pray," said the little Captain.

Mr. Grant looked at his watch and found that it was almost nine o'clock. He had forgotten his dinner. The little Captain's earnest face

must have had a powerful influence to make him do that. He took up his hat, but before he could leave the room the Captain again began speaking.

"My time here is up to-night," he said. "To-morrow I go to other barracks. I wish that I could have left my accounts straight; yet I can't. I'm in debt. The gas bill is not paid yet, and I do not know how to pay it. I want three pounds, and it is not likely that the collection this evening will bring me in more than a few shillings. I have put half of my pay towards it, and the officers have made a special collection out of their own pockets. You, too, will be generous; I know you will be generous."

He spoke with a good deal of reluctance, and his face showed how glad he would be to have a clean billet. Mr. Grant put his hand in his pocket, and finding little there, walked towards the vestry.

"Have you got saved?" a pale-faced youth asked him, when he entered the room.

"No, not exactly," he answered. "But you can give my card to the Captain and say that I will pay the gas bill."

As he left the hall the Salvationists were singing a hymn. Six penitents knelt beside the table, and the officers waved their pocket-handkerchiefs over them, defying the devil. He had not gone far down the Whitechapel Road before he heard some one running after him, and, turning round, he saw Captain Lobe.

"God help you!" said the little fellow, seizing both of his hands; "God help you!"

"I will send you a cheque to-night," Mr. Grant told him, "and another for Nelly Ambrose."

The Captain lifted his cap, and with another "God help you!" went back to his people.

Mr. Grant walked on home—thinking.

N

CHAPTER XIII.

A FUNERAL AND A WEDDING.

A FEW days later a carriage drove up to the sergeant's house. Two men with white scarfs round their hats brought it; and one of them went into the kitchen, when the door was opened, to fetch a little coffin. Nelly followed. She was alone, for the sergeant could not get a holiday, and Captain Lobe had gone to America. Her face was colourless, white as the wreath of roses she carried; its expression was so lonely, so despairing, passers-by stopped a minute to look at it; a crowd of boys and girls stared in at the window after she stepped into the carriage.

"No, don't put it there," said Nelly, when the man was about to place the little coffin under the box-seat. "Let me have it inside the carriage.

"It's the last time I'll mind it," she said,

seeing the man hesitate. "To-morrow I'll have no baby."

The carriage went slowly along the Whitechapel Road towards the cemetery. Many mourners had sat in it before Nelly; but not one had felt more hopeless and desolate. Cut off from the past, seeing no hope from the future, she did not seem to care what happened to her now she had lost the baby. Girlish pleasures seemed such silly things. She had no wish now for theatres and outings. She put her hand on the little coffin when the carriage jolted; and cold tears fell down her cheeks, quivered on her heavy eyelids.

At last the carriage left the dusty highroad and entered the cemetery. There a sense of peace came over the East End mother, for it lay like an oasis amid the dirty houses and tall chimneys; it was full of flowers and covered with grass. "After all, it's the best place for him," thought Nelly. "He might have been unhappy like me."

The little coffin was carried into a chapel and

placed on tressels before the altar. Then, after a priest had read part of the funeral service, it was taken to a grave. "*Memento homo quia Pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris,*" said the priest; but there was something consoling in the way he said the words, something which carried Nelly's thoughts to the Heaven she believed in, which made her picture her child far away from noisy, suffering, hard-working Whitechapel. A soft wind moved the boughs of the trees, blew fallen rose-leaves into the grave. Nelly placed her wreath upon the little coffin. She did not cry when the earth fell on her baby. She went to the chapel, and there she knelt down to pray for him. Catholics are happier in one respect, at any rate, than Protestants; they can do something for their lost relations; the living and the dead in the Catholic faith are not divided.

When she reached home she found, to her great surprise, George, the caretaker, upon the doorstep. He helped her out of the carriage, and asked if he might come into the house.

"I've something to say," he told her, as they

went downstairs into the kitchen, "something very particular."

Nelly's eyes filled with tears while she answered, in a choked voice, "yes." She had caught sight of the empty cradle. George sat down in a chair with his back to it, and said that he would like a cup of tea. He looked on while Nelly lighted the fire and filled the kettle, and his eyes softened as they had been wont to do when he met his sweetheart in the Buildings. Her face was older and had lost its freshness, but the hazel eyes were the same as ever, the red-brown hair seemed even more luxurious than before, the blue shadows still hovered about the white throat. Nelly's simple black dress gave a pathos to her movements which the caretaker could not resist. When the cup of tea was finished he said:—

"Come here, Nell."

She took her old place on his knee, but, instead of putting her arms round his neck, she crossed her hands on his shoulder, and when her cold cheek touched his forehead he felt her shivering.

"I think I'll have a pipe," he said. "Perhaps, Nell, you'll fill it."

She did as he suggested.

"I've bettered myself," he said, after he had puffed away for a few minutes. "I'm going to leave the Buildings."

"Where are you going?" asked Nelly, closing her hands on the arm round her waist.

"Into the country. There's a society, or a club, just started, I don't know quite what they call it, but it's made up of people who write books. They've got a lot of little cottages, about an hour out of London; and they want some one to look after the gardens, and—and—"

"And what?" inquired Nelly.

"Some one else to look after the servants.

"It's a very nice place," continued the caretaker; "and a lot cleaner than the Buildings.

"'We're casuals, too,' the gentleman said, when I went to look at it.

"'You're a cut above those in Whitechapel,' I told him.

"He laughed, and said I needn't be afraid

but I'd get my wages, though authors were poor folks, and had difficulties in making both ends meet. The caretaker's house stands in the middle of the little cottages, and all the food's to be cooked in it. The meals are to be carried to the cottages by servants—two servants, Nelly. I'm to keep the gardens tidy, and take care of the keys when the places aren't let. All the cottages are took already; and they want me to go there at once. So I've told the committee that I've bettered myself, and next week I'm off."

Nelly remained silent.

"Fill another pipe," said George, wiping his forehead with a pocket-handkerchief. "It's wonderful how words come when one's mouth's got something in it; when mine's empty words seem to stick in my throat."

"I can't go alone," he continued, after he had smoked some minutes in silence. "You'll have to come along with me, Nell. "We'll let bygones be bygones, and get married."

"Oh, George," sobbed Nelly, "I ain't worth it."

"That's nonsense," said George, shaking the ashes out of his pipe. "I'll come to-morrow evening, and we'll talk over the wedding. I must get back now to light the lamps. What are you crying about?"

"I was only thinking how nice it would have been to have baby down in the country," said Nelly.

George shook his head. He gave Nelly a kiss, and told her to expect him the next evening. He went out of the kitchen, and as he shut the door he muttered, between his teeth:—

"I wish I'd never left the Service."

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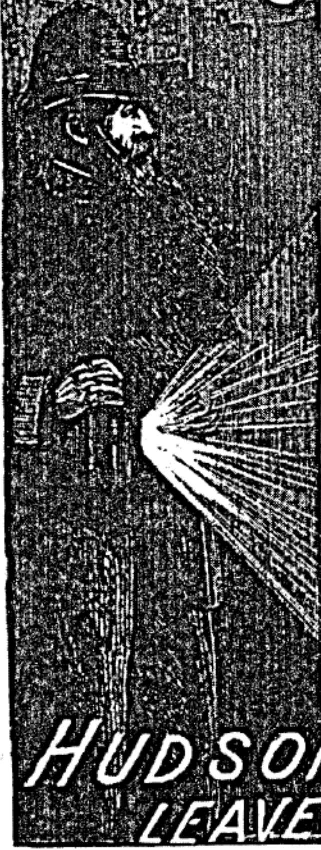

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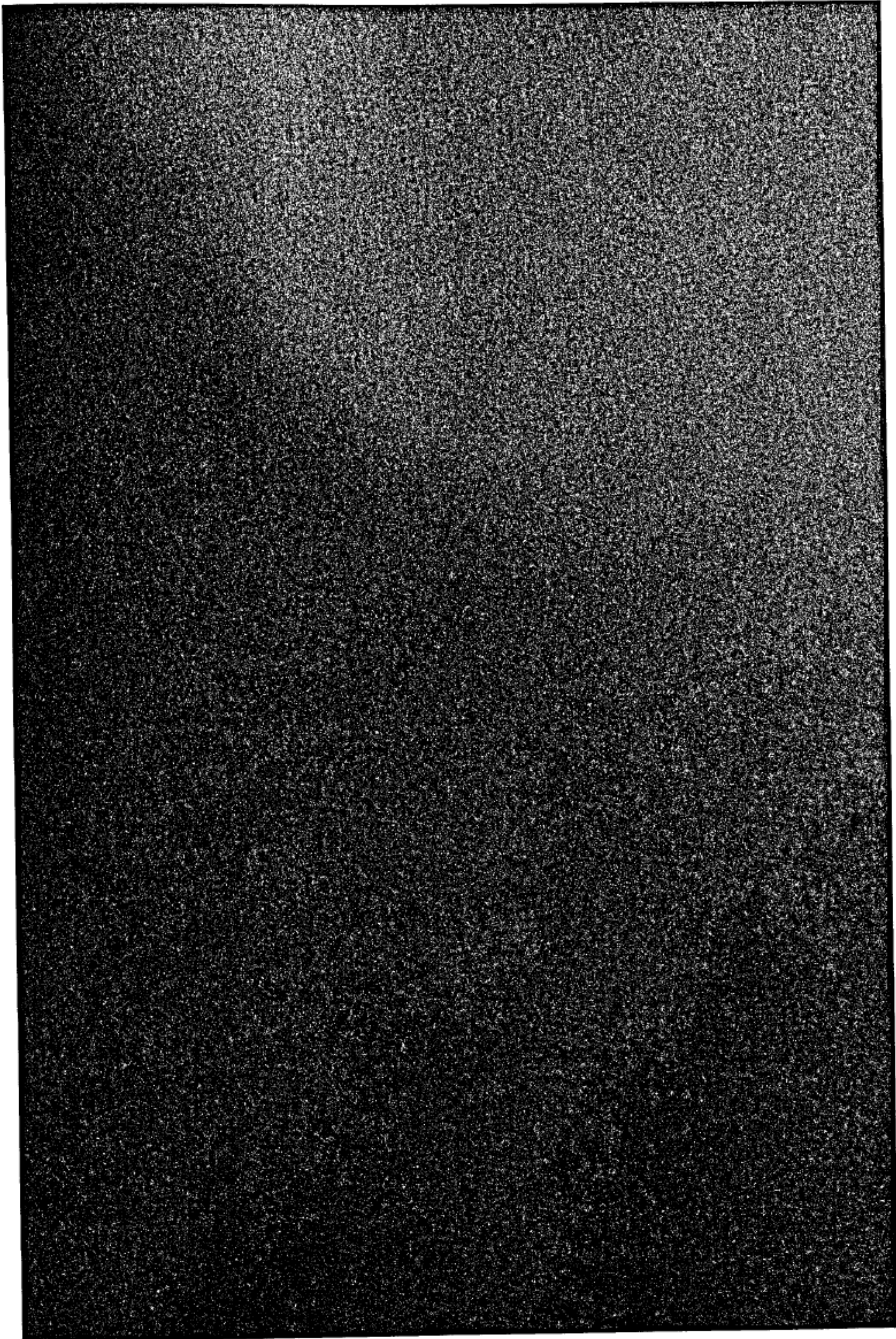

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