Alone in London eBook

Alone in London by Hesba Stretton

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CHAPTER I.

Not alone.

It had been a close and sultry day—one of the hottest of the dog-days—even out in the open country, where the dusky green leaves had never stirred upon their stems since the sunrise, and where the birds had found themselves too languid for any songs beyond a faint chirp now and then. All day long the sun had shone down steadily upon the streets of London, with a fierce glare and glowing heat, until the barefooted children had felt the dusty pavement burn under their tread almost as painfully as the icy pavement had frozen their naked feet in the winter. In the parks, and in every open space, especially about the cool splash of the fountains at Charing Cross, the people, who had escaped from the crowded and unventilated back streets, basked in the sunshine, or sought every corner where a shadow could be found. But in the alleys and slums the air was heavy with heat and dust, and thick vapours floated up and down, charged with sickening smells from the refuse of fish and vegetables decaying in the gutters. Overhead the small, straight strip of sky was almost white, and the light, as it fell, seemed to quiver with the burden of its own burning heat.

Out of one of the smaller thoroughfares lying between Holborn and the Strand, there opens a narrow alley, not more than six or seven feet across, with high buildings on each side. In the most part the ground floors consist of small shops; for the alley is not a blind one, but leads from the thoroughfare to another street, and forms, indeed, a short cut to it, pretty often used. These shops are not of any size or importance—a greengrocer's, with a somewhat scanty choice of vegetables and fruit, a broker's, displaying queer odds and ends of household goods, two or three others, and at the end farthest from the chief thoroughfare, but nearest to the quiet and respectable street beyond, a very modest-looking little shop-window, containing a few newspapers, some rather yellow packets of stationery, and two or three books of ballads. Above the door was painted, in very small, dingy letters, the words, "James Oliver, News Agent."

The shop was even smaller, in proportion, than its window. After two customers had entered—if such an event could ever come to pass—it would have been almost impossible to find room for a third. Along the end ran a little counter, with a falling flap by which admission could be gained to the living-room lying behind the shop. This evening the flap was down—a certain sign that James Oliver, the news agent, had some guest within, for otherwise there would have been no occasion to lessen the scanty size of the counter. The room beyond was dark, very dark indeed, for the time of day; for, though the evening was coming on, and the sun was hastening to go down at last, it had not yet ceased to shine brilliantly upon the great city. But inside James Oliver's house the gas was already

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lighted in a little steady flame, which never flickered in the still, hot air, though both door and window were wide open. For there was a window, though it was easy to overlook it, opening into a passage four feet wide, which led darkly up into a still closer and hotter court, lying in the very core of the maze of streets. As the houses were four stories high, it is easy to understand that very little sunlight could penetrate to Oliver's room behind his shop, and that even at noonday it was twilight there. This room was of a better size altogether than a stranger might have supposed, having two or three queer little nooks and recesses borrowed from the space belonging to the adjoining house; for the buildings were old, and had probably been one large dwelling in former times. It was plainly the only apartment the owner had; and all its arrangements were those of a man living alone, for there was something almost desolate about the look of the scanty furniture, though it was clean and whole. There had been a fire, but it had died out, and the coals were black in the grate, while the kettle still sat upon the top bar with a melancholy expression of neglect about it.

James Oliver himself had placed his chair near to the open door, where he could keep his eye upon the shop—a needless precaution, as at this hour no customers ever turned into it. He was an old man, and seemed very old and infirm by the dim light. He was thin and spare, with that peculiar spareness which results from the habit of always eating less than one can. His teeth, which had never had too much to do, had gone some years ago, and his cheeks fell in rather deeply. A fine network of wrinkles puckered about the corners of his eyes and mouth. He stooped a good deal, and moved about with the slowness and deliberation of age. Yet his face was very pleasant—a cheery, gentle, placid face, lighted up with a smile now and then, but with sufficient rareness to make it the more welcome and the more noticed when it came.

Old Oliver had a visitor this hot evening, a neat, small, dapper woman, with a little likeness to himself, who had been putting his room to rights, and looking to the repairs needed by his linen. She was just replacing her needle, cotton, and buttons in an old-fashioned housewife, which she always carried in her pocket, and was then going to put on her black silk bonnet and coloured shawl, before bidding him goodbye.

"Eh, Charlotte," said Oliver, after drawing a long and toilsome breath, "what would I give to be a-top of the Wrekin, seeing the sun set this evening! Many and many's the summer afternoon we've spent there when we were young, and all of us alive. Dost remember how many a mile of country we could see all round us, and how fresh the air blew across the thousands of green fields? Why, I saw Snowdon once, more than sixty miles off, when my eyes were young and it was a clear sunset. I always think of the top of the Wrekin when I read of Moses going up Mount Pisgah and seeing all the land about him, north and south, east and west. Eh, lass! there's a change in us all now!"

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“Ah! it’s like another world!” said the old woman, shaking her head slowly. “All the folks I used to sew for at Aston, and Uppington, and Overlehill, they’d mostly be gone or dead by now. It wouldn’t seem like the same place at all. And now there’s none but you and me left, brother James. Well, well! its lonesome, growing old.”

“Yes, lonesome, yet not exactly lonesome,” replied old Oliver, in a dreamy voice. “I’m growing dark a little, and just a trifle deaf, and I don’t feel quite myself like I used to do; but I’ve got something I didn’t use to have. Sometimes of an evening, before I’ve lit the gas, I’ve a sort of a feeling as if I could almost see the Lord Jesus, and hear him talking to me. He looks to me something like our eldest brother, him that died when we were little. Charlotte, thee remembers him? A white, quiet, patient face, with a smile like the sun shining behind clouds. Well, whether it’s only a dream or no I cannot tell, but there’s a face looks at me, or seems to look at me out of the dusk; and I think to myself, maybe the Lord Jesus says, ’Old Oliver’s lonesome down there in the dark, and his eyes growing dim. I’ll make myself half-plain to him.’ Then he comes and sits here with me for a little while.”

“Oh, that’s all fancy as comes with you living quite alone,” said Charlotte, sharply.

“Perhaps so! perhaps so!” answered the old man, with a meek sigh; “but I should be very lonesome without that.”

They did not speak again until Charlotte had given a final shake to the bed in the corner, upon which her bonnet and shawl had been lying. She put them on neatly and primly; and when she was ready to go she spoke again in a constrained and mysterious manner.

“Heard nothing of Susan, I suppose?” she said.

“Not a word,” answered old Oliver, sadly. “It’s the only trouble I’ve got. That were the last passion I ever went into, and I was hot and hasty, I know.”

“So you always used to be at times,” said his sister.

“Ah! but that passion was the worst of all,” he went on, speaking slowly. “I told her if she married young Raleigh, she should never darken my doors again—never again. And she took me at my word though she might have known it was nothing but father’s hot temper. Darken my doors! Why, the brightest sunshine I could have ’ud be to see her come smiling into my shop, like she used to do at home.”

“Well, I think Susan ought to have humbled herself,” said Charlotte. “It’s going on for six years now, and she’s had time enough to see her folly. Do you know where she is?”

“I know nothing about her,” he answered, shaking his head sorrowfully. “Young Raleigh was wild, very wild, and that was my objection to him; but I didn’t mean Susan to take me at my word. I shouldn’t speak so hasty and hot now.”

“And to think. I’d helped to bring her up so genteel, and with such pretty manners!” cried the old woman, indignantly. “She might have done so much better with her cleverness too. Such a milliner as she might have turned out! Well good-bye, brother James, and don’t go having any more of those visions; they’re not wholesome for you.”

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“I should be very lonesome without them,” answered Oliver. “Good-bye, Charlotte, good-bye, and God bless you. Come again as soon as you can.”

He went with her to the door, and stayed to watch her along the quiet alley, till she turned into the street. Then, with a last nod to the back of her bonnet, as she passed out of his sight, he returned slowly into his dark shop, put up the flap of the counter, and retreated to the darker room within. Hot as it was, he fancied it was growing a little chilly with the coming of the night, and he drew on his old coat, and threw a handkerchief over his white head, and then sat down in the dusk, looking out into his shop and the alley beyond it. He must have fallen into a doze after a while, being overcome with the heat, and lulled by the constant hum of the streets, which reached his dull ear in a softened murmur; for at length he started up almost in a fright, and found that complete darkness had fallen upon him suddenly, as it seemed to him. A church clock was striking nine, and his shop was not closed yet. He went out hurriedly to put the shutters up.

CHAPTER II.

WAIFS *and strays*.

In the shop it was not yet so dark but that old Oliver could see his way out with the shutters, which during the day occupied a place behind the door. He lifted the flap of the counter, and was about to go on with his usual business, when a small voice, trembling a little, and speaking from the floor at his very feet, caused him to pause suddenly.

“Please, rere’s a little girl here,” said the voice.

Oliver stooped down to bring his eyes nearer to the ground, until he could make out the indistinct outline of the figure of a child, seated on his shop floor, and closely hugging a dog in her arms. Her face looked small to him; it was pale, as if she had been crying quietly, and though he could not see them, a large tear stood on each of her cheeks.

“What little girl are you?” he asked, almost timidly.

“Rey called me Dolly,” answered the child.

“Haven’t you any other name?” inquired old Oliver

“Nosing else but Poppet,” she said; “rey call me Dolly sometimes, and Poppet sometimes. Ris is my little dog, Beppo.”

She introduced the dog by pushing its nose into his hand, and Beppo complacently wagged his tail and licked the old man’s withered fingers.

“What brings you here in my shop, my little woman?” asked Oliver.

“Mammy brought me,” she said, with a stifled sob; “she told me run in rere, Dolly, and stay till mammy comes back, and be a good girl always. Am I a good girl?”

“Yes, yes,” he answered, soothingly; “you’re a very good little girl, I’m sure; and mother ’ill come back soon, very soon. Let us go to the door, and look for her.”

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He took her little hand in his own; such a little hand it felt, that he could not help tightening his fingers fondly over it; and then they stood for a few minutes on the door-sill, while old Oliver looked anxiously up and down the alley. At the greengrocer's next door there flared a bright jet of gas, and the light shone well into the deepening darkness. But there was no woman in sight, and the only person about was a ragged boy, barefoot and bareheaded with no clothing but a torn pair of trousers, very jagged about the ankles, and a jacket through which his thin shoulders displayed themselves. He was lolling in the lowest window-sill of the house opposite, and watched Oliver and the little girl looking about them with sundry signs of interest and amusement.

"She ain't nowhere in sight," he called across to them after a while, "nor won't be, neither, I'll bet you. You're looking out for the little un's mother, ain't you, old master?"

"Yes," answered Oliver; "do you know anything about her, my boy?"

"Nothink," he said, with a laugh; "only she looked as if she were up to some move, and as I'd nothink particular on hand, I just followed her. She was somethink like my mother, as is dead, not fat or rosy, you know, with a bit of a bruise about her eye, as if somebody had been fighting with her. I thought there'd be a lark when she left the little 'un in your shop, so I just stopped to see. She bolted as if the bobbies were after her."

"How long ago?" asked Oliver, anxiously.

"The clocks had just gone eight," he answered; "I've been watching for you ever since."

"Why! that's a full hour ago," said the old man, looking wistfully down the alley; "it's time she was come back again for her little girl."

[Illustration: *The little stranger*.]

But there was no symptom of anybody coming to claim the little girl, who stood very quietly at his side, one hand holding the dog fast by his ear, and the other still lying in Oliver's grasp. The boy hopped on one foot across the narrow alley, and looked up with bright, eager eyes into the old man's face.

"I say," he said, earnestly, "don't you go to give her up to the p'lice. They'd take her to the house, and that's worse than the jail. Bless yer! they'd never take up a little thing like that to jail for a wagrant. You just give her to me, and I'll take care of her. It 'ud be easy enough to find victuals for such a pretty little thing as her. You give her up to me, I say."

"What's your name?" asked Oliver, clasping the little hand tighter, "and where do you come from?"

“From nowhere particular,” answered the boy; “and my name’s Antony; Tony, for short. I used to have another name; mother told it me afore she died, but it’s gone clean out o’ my head. Tony I am, anyhow, and you can call me by it, if you choose.”

“How old are you, Tony?” inquired Oliver, still lingering on the threshold, and looking up and down with his dim eyes.

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“Bless yer! I don’t know,” replied Tony; “I weren’t much bigger nor her when mother died, and I’ve found myself ever since. I never had any father.”

“Found yourself!” repeated the old man, absently.

“Ah, it’s not bad in the summer,” said Tony, more earnestly than before: “and I could find for the little ’un easy enough. I sleep anywhere, in Covent Garden sometimes, and the parks—anywhere as the p’lice ’ill let me alone. You won’t go to give her up to them p’lice, will you now, and she so pretty?”

He spoke in a beseeching tone, and old Oliver looked down upon him through his spectacles, with a closer survey than he had given to him before. The boy’s face was pale and meagre, with an unboyish sharpness about it, though he did not seem more than nine or ten years old. His glittering eyes were filled with tears, and his colourless lips quivered. He wiped away the tears roughly upon the ragged sleeve of his jacket.

“I never were such a baby before,” said Tony, “only she is such a nice little thing, and such a tiny little ’un. You’ll keep her, master, won’t you? or give her up to me?”

“Ay, ay! I’ll take care of her,” answered Oliver, “till her mother comes back for her. She’ll come pretty soon, I know. But she wants her supper now, doesn’t she?”

He stooped down to bring his face nearer to the child’s, and she raised her hand to it, and stroked his cheek with her warm, soft fingers.

“Beppo wants his supper, too,” she said, in a clear, shrill, little voice, which penetrated easily through old Oliver’s deafened hearing.

“And Beppo shall have some supper as well as the little woman,” he answered. “I’ll put the shutters up now, and leave the door ajar, and the gas lit for mother to see when she comes back; and if mother shouldn’t come back to night, the little woman will sleep in my bed, won’t she?”

“Dolly’s to be a good girl till mammy comes back,” said the child, plaintively, and holding harder by Beppo’s ear.

“Let me put the shutters up, master,” cried Tony, eagerly; “I won’t charge you nothink, and I’ll just look round in the morning to see how you’re getting along. She is such a very little thing.”

The shutters were put up briskly, and then Tony took a long, farewell gaze of the old man and the little child, but he could not offer to touch either of them. He glanced at his hands, and Oliver did the same; but they both shook their heads.

“I’ll have a wash in the morning afore I come,” he said, nodding resolutely; “good-bye, guv’ner; goodbye, little ’un.”

Old Oliver went in, leaving his door ajar, and his gas lit, as he had said. He fed the hungry child with bread and butter, and used up his half-pennyworth of milk, which he bought for himself every evening. Then he lifted her on to his knee, with Beppo in her arms, and sat for a long while waiting. The little head nodded, and Dolly sat up, unsteadily striving hard to keep awake; but at last she let Beppo drop to the floor, while she herself fell upon the old man’s breast, and lay there without moving. It chimed eleven o’clock at last, and Oliver knew it was of no use to watch any longer.

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He managed to undress his little charge with gentle, though trembling hands, and then he laid her down on his bed, putting his only pillow against the wall to make a soft nest for the tender and sleepy child. She roused herself for a minute, and stared about her, gazing steadily, with large, tearful eyes, into his face. Then as he sat down on the bedstead beside her, to comfort her as well as he could, she lifted herself up, and knelt down, with her folded hands laid against his shoulder.

“Dolly vewy seepy,” she lisped, “but must say her prayers always.”

“What are your prayers, my dear?” he asked.

“On’y God bless gan-pa, and father, and mammy, and poor Beppo, and make me a good girl,” murmured the drowsy voice, as Dolly closed her eyes again, and fell off into a deep sleep the next moment.

CHAPTER III.

A *little peacemaker*.

It was a very strange event which had befallen old Oliver. He went back to his own chair, where he smoked his Broseley pipe every night, and sank down in it, rubbing his legs softly; for it was a long time since he had nursed any child, and even Dolly’s small weight was a burden to him. Her tiny clothes were scattered up and down, and there was no one beside himself to gather them together, and fold them straight. In shaking out her frock a letter fell from it, and Oliver picked it up wondering whoever it could be for. It was directed to himself, “Mr. James Oliver, News-agent,” and he broke the seal with eager expectation. The contents were these, written in a handwriting which he knew at first sight to be his daughter’s:—

“*Dear father*,

“I am very very sorry I ever did anything to make you angry with me. This is your poor Susan’s little girl, as is come to be a little peacemaker betwixt you and me. I’m certain sure you’ll never turn her away from your door. I’m going down to Portsmouth for three days, because he listed five months ago, and his regiment’s ordered out to India, and he sails on Friday. So I thought I wouldn’t take my little girl to be in the way, and I said I’ll leave her with father till I come back, and her pretty little ways will soften him towards me, and we’ll live all together in peace and plenty till his regiment comes home again, poor fellow. For he’s very good to me when he’s not in liquor, which is seldom for a man. Please do forgive me for pity’s sake, and for Christ’s sake, if I’m worthy to use his name, and do take care of my little girl till I come home to you both on Friday, From your now dutiful daughter,

“*Poor Susan*.”

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The tears rolled fast down old Oliver's cheeks as he read this letter through twice, speaking the words half aloud to himself. Why! this was his own little grandchild, then —his very own! And no doubt Susan had christened her Dorothy, after her own mother, his dear wife, who had died so many years ago. Dolly was the short for Dorothy, and in early times he had often called his wife by that name. He had turned his gas off and lighted a candle, and now he took it up and went to the bedside to look at his new treasure. The tiny face lying upon his pillow was rosy with sleep, and the fair curly hair was tossed about in pretty disorder. His spectacles grew very dim indeed, and he was obliged to polish them carefully on his cotton handkerchief before he could see his grand-daughter plainly enough. Then he touched her dimpled cheek tremblingly with the end of his finger, and sobbed out, "Bless her! bless her!" He returned to his chair, his head shaking a good deal before he could regain his composure; and it was not until he had kindled his pipe, and was smoking it, with his face turned towards the sleeping child, that he felt at all like himself again.

"Dear Lord!" he said, half aloud, between the whiffs of his pipe, "dear Lord! how very good thou art to me! Didst thee not say, 'I'll not leave thee comfortless, I'll come to thee?' I know what that means, bless thy name; and the good Spirit has many a time brought me comfort, and cheered my heart. I know thou didst not leave me alone before. No, no! that was far from thee, Lord. Alone!—why, thou'rt always here; and now there's the little lass as well. Lonesome!—they don't know thee, Lord, and they don't know me. Thou'rt here, with the little lass and me. Yes, yes,—yes."

He murmured the word "yes" in a tone of contentment over and over again, until, the pipe being finished, he prepared for sleep also. But no sleep came to the old man. He was too full of thought, and too fearful of the child waking in the night and wanting something. The air was close and hot, and now and then a peal of thunder broke overhead; but a profound peace and tranquillity, slightly troubled by his new joy, held possession of him. His grandchild was there, and his daughter was coming back to him in three days.

Oh, how he would welcome her! He would not let her speak one word of her wilfulness and disobedience, and the long, cruel neglect which had left him in ignorance of where she lived, and what had become of her. It was partly his fault, for having been too hard upon her, and too hasty and hot-tempered. He had learnt better since then.

CHAPTER IV.

Old Oliver's master.

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Very early in the morning, before the tardy daylight could creep into the darkened room, old Oliver was up and busy. He had been in the habit of doing for himself, as he called it, ever since his daughter had forsaken him, and he was by nature fastidiously clean and neat. But now there would be additional duties for him during the next three days; for there would be Dolly to wash, and dress, and provide breakfast for. Every few minutes he stole a look at her lying still asleep; and as soon as he discovered symptoms of awaking, he hastily lifted Beppo on to the bed, that her opening eyes should be greeted by some familiar sight. She stretched out her wonderful little hands, and caught hold of the dog's rough head before venturing to lift her eyelids, while Oliver looked on in speechless delight. At length she ventured to peep slyly at him, and then addressed herself to Beppo.

"What am I to call ris funny old man, Beppo?" she asked.

"I am your grandpa, my darling," said Oliver, in his softest voice.

"Are you God-bless-gan-pa?" inquired Dolly, sitting up on her pillow, and staring very hard with her blue eyes into his wrinkled face.

"Yes, I am," he answered, looking at her anxiously.

"Dolly knows," she said, counting upon her little fingers; "rere's father, and mammy, and Beppo; and now rere's gan-pa. Dolly'll get up now."

She flung her arms suddenly about his neck and kissed him, while old Oliver trembled with intense joy. It was quite a marvel to him how she helped him to dress her, laughing merrily at the strange mistakes he made in putting on her clothes the wrong side before; and when he assured her that her mother would come back very soon, she seemed satisfied to put up with any passing inconvenience. The shop, with its duties, and the necessity of getting in his daily stock of newspapers, entirely slipped his memory; and he was only recalled to it by a very loud rapping at the door as he was pouring out Dolly's breakfast. To his great surprise he discovered that he had forgotten to take down his shutters, though it was past the hour when his best customers passed by.

The person knocking proved to be none other than Tony, who greeted the old man's appearance with a prolonged whistle, and a grave and reproachful stare.

"Come," he said, in a tone of remonstrance, "this'll never do, you know. Business is business, and must be minded. You pretty nearly frightened me into fits; anybody could have knocked me down with a straw when I see the shutters up. How is she?"

"She's very well, thank you, my boy," answered Oliver, meekly.

"Mother not turned up, I guess?" said Tony.

“No; she comes on Friday,” he replied.

Tony winked, and put his tongue into his cheek; but he gave utterance to no remark until after the shutters were in their place. Then he surveyed himself as well as he could, with an air of satisfaction. His face and hands were clean, and his skin looked very white through the holes in his tattered clothes; even his feet, except for an unavoidable under surface of dust, were unsoiled. His jacket and trousers appeared somewhat more torn than the evening before; but they bore every mark of having been washed also.

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“Washed myself early in the morning, afore the bobbies were much about,” remarked Tony, “in the fountains at Charing Cross; but I hadn’t time to get my rags done, so I did ’em down under the bridge, when the tide were going down; but I could only give ’em a bit of a swill and a ring out. Anyhow, I’m a bit cleaner this morning than last night, master.”

“To be sure, to be sure,” answered Oliver. “Come in, my boy, and I’ll give you a bit of breakfast with her and me.”

“You haven’t got sich a thing as a daily paper, have you?” asked Tony, in a patronizing tone.

“Not to-day’s paper, I’m afraid,” he said.

“I’m afraid not,” continued Tony; “overslept yourself, eh? Not as I can read myself; but there are folks going by as can, and might p’raps buy one here as well as anywhere else. Shall I run and get ’em for you, now I’m on my legs?”

Oliver looked questioningly at the boy, who returned a frank, honest gaze, and said, “Honour bright!” as he held out his hand for the money. There was some doubt in the old man’s mind after Tony had disappeared as to whether he had not done a very foolish thing; but he soon forgot it when he returned to the breakfast-table; and long before he himself could have reached the place and returned, Tony was back again with his right number of papers.

Before many minutes Tony was sitting upon an old box at a little distance from the table, where Oliver sat with his grandchild. A basin of coffee and a large hunch of bread rested upon his knees, and Beppo was sniffing round him with a doubtful air. Dolly was shy in this strange company, and ate her breakfast with a sedate gravity which filled both her companions with astonishment and admiration. When the meal was finished, old Oliver took his daughter’s letter from his waistcoat pocket and read it aloud to Tony, who listened with undivided interest.

“Then she’s your own little ’un,” he said, with a sigh of disappointment. “You’ll never give her up to me, if you get tired of her,—nor to the p’lice neither,” he added, with a brightening face.

“No, no, no!” answered Oliver, emphatically. “Besides, her mother’s coming on Friday. I wouldn’t give her up for all the world, bless her!”

“And he’s ’listed!” said Tony, in a tone of envy. “They wouldn’t take me yet a while, if I offered to go. But who’s that she speaks of?—’for Christ’s sake, if I am worthy to use his name.’ Who is he?”

“Don’t you know?” asked Oliver.

“No, never heard tell of him before,” he answered. “Is he any friend o’ yours?” [A]

[Footnote A: It may be necessary to assure some readers that this ignorance is not exaggerated. The City Mission Reports, and similar records, show that such cases are too frequent.]

“Ay!” said Oliver; “he’s my only friend, my best friend. And he’s my master, besides.”

“And she thinks he’d be angry if you turned the little girl away?” pursued Tony.

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“Yes, yes; he’d be very angry,” said old Oliver, thoughtfully; “it ’ud grieve him to his heart. Why, he’s always loved little children, and never had them turned away from himself, whatever he was doing. If she hadn’t been my own little girl, I daren’t have turned her out of my doors. No, no, dear Lord, thee knows as I’d have taken care of her, for thy sake.”

He spoke absently, in a low voice, as though talking to some person whom Tony could not see, and the boy was silent a minute or two, thinking busily.

“How long have you worked for that master o’ yours?” he asked, at last.

“Not very long,” replied Oliver, regretfully. “I used to fancy I was working for him years and years ago; but, dear me! it was poor sort o’work; and now I can’t do very much. Only he knows how old I am, and he doesn’t care so that I love him, which I do, Tony.”

“I should think so!” said the boy, falling again into busy thought, from which he aroused himself by getting up from his box, and rubbing his fingers through his wet and tangled hair.

“He takes to children and little ’uns?” he said, in a questioning tone.

“Ay, dearly!” answered old Oliver.

“I reckon he’d scarcely take me for a man yet,” said Tony, at the same time drawing himself up to his full height; “though I don’t know as I should care to work for him. I’d rather have a crossing, and be my own master. But if I get hard up, do you think he’d take to me, if you spoke a word for me?”

“Are you sure you don’t know anything about him?” asked Oliver.

“Not I; how should I?” answered Tony. “Why, you don’t s’pose as I know all the great folks in London, though I’ve seen sights and sights of ’em riding about in their carriages. I told you I weren’t much bigger nor her there when mother died, and I’ve picked up my living up and down the streets anyhow, and other lads have helped me on, till I can help ’em on now. It don’t cost much to keep a boy on the streets. There’s nothink to pay for coals, or rent, or beds, or furniture, or anythink; only your victuals, and a rag now and then. All I want’s a broom and a crossing, and then shouldn’t I get along just? But I don’t know how to get ’em.”

“Perhaps the Lord Jesus would give them to you, if you’d ask him,” said Oliver, earnestly.

“Who’s he?” inquired Tony, with an eager face.

“Him—Christ. It’s his other name,” answered the old man.

“Ah! I see,” he said, nodding. “Well, if I can’t get ’em myself, I’ll think about it. He’ll want me to work for him, you know. Where does he live?”

“I’ll tell you all about him, if you’ll come to see me,” replied Oliver.

“Well,” said the boy, “I’ll just look in after Friday, and see if the little ’un’s mother’s come back. Goodbye,—good-bye, little miss.”

He could take Dolly’s hand into his own this morning, and he looked down curiously at it,—a small, rosy, dimpled hand, such as he had never seen before so closely. A lump rose in his throat, and his eyelids smarted with tears again. It was such a little thing, such a pretty little thing, he said to himself, covering it fondly with his other hand. There was no fear that Tony would forget to come back to old Oliver’s house.

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“Thank you for my breakfast,” he said, with a choking voice; “only if I do come to see you, it’ll be to see her again—not for anythink as I can get.”

CHAPTER V.

Forsaken again.

The next three days were a season of unmixed happiness to old Oliver. The little child was so merry, yet withal so gentle and sweet-tempered, that she kept him in a state of unwearied delight, without any alloy of anxiety or trouble. She trotted at his side with short, running footsteps, when he went out early in the morning to fetch his daily stock of newspapers. She watched him set his room tidy, and made believe to help him by dusting the legs and seats of his two chairs. She stood with folded hands and serious face, looking on as he was busy with his cooking. When she was not thus engaged she played contentedly with Beppo, prattling to him in such a manner, that Oliver often forgot what he was about while listening to her. She played with him, too, frolicsome little games of hide-and-seek, in which he grew as eager as herself; and sometimes she stole his spectacles, or handkerchief, or anything she could lay her mischievous fingers upon to hide away in some unthought-of spot; while her shrewd, cunning little face put on an expression of profound gravity as old Oliver sought everywhere for them.

As Friday evening drew near, the old man’s gladness took a shade of anxiety. His daughter was coming home to him, and his heart was full of unutterable joy and gratitude; but he did not know exactly how they should go on in the future. He was averse to change; yet this little house, with its single room, to which he had moved when she forsook him, was too scanty in its accommodation. He had made up a rude sort of bed for himself under the counter in the shop, and was quite ready to give up his own to Susan and his little love, as he called Dolly; but would Susan let him have his own way in this, and many other things? He provided a sumptuous tea, and added a fresh salad to it from the greengrocer’s next door; but though he and Dolly waited and watched till long after the child’s bed-time, taking occasional snatches of bread and butter, still Susan did not arrive. At length a postman entered the little shop with a noise which made Oliver’s heart beat violently, and tossed a letter down upon the counter. He carried it to the door, where there was still light enough to read it, and saw that it was in Susan’s handwriting.

“*My dear and dearest father*,

“My heart is almost broke, betwixt one thing and another. His regiment is to set sail immediate, and the colonel’s lady has offered me very handsome wages to go out with her as lady’s maid, her own having disappointed her at the last moment; which I could do very well, knowing the dressmaking. He said, ’Do come, Susan, and I’ll never get drunk again, so help me God; and if you don’t,

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I shall go to the bad altogether; for I do love you, Susan.’ I said, ‘Oh my child!’ And the colonel’s lady said, ’She’s safe with her grandfather; and if he’s a good man, as you say he is, he’ll take the best of care of her. I’ll give you three pounds to send him from here, and we’ll send more from Calcutta.’ So they overpersuaded me, and there isn’t even time to come back to London, for we are going in a few hours. You’ll take care of my little dear, I know, you and aunt Charlotte. I’ve sent a little box of clothes for her by the railway, and what more she wants aunt Charlotte will see to, I’m sure, and do her mending, and see to her manners till I come home. Oh! if I could only hear you say ’Susan, my dear, I forgive you, and love you almost as much as ever,’ I’d go with a lighter heart, and be almost glad to leave Dolly to be a comfort to you. She will be a comfort to you, though she is so little, I’m sure. Tell her mammy says she must be a good girl always till mammy comes back. A hundred thousand kisses for my dear father and my little girl. We shall come home as soon as ever we can; but I don’t rightly know where India is. I think it’s my bounden duty to go with him, as things have turned out. Pray God take care of us all.

“Your loving, sorrowful daughter,

“*Susan Raleigh*.”

CHAPTER VI.

The Grasshopper A *burden*.

It was some time before the full meaning of Susan’s letter penetrated to her father’s brain; but when it did, he was not at first altogether pained by it. True, it was both a grief and disappointment to think that his daughter, instead of returning to him, was already on her way across the sea to a very distant land. But as this came slowly to his mind, there came also the thought that there would now be no one to divide with him the treasure committed to his charge. The little child would belong to him alone. They might go on still, living as they had done these last three days, and being all in all to one another. If he could have chosen, his will would certainly have been for Susan to return to them; but, since he could not have his choice, he felt that there were some things which would be all the happier for him because of her absence.

He put Dolly to bed, and then went out to shut up the shop for the night. As he carried in his feeble arms a single shutter at a time, he heard himself hailed by a boy’s voice, which was lowered to a low and mysterious whisper, and which belonged to Tony, who took the shutter out of his hands.

“S’pose the mother turned up all right?” he said, pointing with his thumb through the half open door.

“No,” answered Oliver. “I’ve had another letter from her, and she’s gone out to India with her husband, and left the little love to live alone with me.”

“But whatever’ll the Master say to that?” inquired Tony.

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“What master?” asked old Oliver.

“Him—Lord Jesus Christ. What’ll he say to her leaving you and the little ’un again?” said Tony, with an eager face.

“Oh! he says a woman ought to leave her father, and keep to her husband,” he answered, somewhat sadly. “It’s all right, that is.”

“I s’pose he’ll help you to take care of the little girl,” said Tony.

“Ay will he; him and me,” replied old Oliver; “there’s no fear of that. You never read the Testament, of course, my boy?”

“Can’t read, I told you,” he answered. “But what’s that?”

“A book all about him, the Lord Jesus,” said Oliver, “what he’s done, and what he’s willing to do for people. If you’ll come of an evening, I’ll read it aloud to you and my little love. She’ll listen as quiet and good as any angel.”

“I’ll come to-morrow,” answered Tony, readily; and he lingered about the doorway until he heard the old man inside fasten the bolts and locks, and saw the light go out in the pane of glass over the door. Then he scampered noiselessly with his naked feet along the alley in the direction of Covent Garden, where he purposed to spend the night, if left undisturbed.

Old Oliver went back into his room, where the tea-table was still set out for his Susan’s welcome; but he had no heart to clear the things away. A chill came over his spirit as his eye fell upon the preparations he had made to give her such a cordial greeting, that she would know at once he had forgiven her fully. He lit his pipe, and sat pondering sorrowfully over all the changes that had happened to him since those old, far-away days when he was a boy, in the pleasant, fresh, healthy homestead at the foot of the Wrekin. He felt all of a sudden how very old he was; a poor, infirm, hoary old man. His sight was growing dim even, and his hearing duller every day; he was sure of it. His limbs ached oftener, and he was earlier wearied in the evening; yet he could not sleep soundly at nights, as he had been used to do. But, worst of all, his memory was not half as good as it had been. Sometimes, of late, he had caught himself reading a newspaper quite a fortnight old, and he had not found it out till he happened to see the date at the top. He could not recollect the names of people as he did once; for many of his customers to whom he supplied the monthly magazines were obliged to tell him their names and the book they wanted every time, before he could remember them. And now there was this young child cast upon him to be thought of, and cared and worked for. It was very thoughtless and reckless of Susan! Suppose he should forget or neglect any of her tender wants! Suppose his dull ear should grow too deaf to catch the pretty words she said when she asked for something! Suppose he should not see when

the tears were rolling down her cheeks, and nobody would comfort her! It might very easily be so. He was not the hale man he was when Susan was just such another little darling, and he could toss her up to the ceiling in his strong hands. It was as much as he could do to lift Dolly on to his feeble knee, and nurse her quietly, not even giving her a ride to market upon it; and how stiff he felt if she sat there long!

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Old Oliver laid aside his pipe, and rested his worn face upon his hands, while the heavy tears came slowly and painfully to his eyes, and trickled down his withered cheeks. His joy had fled, and his unmingled gladness had faded quite away. He was a very poor, very old man; and the little child was very, very young. What would become of them both, alone in London?

He did not know whether it was a voice speaking within himself in his own heart, or words whispered very softly into his ear; but he heard a low, quiet, still, small voice, which said, “Even to your old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs I will carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” And old Oliver answered, with a sob, “Yes, Lord, yes!”

CHAPTER VII.

The Prince of life.

In the new life which had now fairly begun for Oliver, it was partly as he had foreseen; he was apt to forget many things, and he had a fretting consciousness of this forgetfulness. When he was in the house playing with Dolly, or reading to her, the shop altogether slipped away from his memory, and he was only recalled to it by the loud knocking or shouting of some customer in it. On the other hand, when he was sitting behind the counter looking for news from India in the papers, news in which he was already profoundly concerned, though it was impossible that Susan could yet have reached it, he grew so absorbed, that he did not know how the time was passing by, and both he and his little grand-daughter were hungry before he had thought of getting ready any meal. He tried all kinds of devices for strengthening his failing memory; but in vain. He even forgot that he did forget; and when Dolly was laughing and frolicking about him he grew a child again, and felt himself the happiest man in London.

The person who took upon himself the heaviest weight of anxiety and responsibility about Dolly was Tony, who began to make it his daily custom to pass by the house at the hour when old Oliver ought to be going for his morning papers; and if he found no symptom of life about the place, he did not leave off kicking and butting at the shop-door until the owner appeared. It was very much the same thing at night, when the time for shutting up came; though it generally happened now that the boy was paying his friends an evening visit, and was therefore at hand to put up the shutters for Oliver. Tony could not keep away from the place. Though he felt a boy’s contemptuous pity for the poor old man’s declining faculties as regarded business, he had a very high veneration for his learning. Nothing pleased him better than to sit upon the old box near the door, his elbows on his knees, and his chin upon his hands, while Oliver read aloud, with Dolly upon his knee, her curly hair and small pretty features making a strange contrast to his white head and withered, hollow face.

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Tony, who had never had anything to love except a stray cur or two, which he had always lost after a few days' friendship, felt as if he could have suffered himself to be put to death for either of these two; while Beppo came in for a large share of his unclaimed affections. The chief subject of their reading was the life of the Master, who was so intimately dear to the heart of old Oliver. Tony was very eager to learn all he could of this great friend who did so much for the old man, and who might perhaps be persuaded some day or other to take a little notice of him, if he should fail to get a crossing for himself. Oliver, in his long, unbroken solitude of six years, had fallen into a notion, amounting to a firm belief, that his Lord was not dead and far off, as most of the world believed, but was a very present, living friend, always ready to listen to the meanest of his words. He had a vague suspicion that his faith had got into a different course from that of most other people; and he bore meekly the rebukes of his sister Charlotte for the unwholesomeness of his visions. But none the less, when he was alone, he talked and prayed to, and spoke to Tony of this Master, as one who was always very near at hand.

"I s'pose he takes a bit o' notice o' the little un," said Tony, "when he comes in now and then of an evening."

"Ay, does he!" answered Oliver, earnestly. "My boy, he loves every child as if it was his very own, and it is his own in one sense. Didn't I read you last night how he said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.' Why, he'd love all the young children in the world, if they weren't hindered from coming to him."

"I should very much like to see him some day," pursued Tony, reflectively, "and the rest of them,—Peter, and John, and them. I s'pose they are getting pretty old by now, aren't they?"

"They are dead," said Oliver.

"All of 'em?" asked Tony.

"All of them," he repeated.

"Dear, dear!" cried Tony, his eyes glistening. "Whatever did the Master do when they all died? I'm very sorry for him now. He's had a many troubles, hasn't he?"

"Yes, yes," replied old Oliver, with a faltering voice. "He was called a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Nobody ever bore so many troubles as him."

"How long is it ago since they all died?" asked Tony.

“I can’t rightly say,” he answered. “I heard once, but it is gone out of my head. I only know it was the same when I was a boy. It must have been a long, long time ago.”

“The same when you was a boy!” repeated Tony, in a tone of disappointment. “It must ha’ been a long while ago. I thought all along as the Master was alive now.”

“So he is, so he is!” exclaimed old Oliver, eagerly. “I’ll read to you all about it. They put him to death on the cross, and buried him in a rocky grave; but he is the Prince of Life, and he came to life again three days after, and now he can die no more. His own words to John were, ’I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore.’ What else can it mean but that he is living now, and will never die again?”

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Tony made no answer. He sat with his sharp, unboyish face gazing intently into the fire; for by this time autumn had set in, and the old man was chilly of an evening. A very uncertain, dim idea was dawning upon him that this master and friend of old Oliver's was a being very different from an ordinary man, however great and rich he might be. He had grown to love the thought of him, and to listen attentively to the book which told the manner of life he led; but it was a chill to find out that he could not look into his face, and hear his voice, as he could Oliver's. His heart was heavy, and very sad.

"I s'pose I can't see him, then," he murmured to himself, at last.

"Not exactly like other folks," said Oliver. "I think sometimes that perhaps there's a little darkness of the grave where he was buried about him still. But he sees us, and hears us. He himself says, 'Behold, I am with you always.' I don't know whatever I should do, even with my little love here, if I wasn't sure Jesus was with me as well."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Tony, after another pause. "I'm going to ask him to give me somethink, and then if he does, I shall know he hears me—I should very much like to have a broom and a crossing, and get my living a bit more easy, if you please."

He had turned his face away from Oliver, and looked across into the darkest corner of the room, where he could see nothing but shadow. The old man felt puzzled, and somewhat troubled, but he only sighed softly to himself; and opening the Testament, he read aloud in it till he was calmed again, and Tony was listening in rapt attention.

"My boy," he said, as the hour came for Tony to go, "where are you sleeping now?"

"Anywhere as I can get out o' the wind," he answered. "It's cold now, nights—wery cold, master. But I must get along a bit farder on. Lodgings is wery dear."

"I've been thinking," said Oliver, "that you'd find it better to have some sort of a shake-down under my counter. I've heard say that newspapers stitched together make a coverlid pretty near as warm as a blanket; and we could do no harm by trying them, Tony. Look here, and see how you'd like it."

It looked very much like a long box, and was not much larger. Two or three beetles crawled sluggishly away as the light fell upon them, and dusty cobwebs festooned all the corners; but to Tony it seemed so magnificent an accommodation for sleeping, that he could scarcely believe he heard old Oliver aright. He looked up into his face with a sharp, incredulous gaze, ready to wink and thrust his tongue into his cheek, if there was the least sign of making game of him. But the old man was simply in earnest, and without a word Tony slipped down upon a heap of paper shavings strewed within, drew his ragged jacket up about his ears, and turned his face away, lest his tears should be seen. He felt, a minute or two after, that a piece of an old rug was laid over him, but he could say nothing; and old Oliver could not hear the sob which broke from his lips.

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CHAPTER VIII.

No pipe for old Oliver.

As some weeks went by, and no crossing and broom had been given to Tony, he began to suspect that Oliver was imposing upon him. Now that he slept under the counter, he could often hear the old man talking aloud to his invisible Friend as he smoked his pipe; and once or twice Tony crept noiselessly to the door and watched him, after he had finished smoking, kneel down and hide his face in his hands for some minutes together. But the boy could see nothing, and his wish had not been granted; even though, as he grew more instructed, he followed Oliver's example, and, kneeling down behind the counter, whispered out a prayer for it. To be sure his life was easier, especially the nights of it; for he never now went hungry and starved to bed upon some cold, hard door-step. But it was old Oliver who did that for him, not old Oliver's Master. So far as he knew, the Lord Jesus had taken no notice whatever of him; and the feeling, at first angry, softened down into a kind of patient grief, which was quickly dying away into indifference.

Oliver had done himself no bad turn by offering a shelter to the solitary lad. Tony always woke early in the morning, and if it rained he would run for the papers, before turning out to "find for himself" in the streets. He generally took care to be out of the way at meal-times; for it was as much as the old man could do to provide for himself and Dolly. Sometimes Tony saw him at the till, counting over his pence with rather a troubled face. Once, after receiving a silver fourpenny piece, an extraordinary and undreamed of event, Tony dropped it, almost with a feeling of guilt, through the slit in the counter which communicated with the till. But Oliver was so bewildered by its presence among the coppers, that he was compelled to confess what he had done, saying it would have cost him more than that for lodgings these cold nights.

"No, no, Tony," said Oliver; "you're very useful, fetching my papers, and taking my little love out a-walking when the weather's fine. I ought to pay you something, instead of taking it of you."

"Keep it for Dolly," said Tony, bashfully, and pushing the coin into her little hand.

"Sank 'oo," answered Dolly, accepting it promptly; "me'll give 'oo twenty kisses for it."

It seemed ample payment to Tony, who went down on his knees to have the kisses pressed upon his face, which had never felt a kiss since his mother died. But Oliver was not satisfied with the bargain, though he drew Dolly to him fondly, and left the money in her hand.

"It 'ud buy you a broom, Tony," he said.

“Oh, I’ve give up asking for a crossing,” he answered, dejectedly; “for he never heard, or if he heard, he never cared; so it were no use going on teazing either him or me.”

“But this money ’ud buy the broom,” said Oliver; “and if you looked about you, you’d find the crossing. You never got such a bit of money before, did you?”

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“No, never,” replied Tony. “A tall, thin gentleman, with a dark face and very sharp eyes, gave it me for holding his horse, near Temple Bar. He says, ‘Mind you spend that well, my lad.’ I’d know him again anywhere.”

“You ought to have bought a broom,” said Oliver, looking down at Dolly’s tightly-closed hand.

“Don’t you go to take it of her,” cried Tony. “Bless you! I’ll get another some way. I never thought that were the way he’d give me a broom and a crossing. I thought it ’ud be sure to come direct.”

“Well,” said Oliver, after a little pause, “I’ll save the fourpence for you. It’ll only be going without my pipe for a few nights, that’s all. That’s nothing, Tony.”

It did not seem much to Tony, who had no idea as yet of the pleasures of smoking; yet he roused up just before falling into his deep sleep at night to step softly to the door, and look in upon Oliver. He was sitting in his arm-chair, with his pipe between his lips, but there was no tobacco in it; and he was holding more eager converse than ever with his unseen companion.

“Dear Lord!” he said, “I’d do ten times more than this for thee. Thou hast said, ’Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto me.’ Tony’s one of thy little ones. Dear Lord, do thee give him a crossing, if it be thy blessed will. Do thee now, Lord.”

Tony could hear no more, and he stole back to bed, his mind full of new and vague hopes. He dreamed of the fourpenny piece, and the gentleman who had given it, and of Dolly, who bought a wondrous broom with it, in his dream, which swept a beautiful crossing of itself. But old Oliver sat still a long time, talking half aloud; for his usual drowsiness did not come to him. It was nearly five months now since Dolly was left to him, and he felt his deafness and blindness growing upon him slowly. His infirmities were not yet so burdensome as to make him dependent upon others; but he felt himself gradually drawing near to such a state. Dolly’s clothes were getting sadly in want of mending; there was scarcely a fastening left upon them, and neither he nor Tony could sew on a button or tape. It was a long time—a very long time—since his sister had been to see him; and, with the reluctancy of old age to any active exertion, he had put off from week to week the task of writing to her to tell her of Susan’s departure, and the charge he had in his little grandchild. He made up his mind that he would do it tomorrow.

CHAPTER IX.

A *new broom and* A *crossing*.

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The morning was a fine soft, sunny December day, such as comes sometimes after a long season of rain and fog, and Tony proposed taking Dolly out for a walk through the streets, to which Oliver gladly consented, as it would give to him exactly the undisturbed leisure he needed for writing his letter to Charlotte. But Dolly was not in her usual spirits; on the contrary, she was grave and sober, and at length Tony, thinking she was tired, sat down on a door-step, and took her upon his knee, to tell her his dream of the wonderful broom which swept beautifully all by itself. Dolly grew more and more pensive after hearing this, and sat silent for a long time, with her small head resting thoughtfully upon her hand, as she looked up and down the street.

“Dolly ’ud like to buy a boom,” she said, at last, “a great, big boom; and gan-pa ’ill smoke his pipe again to-night. Dolly’s growing a big girl; and me must be a good girl till mammy comes back. Let us go and buy a big boom, Tony.”

For a few minutes Tony tried to shake her resolution, and persuade her to change her mind. He even tempted her with the sight of a doll in a shop-window; but she remained steadfast, and he was not sorry to give in at last. Since the idea had entered his head that the money had been given to him for the purpose of buying a broom, he had rather regretted parting with it, and he felt some anxiety lest he should not be allowed a second chance. Dolly’s light-heartedness had returned, and she trotted cheerfully by his side as they walked on in search of a shop where they could make their purchase. It was some time before they found one, and they had already left behind them the busier thoroughfares, and had reached a knot of quieter streets where there were more foot-passengers, for the fine morning had tempted many people out for pleasure as well as business. Tony was particular in his choice of a broom, but once bought, he carried it over his shoulder, and went on his way with Dolly in triumph.

They were passing along chattering busily, when Tony’s eyes fell upon a child about as old as Dolly, standing on the kerb-stone with a lady, who looked anxiously across to the other side of the broad and very dirty road, for the day before had been rainy. They were both finely dressed, and the little girl had on new boots of shining leather, which it was evident she was very much afraid of soiling. For a minute Tony only looked on at their perplexity, but then he went up to them, holding Dolly by the hand.

[Illustration: A *new broom and* A *crossing*]

“If you’ll take care of my little girl,” he said, “I’ll carry your little girl across the road. I’m wery clean for a street-boy, all but my feet, ’cos I’ve got this little girl to take care of; and I’ll do it wery gentle.”

Both the lady and the child looked very searchingly into Tony’s face. It was pale and meagre; but there was a pleasant smile upon it, and his eyes shone down upon the two children with a very loving light in them. The lady took Dolly’s hand in hers, nodding permission for him to carry her little child over to the other side, and she waited for him

to come back to his own charge. Then she took out her purse, and put twopence into his hand.

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“Thank ye, my lady,” said Tony; “but I didn’t do it for that. I’m only looking out for a crossing. Me and Dolly have bought this broom, and I’m looking out for a place to make a good crossing in.”

“Why not make one here?” asked the lady.

It seemed a good place to try one in; there were four roads meeting, and a cab-stand close by. Plenty of people were passing to and fro, and the middle of the road was very muddy. Tony begged a wisp of straw from a cabman, to make a seat for Dolly in the sunshine under a blank bit of wall, while he set to work with a will, feeling rather pleased than not that the broom would not sweep of itself. A crossing was speedily made, and for two or three hours Tony kept it well swept. By that time it was twelve o’clock, and Dolly’s dinner would be ready for her before they could reach home, if old Oliver had not forgotten it. It seemed a great pity to leave his new post so early. Most passers-by, certainly, had appeared not to see him at all; but he had already received fivepence halfpenny, chiefly in halfpence, from ladies who were out for their morning’s walk; and Dolly was enjoying herself very much in the sunshine, receiving all the attention which he could spare from his crossing. However a beginning was made. The broom and the crossing were his property; and Tony’s heart, beat fast with pride and gladness as he carried the weary little Dolly all the way home again. He resolved to put by half of his morning’s earnings towards replacing the fourpenny-piece she had given back to him; or perhaps he would buy her a beautiful doll, dressed like a real lady.

CHAPTER X.

Highly respectable.

As old Oliver was stooping over his desk on the counter, and bringing his dim eyes as close as he could to the letter he was writing, his shop-door was darkened by the unexpected entrance of his sister Charlotte herself. She was dressed with her usual extreme neatness, bordering upon gentility, and she carried upon her arm a small fancy reticule, which contained some fresh eggs, and a few russet apples, brought up expressly from the country. Oliver welcomed her with more than ordinary pleasure, and led her at once into his room behind. Charlotte’s quick eyes detected in an instant the traces of a child’s dwelling there; and before Oliver could utter a word, she picked up a little frock, and was holding it out at arm’s length, with an air of utter surprise and misgiving.

“Brother James!” she exclaimed, and her questioning voice, with its tone of amazement, rang very clearly into his ears.

“It’s my little Dolly’s,” he answered, in haste; “poor Susan’s little girl, who’s gone out with her husband, young Raleigh, to India, because he’s ’listed, and left her little girl with me, her grandfather. She came on the very last day you were here.”

“Well, to be sure!” cried his sister, sinking down on a chair, but still keeping the torn little frock in her hand.

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“I’ve had two letters from poor Susan,” he continued, in a tremulous voice, “and I’ll read them to you. The child’s such a precious treasure to me, Charlotte—such a little love, a hundred times better than any gold; and now you’re come to mend up her clothes a bit, and see what she wants for me, there’s nothing else that I desire. I was writing about her to you when you came in.”

“I thought you’d gone and picked up a lost child out of the streets,” said Charlotte, with a sigh of relief.

“No, no; she’s my own,” he answered. “You hearken while I read poor Susan’s letters, and then you’ll understand all about it. I couldn’t give her up for a hundred gold guineas —not for a deal more than that.”

He knew Susan’s letters off by heart, and did not need his spectacles, nor a good light to read them by. Charlotte listened with emphatic nods, and many exclamations of astonishment.

“That’s very pretty of Susan,” she remarked, “saying as Aunt Charlotte’ll do her sewing, and see to her manners. Ay, that I will! for who should know manners better than me, who used to work for the Staniers, and dine at the housekeeper’s table, with the butler and all the head servants? to be sure I’ll take care that she does not grow up ungenteel. Where is the dear child, brother James?”

“She’s gone out for a walk this fine morning,” he answered.

“Not alone?” cried Charlotte. “Who’s gone out with her? A child under five years old could never go out all alone in London: at least I should think not. She might get run over and killed a score of times.”

“Oh! there’s a person with her I’ve every confidence in,” replied Oliver.

“What sort of person; man or woman; male or female?” inquired Charlotte.

“A boy,” he answered, in some confusion.

“A boy!” repeated his sister, as if he had said a monster. “What boy?”

“His name’s Tony,” he replied.

“But where does he come from? Is he respectable?” she pursued, fixing him with her glittering eyes in a manner which did not tend to restore his composure.

“I don’t know, sister,” he said in a feeble tone.

“Don’t know, brother James!” she exclaimed. “Don’t you know where he lives?”

“He lives here,” stammered old Oliver; “at least he sleeps here under the counter; but he finds his own food about the streets.”

Charlotte’s consternation was past all powers of speech. Here was her brother, a respectable man, who had seen better days, and whose sister had been a dressmaker in good families, harbouring in his own house a common boy off the streets, who, no doubt, was a thief and pickpocket, with all sorts of low ways and bad language. At the same time there was poor Susan’s little girl dwelling under the same roof; the child whose pretty manners she was to attend to, living in constant companionship with a vulgar and vicious boy! What she might have said upon recovering her speech, neither she nor Oliver ever knew; for at this crisis Tony himself appeared, carrying Dolly and his new broom in his arms, and looking very haggard and tattered himself, his bare feet black with mud, and his bare head in a hopeless condition of confusion, and tangle.

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“We’ve bought a geat big boom, gan-pa,” shouted Dolly, as she came through the shop, and before she perceived the presence of a stranger; “and Tony and Dolly made a great big crossing, and dot ever so much money—”

She was suddenly silent as soon as her eye fell upon the stranger; but Aunt Charlotte had heard enough. She rose with great dignity from her chair, and was about to address herself vehemently to Tony, when old Oliver interrupted her.

“Charlotte,” he said, “the boy’s a good boy, and he’s a help to me. I couldn’t send him away. He’s one of the Lord’s poor little ones as are scattered up and down in this great city, without father or mother, and I must do all I can for him. It isn’t much; it’s only a bed under the counter, and a crust now and then, and he more than pays for it. You musn’t come betwixt me and Tony.”

Old Oliver spoke so emphatically, that his sister was impressed and silenced for a minute. She took the little girl away from Tony, and glared at him with a sternness which made him feel very uncomfortable; but her eye softened a little, and her face grew less harsh.

“You can’t read or write?” she said, in a sharp voice.

“No,” he answered.

“And you’ve not got any manners, or boots, or a cap on your head. You are ragged and ignorant, and not fit to live with this little girl,” she continued, with energy. “If this little girl’s mother saw her going about with a boy in bare feet and a bare head, it ’ud break her heart I know. So if you wish to stay here with my brother, Mr. Oliver, and this little girl, Miss Dorothy Raleigh, as I suppose her name is, you must get all these things. You must begin to learn to read and write, and talk properly. I shall come here again in a month’s time—I shall come every month now—and if you haven’t got some shoes for your feet, and a cap for your head, before I see you again, I shall just take the little girl away down into the country, where I live, and you’ll never see her again. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” answered Tony, nodding his head.

“Then you may take yourself away now,” said the sharp old woman, “I don’t want to be too hard upon you; but I’ve got this little girl to look after for her mother, and you must do as I say, or I shall carry her right off to be out of your way. Take your broom and go; and never you think of such a thing as taking this little girl to sweep a crossing again. I never heard of such a thing. There, go!”

Tony slunk away sadly, with a sudden down-heartedness. He returned so joyous and triumphant, in spite of his weariness, that this unexpected and unpleasant greeting had

been a very severe shock to him. With his broom over his shoulder, and with his listless, slouching steps, he sauntered slowly back to his crossing; but he had no heart for it now.

CHAPTER XI.

Among thieves.

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The night fell early, for a thick fog came on in the afternoon. Tony cowered down upon his broom under the wall where Dolly had sat in the sunshine all the morning to watch him sweep his crossing. It was all over now. She was lost to him; for he should never dare to go back to old Oliver's house, and face that terrible old woman again. There was nothing for him but to return to his old life and his old haunts; and a chill ran through him, body and spirit, as he thought of it. His heap of paper shavings under the counter, where the biting winds could not reach him, came to his mind, and the tears rushed to his eyes. But to-night, at least, there would be no need to sleep out of doors, for he had some money in the safest corner of his ragged pocket, tied up in it securely with a bit of string. He could afford to pay for a night's lodging, and he knew very well where he could get one.

About nine o'clock Tony turned his weary feet towards a slum he knew of in Westminster, where there was a cellar open to everybody who could pay two-pence for a night's shelter. His heart was very full and heavy with resentment against his enemy, and a great longing to see Dolly. He loitered about the door of the cellar, reluctant and almost afraid to venture in; for it was so long since he had been driven to any of these places that he felt nearly like a stranger among them. Besides, in former times he had been kicked, and beaten, and driven from the fire, and fought with by the bigger boys; and he had become unaccustomed to such treatment of late. How different this lodging-house was to the quiet peaceful home where Dolly knelt down every evening at her grandfather's knee, and prayed for him; for now she always put Tony's name into her childish prayers! He should never, never hear her again, nor see old Oliver seated in his arm-chair, smoking his long pipe, while he talked with that strange friend and master of his. Ah! he would never hear or know any more of that unseen Christ, who was so willing to be his master and friend, for the Lord Jesus Christ could never come into such a wicked place as this, which was the only home he had. He had given him the crossing and the broom, and that was the end of it. He must take care of himself now, and keep out of gaol if he could, and if not, why then he had better make a business of thieving, and become as good a pickpocket as "Clever Dog Tom," who had once stolen a watch from a policeman himself.

Clever Dog Tom was the first to greet Tony when he slipped in at last, and he seemed inclined to make much of him; but Tony was too troubled for receiving any consolation from Tom's friendly advances. He crept away into the darkest corner, and stretched himself on the thin straw which covered the damp and dirty floor, but he could not fall asleep. There was a good deal of quarreling among the boys, and the men who wished to sleep swore long and loudly at them. Then there followed a fight, which grew so exciting

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at last that every person in the place, except Tony, gathered about the boys in a ring, encouraging and cheering them. It was long after midnight before silence and rest came, and then he fell into a broken slumber, dreaming of Dolly and old Oliver, until he awoke and found his face wet with tears. He got up before any of his bed-fellows were aroused, and made his way out into the fresh keen air of a December morning.

Day after day went by, and night after night Tony was growing more indifferent again to the swearing and fighting of his old comrades. He began to listen with delight to the tales of Clever Dog Tom, who told him that hands like his would work well in his line, and his innocent-looking face would go a long way towards softening any judge and jury, or would bring him favour with the chaplain, and easy times in gaol. He kept his crossing still, and did tolerably well, earning enough to keep himself in food, and to pay for his night's shelter; but he was beginning to hanker after something more. If he could not be good, and be on the same side as old Oliver and Dolly, he thought it would be better to be altogether on the other side, like Tom, who dressed well, and lived well, and was looked up to by other boys. It was a week after he had left old Oliver's house, and he was about to leave his crossing for the night, when a gentleman stopped him suddenly, and looked keenly into his face.

"Hollo, my lad!" he said, "you're the boy I gave fourpence to a week ago for holding my horse. I told you to lay it out well. What did you do with it?"

"Me and Dolly bought this broom," he answered, "and I've kept this crossing ever since."

"Well done!" said the gentleman. "And who is Dolly?"

"It's a little girl as I was very fond of," replied Tony, with a deep sigh. It seemed so long ago that he spoke of his love for her as if it was a thing altogether passed away and dead, yet his heart still ached at the memory of it.

"Well, here's another fourpenny-bit for you," said his friend, "quite a new one. See how bright it is; no one has ever bought anything with it yet. Dolly will like to see it."

Tony held it in the palm of his hand long after the gentleman was out of sight, gazing at it in the lamplight. It was very beautiful and shining; and oh! how Dolly's eyes would shine and sparkle if she could only see it! And she ought to see it. By right it belonged to her; for had he not given her his first fourpenny-piece freely, and had twenty kisses for it, and then had she not given it him back to buy a broom with? she had never had a single farthing of all his earnings. How he would like to show her this beautiful piece of silver, and feel her soft little arms round his neck, when he said it was to be her very own! He felt that he dare not pass the night in the cellar with such a treasure about him, for Tom, who was so clever, would be sure to find out that his pocket was worth the

picking, and Tony had not found that there was much honour among thieves. What was he to do? Where was he to go?

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CHAPTER XII.

Tony's welcome.

Almost without knowing where his feet were carrying him, Tony sauntered through the streets until he found himself at the turn into the alley within a few yards of Oliver's home, and his beloved Dolly. At any rate he could pass down it, and, if the shop-door was not shut, he would wrap his beautiful silver coin in a rag, and throw it into the inside; they would be sure to guess who had done it, and what it was for. It was dark down the alley, only one lamp and the greengrocer's gas lighting it up, and Tony stole along quietly in the shadow. It was nearly time for Dolly to be going to bed, he thought, and old Oliver was sure to be with her in the inner room; but just as he came into the revealing glare of the greengrocer's stall, his ears rang and his heart throbbed violently at the sound of a shrill little scream of gladness, and the next moment he felt himself caught by Dolly's arms, and dragged into the house by them.

"Tony's come home, Tony's come home, gan-pa!" she shouted with all her might. "Dolly's found Tony at last!"

Dolly's voice quivered, and broke down into quick, childish sobs, while she held Tony very fast, lest he should escape from her once again; and old Oliver came quickly from the room beyond, and laid his hand fondly upon the boy's shoulder.

"Why have you kept away from us so long, Tony?" he asked.

"Oh, master!" he cried, "I've been a wicked boy, and a miserable boy. Do forgive me, and I'll never do so no more. I s'pose you'll never let me sleep under the counter again?"

"Come in, come in!" answered Oliver, pushing him gently before him into the house. "We've been waiting and watching for you every night, me and my little love. You ought not to have served us so, my lad; but we're too glad to be angry with you. Charlotte's sharp, and she's very much afraid of low ways and manners; but she isn't a hard woman, and she didn't know anything about you. When I told her as you'd been left no bigger than my little love here to take care of yourself, alone, in London,—mother dead, and no father,—she shed tears about you, she did. And she left you the biggest of her eggs to be kept for your supper, with her kind love; and we've put it by for you. You shall have it this very night. Dolly, my love, bring me the little saucepan."

"I'm not so clean as I could wish," said Tony, mournfully; for he had neglected himself during the last week, and looked very much like what he had done when he had first seen old Oliver and his little grand-daughter.

“Take a bowl full of water into the shop, then,” answered Oliver, “and wash yourself, while I boil the egg. Dolly’ll find you a bit of soap and a towel; she’s learning to be grand-pa’s little housekeeper, she is.”

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When Tony returned to the kitchen he looked a different being; the gloom was gone as well as the grime. He felt as if he had come to himself after a long and very miserable dream. Here was old Oliver again, looking at him with a kindly light in his dim eyes, and Dolly dancing about, with her pretty merry little ways; and Beppo wagging his tail in joyous welcome, as he sniffed round and round him. Even the egg was a token of forgiveness and friendliness. That terrible old woman was not his enemy, after all. He recollected what she had said he must do, and he resolved to do it for Dolly's sake, and old Oliver's. He would learn to read and write, and he would pinch himself hard to buy some better clothing, lest he should continue to be a disgrace to them; shoes he must have first of all, as those were what the sharp but friendly old woman had particularly mentioned. At any rate, he could never run away again from this home, where he was so loved and cared for.

Oliver told him how sadly Dolly had fretted after him, and watched for him at the door, hour after hour, to see him come home again. He said that in the same way, only with a far greater longing and love, his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, was waiting for Tony to go to him. He could not half understand it, but a vague feeling of a love passing all understanding sank deeply into his heart. He fell asleep that night under the counter with the tranquil peacefulness of one who has been tossed about in a great storm and tempest, and has been brought safely to the desired haven.

CHAPTER XIII.

New boots.

It was several weeks before Tony could scrape together enough money for his new boots, though he pinched and starved himself with heroic courage and endurance. He did not mean to buy them at a shop; for he knew a place in Whitechapel where boots quite good enough for him were to be had for two or three shillings. He was neither ambitious nor fastidious; old boots patched up would do very well to start with, if he could only manage to get them before aunt Charlotte came up to town again. She had sent word she was coming the last Saturday in January; and early in the afternoon of that day, before the train could come in from Stratford, Tony started off to the place where he intended to make his purchase.

It was a small open space in one of the streets of Whitechapel, where there was an area of flags, lying off the pavement. Several traders held possession of this square, sitting on low stools, or cross-legged on the ground, with their stock in trade around them. One dealer bought and sold all kinds of old and rusty pieces of iron; another, a woman, ill clad and with red eyes, displayed before her a dingy assortment of ragged clothes, which were cheapened by other spare and red-eyed women, who held almost naked children by the hand. It was cold, and a bitter, keen east

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wind was searching every corner of London streets. The salesman Tony was come to deal with had a tolerable selection of old boots, very few of them pairs, some with pretty good upper-leathers, but with no soles worth speaking of; and others thickly cobbled and patched, but good enough to keep the feet dry, without presenting a very creditable appearance. For the first time in his life Tony found out the perplexity of having a choice to make. There were none which exactly fitted him; but a good fit is a luxury for richer folks than Tony, and he was not troubled about it. His chief anxiety was to look well in the eyes of Dolly's aunt, who might possibly let him see her on her way back to the station, if she approved of him; and who would not now be obliged to carry Dolly off with her, to be out of the way of his naked feet.

He fixed upon a pair at last, urged and coaxed to them by the dealer. They were a good deal too large, and his feet slipped about in them uncomfortably; but the man assured him that was how everybody, even gentlefolks, bought them, to leave room for growing. There was an awkward, uneven patch under one of the soles, and the other heel was worn down at the side; but at least they covered his feet well. He shambled away in them slowly and toilsomely, hardly knowing how to lift one foot after another, yet full of pride in his new possessions. It was a long way home to old Oliver's alley, between Holborn and the Strand; but he was in no hurry to arrive there before they had finished and cleared away their tea; so he travelled painfully in that direction, stopping now and then to regale himself at the attractive windows of tripe and cow-heel shops. He watched the lamplighters kindling the lamps, and the shopkeepers lighting up their gas; and then he heard the great solemn clock of St. Paul's strike six. Tea would be quite over now, and Tony turned down a narrow back street, which would prove a nearer way home than the thronged thoroughfares, and set off to run as fast as he could in his awkward and unaccustomed boots.

It was not long before he came to a sudden and sharp fall off the kerb-stone, as he trod upon a bit of orange-peel, and slipped upon it. He felt stunned for a few seconds, and sat still rubbing his forehead. These back streets were very quiet, for the buildings were mostly offices and warehouses, and most of them were already closed for the night. He lifted himself up at length, and set his foot upon the flags; but a shrill cry of pain broke from his lips, and rang loudly through the quiet street. He fell back upon the pavement, quivering and trembling, with a chilly moisture breaking out upon his skin. What hurt had been done to him? How was it that he could not bear to walk? He took off his new boots, and tried once more, but with no better success. He could not endure the agony of standing or moving.

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Yet he must move; he must get up and walk. If he did not go home, they would think he had run away again, for fear of meeting Dolly's aunt. At that thought he set off to crawl homewards upon his hands and knees, with suppressed groans, as his foot trailed uselessly along the ground. Yet he knew he could not advance very far in this manner. What if he should have to lie all night upon the hard paving-stones! for he could not remember ever having seen a policeman in these back streets; and there did not seem to be anybody else likely to pass that way. It was freezing fast, now the sun was gone down, and his hands scraped up the frosty mud as he dragged himself along. If he stayed out all night, he must die of cold and pain before morning.

But if that was true which old Oliver said so often, that the Lord Jesus Christ loved him, and that he was always with those whom he loved, then he was not alone and helpless even here, in the deserted street, with the ice and darkness of a winter's night about him. Oh! if he could but feel the hand of Christ touching him, or hear the lowest whisper of his voice, or catch the dimmest sight of his face! Perhaps it was he who was helping him to crawl towards the stir and light of a more frequented street, which he could see afar off, though the pain he felt made him giddy and sick. It became too much for him at last, however, and he drew himself into the shelter of a warehouse door, and crouched down in a corner, crying, with clasped hands, and sobbing voice, "Oh! Lord Jesus Christ! Lord Jesus Christ!"

After uttering this cry Tony lay there for some minutes, his eyes growing glazed and his ears dull, when a footstep came briskly up the street, and some one, whom he could not now see for the strange dimness of his sight, stopped opposite to him, and then stooped to touch him on the arm.

"Why," said a voice he seemed to know, "you're my young friend of the crossing,—my little fourpenny-bit, I call you. What brings you sitting here this cold night?"

"I've fell down and hurt myself," answered Tony, faintly.

"Where?" asked the stranger.

"My leg," he answered.

The gentleman stooped down yet lower, and passed his hand gently along Tony's leg till he came to the place where his touch gave him the most acute pain.

"Broken!" he said to himself. "My boy, where's your home?"

"I haven't got any right home," answered Tony, more faintly than before. He felt a strange numbness creeping over him, and his lips were too parched and his tongue too heavy for speaking. The gentleman took off his own great-coat and wrapped it well about him, placing him at the same time in a more comfortable position. Then he ran

quickly to the nearest street, hailed the first cab, and drove back to where Tony was lying.

[Illustration: *Tony's accident*.]

CHAPTER XIV.

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In hospital.

The pain Tony was suffering kept him partially conscious of what was happening to him. He knew that he was carried gently into a large hall, and that two or three persons came to look at him, to whom his new friend spoke in eager and rapid tones.

“I know you do not take in accidents,” he said; “but what could I do with the little fellow? He told me he had no home, and that was all he could say. You have two or three cots empty; and I’ll double my subscription if it’s necessary, rather than take him away. Come, doctor, you’ll admit my patient?”

“I don’t think I could send him away, Mr. Ross,” answered another hearty voice. “We must get him into bed as soon as possible.”

Tony felt himself carried up stairs into a large room, where there were a number of small beds, with a pale little face lying on every pillow. There was a vacant cot at the end, and he was laid upon it, after having his tattered clothes taken off him. His new boots were gone altogether, having been left behind on the steps of the warehouse. His hands and knees, bruised with crawling along the frosty stones, were gently bathed with a soft sponge and warm water. He was surrounded by kind faces, looking pitifully down upon him, and the gentleman who had brought him there spoke to him in a very pleasant and cheering voice.

“My boy,” he said, “you have broken your leg in your fall; but the doctor here, who is a great friend of mine, is going to mend it for you. It will give you a good deal of pain for a few minutes; but you’ll bear it like a man, I know.”

“Yes,” murmured Tony; “but will you let me go as soon as it’s done?”

“You could not do that,” answered Mr. Ross, smiling. “It will be some weeks before you will be well enough to go; but you will be very happy here, I promise you.”

“Oh! but I must go!” cried Tony, starting up, but falling back again with a groan. “There’s Dolly and Mr. Oliver,—they’ll think I’ve run away again, and I were trying all I could to get back to ’em. She’ll be watching for me, and she’ll fret ever so. Oh! Dolly, Dolly!”

He spoke in a tone of so much grief, that the smile quite passed away from the face of Mr. Ross, and he laid his hand upon his, and answered him very earnestly:

“If you will tell me where they live,” he said, “I will go at once and let them know all about your accident; and they shall come to see you to-morrow if you are well enough to see them.”

Tony gave him very minute and urgent directions where to find old Oliver’s shop; and then he resigned himself, with the patience and fortitude of most of the little sufferers in that hospital, to the necessary pain he had to bear.

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It was Sunday afternoon when old Oliver and Dolly entered the hall of the Children's Hospital and inquired for Tony. There was something about the old man's look of age and the little child's sweet face which found them favour, even in a place where everybody was received with kindness. A nurse, who met them slowly climbing the broad staircase, turned back with them, taking Dolly's hand in hers, and led them up to the room where they would find Tony. There were many windows in it, and the sunshine, which never shone into their own home, was lighting it up gaily. The cots were all covered with white counterpanes, and most of the little patients, who had been asleep the night before, were now awake, and sitting up in bed, with little tables before them, which they could slide up and down as they wished along the sides of their cots. There was no sign of medicine, and nothing painful to see, except the wan faces of the children themselves. But Oliver and Dolly had no eyes but for Tony, and they hurried on to the corner where he was lying. His face was very white, and his eyelids were closed, and his lips drawn in as if he were still in pain. But at the very gentle and almost frightened touch of Dolly's fingers his eyes opened quickly, and then how his face changed! It looked as if all the sunshine in the room had centred upon it, and his voice shook with gladness.

"Dolly hasn't had to fret for Tony this time," he said.

"But Dolly will fret till Tony gets well again," she answered, clasping both her small hands round his.

"No, no!" said old Oliver; "Dolly's going to be a very good girl, and help grand-pa to mind shop till Tony comes home again."

This promise of promotion partly satisfied Dolly, and she sat still upon Oliver's knee beside Tony's cot, where his eyes could rest with contentment and pleasure upon them both, though the nurse would not let them talk much. When they went away she took them through the girls' wards in the story below; for the girls were more sumptuously lodged than the boys. These rooms were very lofty, with windows reaching to the cornice of the ceiling, and with grand marble chimney-pieces about the fireplaces; for in former times, the nurse told them, this had been a gentleman's mansion, where gay parties and assemblies had been held; but never had there been such a party and assembly as the one now in it.

Old Oliver walked down between the rows of cots, with his little love clinging shyly to his hand, smiling tenderly upon each poor little face turned to look at them. Some of the children smiled back to him, and nodded cheerfully to Dolly, lifting up their dolls for her to see, and calling to her to listen to the pretty tunes their musical boxes were playing. But others lay quietly upon their pillows half asleep, with beautiful pictures hanging over their feeble heads,—pictures of Christ carrying a lamb in his arms; and again, of Christ with a little child upon his knee; and again, of Christ holding the hand of the young girl who seemed dead, but whose ear heard his voice saying "Arise!" and she came to life

again in her father’s and mother’s house. The tears stood in old Oliver’s eyes, and his white head trembled a great deal before he had seen all, and given one of his tender glances to each child.

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“I wonder whatever the Lord ’ud have said,” he exclaimed, “if there’d been such a place as this in his days! He’d have come here very often. He does come, I know, and walks to and fro here of nights when the little ones are asleep, or may be awake through pain, and he blesses every one of them. Ah, bless them! Bless the little children, and the good folks who keep a place like this. Bless them everyone!”

He felt reluctant to go away; but his time was gone, and the nurse was needed elsewhere. She kissed Dolly before she went, putting a biscuit in her hand, and told Oliver the house was open every Sunday afternoon for the friends of the children, if he chose to come again; and then they walked home with slow, short footsteps, and all the Sunday evening they talked together of the beautiful place they had seen, and how happy Tony would be in the Children’s Hospital.

CHAPTER XV.

Tony’s future prospects.

Old Oliver and Dolly made several visits to Tony while he was in the hospital. Every Sunday afternoon they went back to it, until its great door, and wide staircase, and sunny ward, became almost as familiar to them as their own dull little house. Tony recovered quickly, yet he was there some weeks before the doctor pronounced him strong enough to turn out again to rough it in the world. As he grew better he learned a number of things which were making him a wiser, as well as a stronger boy, before the time came for him to leave.

The day before he was to go out of hospital, his friend, Mr. Ross, who had been often to see him, called for the last time, and found him in the room where the little patients who were nearly well were at play together. Some of them were making believe to have a feast, with a small dinner-service of wooden plates and dishes, and a few bits of orange-peel, and biscuits; but Tony was sitting quietly and gravely on one side, looking on from a distance. He had never learned to play.

“Antony,” said Mr. Ross—he was the only person who ever called him Antony, and it seemed to make more of a man of him—“what are you thinking to do when you leave here to-morrow?”

“I s’pose I must go back to my crossing,” answered Tony, looking very grave.

“No, I think I can do better for you than that,” said his friend, “I have a sister living out in the country, about fifty miles from London; and she wants a boy to help the gardener, and run on errands for the house. She has promised to provide you with a home, and clothing, and to send you to school for two years, till you are about twelve, for we think you must be about ten years old now; and after that you shall have settled wages.”

Tony listened with a quick throbbing of his heart and a contraction in his throat, which hindered him from speaking all at once when Mr. Ross had finished. What a grand thing it would be for himself! But then there were old Oliver and Dolly to be remembered.

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“It ’ud do first-rate for me,” he said at last, “and I’d try my best to help in the garden; but I couldn’t never leave Mr. Oliver and the little girl. She’d fret ever so; and he’s gone so forgetful he’d lose his own head, if he could anyhow. Why! of a morning they sell him any papers as they’ve too many of. Sometimes it’s all the ‘Star,’ and sometimes it’s all the ‘Standard;’ and them as buys one won’t have the other. I don’t know why, I’m sure. But you see when I go for ’em I say twenty-five this, and thirteen that, and I count ’em over pretty sharp, I can tell you; though I couldn’t read at all afore I came here, but I could tell which was which easy enough. Then he’d never think to open his shop some mornings; and other mornings he’d open at four or five o’clock, just when he woke of hisself. No. I must stay and take care of ’em a bit; but thank you, sir, all the same.”

He had spoken so gravely and thoughtfully that his reasons went directly to the heart of Mr. Ross; but he asked him one more question, before he could let his good plan for the boy drop.

“What has he done for you, Antony? Is he any relation of yours?”

“No, no!” cried Tony, his eyes growing bright, “I haven’t got any relation in all the world; but he took me in out of love, and let me sleep comfortable under the counter, instead of in the streets. I love him, and Dolly, I do. I’ll stay by ’em as long as ever I live, if I have to sweep a crossing till I’m an old man like him. Besides, I hear him speak a good word for me often and often to his Master; and I s’pose nobody else ’ud do that.”

“What master?” inquired Mr. Ross.

“Him,” answered Tony, pointing to a picture of the Saviour blessing young children, “he’s always talking to him as if he could see him, and he tells him everythink. No, it ’ud be better for me to stay with him and Dolly, and keep hard by my crossing, than go away from ’em, and have clothes, and lodging, and schooling for nothink.”

“I think it would,” said Mr. Ross, “so you must go on as you are, Antony, till I can find you something better than a crossing. You are looking very well, my boy; that’s a nice, warm suit of clothes you have on, better than the rags you came in by a long way.”

It was a sailor’s suit, sent to the hospital by some mother, whose boy had perhaps outgrown it; or, it may be, whose boy had been taken away from all her tender care for him. It was of good, rough, thick blue cloth, and fitted Tony well. He had grown a good deal during his illness, and his face had become whiter and more refined; his hair, too, was cut to a proper length, and parted down the side, no longer lying about his head in a tangled mass. He coloured up with pleasure as Mr. Ross looked approvingly at him.

“They’ve lent it me till I go out,” he said, with a tone slightly regretful in his voice, “I only wish Dolly could have seen me in it, and her aunt Charlotte. My own things were too ragged for me to wear ’em in a place like this.”

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“They’ve given it to you, Antony,” replied Mr. Ross, “those are the clothes you will go home in to-morrow.”

It seemed too much for Tony to believe, though a nurse who was sitting by and sewing away busily, told him it was quite true. He was intensely happy all the rest of the day, often standing up, and almost straining his neck to get a satisfactory view of his own back, and stroking the nap of his blue trousers with a fondling touch. They would all see him in it; old Oliver, Dolly, and aunt Charlotte. There would be no question now as to his fitness for taking Dolly out for a walk; he would be dressed well enough to attend upon a princess. This made famous amends for the pair of old boots he had lost the night he broke his leg; a loss he had often silently lamented over in his own mind. The nurse told him she was patching up his old clothes, and making him a cap, to wear when he was at work on his crossing, for the new ones were much too good for that; and Tony felt as rich as if a large fortune had been left to him.

It was a very joyful thing to go home again. Dolly was a little shy at first of this new Tony, so different from the poor, ragged, wild-looking old Tony; but a very short time was enough to make her familiar with his nice blue suit, and the anchor-buttons upon it. He found his place under the counter all nicely papered to keep the draughts out; and a little chaff mattress, made by aunt Charlotte, laid down instead of the shavings upon the floor. It was even pleasanter to be here than in the hospital.

But Tony found it hard work to go back to his crossing in the morning; and he could not make out what was the matter with himself, he felt so cross and idle. His old clothes seemed really such horrid rags that he could scarcely bear to feel them about him; and if any passer-by looked closely at him, he went red and hot all over. He was not so successful as he thought he had been before his accident, or as he thought he ought to be; for the roads were getting cleaner with the drier weather, and few persons considered it necessary to give him a copper for his almost needless labour. Worst of all,—Clever Dog Tom found him out, and would come often to see him; sometimes jeering him for his poor spirit in being content with such low work, and sometimes boasting of the fine things he could do, and displaying the fine clothes he could wear. It was truly very hard work for Tony, after his long holiday at the hospital, where he had had as much luxury and attention as a rich man’s son.

But at home in the evening Tony felt all right again. Old Oliver set him to learn to read and write, and he was making rapid progress, more rapid than Dolly, who began at the same time, but who was apt to look upon it all as only another kind of game, of which she grew more quickly tired than of hide-and-seek. There was no one to check her, or to make her understand it was real, serious work: neither old Oliver

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nor Tony could find any fault with their darling. Now and then there came letters from her mother, full of anxious questions about her, and loving messages to her, telling her to be a good girl till she came back, but never saying a word as to when there was any chance of her returning to England. In one of these letters she sent word that a little sister was come for her out in India, who was just like what Dolly herself had been when she was a baby; but neither Oliver nor Tony could quite believe that. There never had been such a child as Dolly; there never would be again.

CHAPTER XVI

A *Bud fading*.

A second summer went by with its long, hot days, when the sun seemed to stand still in the sky, and to dart down its most sultry beams into the dustiest and closest streets. Out in the parks, and in the broad thoroughfares where the fresh breeze could sweep along early in the morning, and in the evening as soon as the air grew cooler, it was very pleasant weather; and the people who could put on light summer dresses enjoyed it very much. But away among the thickly-built and crowded houses, where there were thousands of persons breathing over and over again the same hot and stagnant atmosphere, it seemed as if the most delicate and weakly among them must be suffocated by the breathless heat. Old Oliver suffered very greatly, but he said nothing about it; indeed he generally forgot the cause of his languor and feebleness. He never knew now the day of the week, nor the month of the year. If any one had told him in the dog-days of July that it was still April, he would only have answered gently that it was bright, warm weather for the time of year.

But about old times his memory was good enough; he could tell long stories of his boyhood, and describe the hills of his native place in such a manner as to set Tony full of longings after the country, with its cornfields, and meadows, and hedge-rows, which he had never seen. He remembered his Bible, too, and could repeat chapter after chapter describing his Master’s life, as they sat together in the perpetual twilight of their room; for now that it was summer-time it did not seem right to keep the gas burning.

Tony’s crossing had failed him altogether, for in dry weather nobody wanted it; but in this extremity Mr. Ross came to his aid, and procured him a place as errand-boy, where he was wanted from eight o’clock in the morning till seven at night; so that he could still open old Oliver’s shop, and fetch him his right papers before he went out, and put the shutters up when he came back. To become an errand-boy was a good step forwards, and Tony was more than content. He never ran about bare-headed and barefooted now as he had done twelve months before; and he had made such good progress in reading

and writing that he could already make out the directions upon the parcels he had to deliver, after they had been once read over

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to him. He did not object to the dry weather and clean streets as he had done when his living depended upon his crossing; on the contrary, he enjoyed the sunshine, and the crowds of gaily-dressed people, for he could hold up his head amongst them, and no longer went prowling about in the gutters searching after bits of orange-peel. He kicked them into the gutters instead, mindful of that accident which had befallen him, but which turned out so full of good for him.

[Illustration: *Dolly's monthly Register*.]

But, if there had been any eye to see it, a very slow, and very sad change was creeping over Dolly; so slowly indeed, that perhaps none but her mother's eye could have seen it at first. On the first of every month, which old Oliver knew by the magazines coming in, he marked how much his little love had grown by placing her against the side-post of the door, and making a thick pencil line where her curly head reached to. He looked at this record often, smiling at the rate his little woman was growing taller; but it was really no wonder that his dim eyes, loving as they were, never saw how the rosy colour was dying away out of her cheeks, as gradually as the red glow fades away in the west after the sun has set, nor how the light grew fainter and fainter in her blue eyes, until they looked at him very heavily from under her drooping eyelids. The house was too dark for any sight to see very clearly; the full, strong, healthy light of the sun, could not find its way into it, and day after day Dolly became more like one of those plants growing in shady places, which live and shoot up, but only put out pale and sickly leaves, and feeble buds. One by one, and by little and little, with degrees as small as her own tiny footsteps, she lost all her merry ways, dropping them, here one and there another, upon the path she was silently treading; as little children let fall the flowers they have gathered in the meadows, along their road homewards. Yet all the time old Oliver was loving and cherishing her as the dearest of all treasures, second only to the Master whom he loved so fully; but he never discovered that there was any change in her. Dolly fell into very quiet ways, and would sit still for hours together, her arm around Beppo, and her sweet, patient little face, which was growing thin and hollow, turned towards the flickering light of the fire, while Oliver pottered toilsomely about his house, forgetting many things, but always ready with a smile and a fond word for his grand-daughter.

Just as Oliver was too old to feel any anxiety about Dolly, so Tony was too young, and knew too little of sickness and death. Moreover, when he came home in the evening, full of the business of the day, with a number of stories to tell of what had happened to him, and what he had seen, Dolly was always more lively, and had a feverish colour on her face, and a brilliant light in her eyes. He seemed to bring life and strength with him, and she liked him to nurse her on his knee, which did not grow tired and stiff like her grandfather's. How should Tony detect anything amiss with her? She never

complained of feeling any pain, and he was glad for her to be very quiet and still while he was busy with his lessons.

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But when the summer was ended, and after the damp warm fogs of November were over, and a keen, black frost set in sharply before Christmas—a frost which had none of the beauty of white lime and clear blue skies, but which hung over the city like a pall, and penetrated to every fireside with an icy breath; when only the strong and the healthy, who were well clothed and well fed, could meet it bravely, while the delicate, and sickly, and poverty-stricken, shrank before it, and were chilled through and through, then Dolly drooped and failed altogether. Even old Oliver's dull ears began to hear a little cough, which seemed to echo from some grave not very far away; and when he drew his little love between his knees, and put on his spectacles to gaze into her face, the dearest face in all the world to him, even his eyes saw something of its wanness, and the hollow lines which had come upon it since the summer had passed away. The old man felt troubled about her, yet he scarcely knew what to do. He bought sweetmeats to soothe her cough, and thought sometimes that he must ask somebody or other about a doctor for her; but his treacherous memory always let the thought slip out of his mind. He intended to take counsel with his sister when she came to see him; but aunt Charlotte was herself very ill with an attack of rheumatism, and could not get up to old Oliver's house.

CHAPTER XVII.

A *very dark shadow*.

The Christmas week passed by, and the new year came in, cold and bleak, but Tony was well secured against the weather, and liked the frosty air, which made it pleasant to run as fast as he could from place to place as he delivered his parcels. When boxing day came, which was half-holiday for him, he returned to the house at mid-day, carrying with him three mince-pies, which he had felt himself rich enough to buy in honour of the holiday. He had for a long time been reckoning upon shutting up shop for the whole afternoon, and upon going out for a long stroll through the streets with old Oliver and Dolly; and now that the hour was positively come he felt very light-hearted and full of spirits, defying the wind which wrestled with him at every turn. Dolly must be wrapped up well, he said to himself, and old Oliver must put on his drab great coat, with mother o' pearl buttons, which he had brought up from the country forty years ago, and which was still good for keeping out the cold. He ran down the alley, and passed through the shop whistling cheerily, and disdaining to lift the flap of the counter, he took a running vault over it, and landed at once inside the open kitchen-door.

But there was old Oliver sitting close to the fire, with Dolly on his knee, and her little head lying upon his breast, while the tears trickled slowly down his furrowed cheeks on to her pretty curls. Beppo was standing between his legs, licking Dolly's small hand, which hung languidly by her side. Her eyelids were closed, and her face was deadly white; but when Tony uttered a great cry of trouble, and fell on his knees before her, she

opened her heavy eyes, and stretched out her cold thin hand to stroke his cheeks. “Dolly’s so very ill, Tony,” she murmured, “poor Dolly’s very ill indeed.”

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“I don’t know whatever is the matter with my little love,” said the old man, in a low and trembling voice; “she fell down all of a sudden, and I thought she was dead, Tony; but she’s coming round again now. Isn’t my little love better now?”

“Yes, gan-pa, yes; Dolly’s better,” she answered faintly.

“Let me hold her, master,” said Tony, his heart beating fast; “I can hold her stronger and more comfortable, maybe, than you. You’re tired ever so, and you’d better get yourself a bit of dinner. Shall Tony nurse you now, Dolly?”

The little girl raised her arms to him, and Tony took her gently into his own, sitting down upon the old box in the chimney-corner, and putting her to nestle comfortably against him. Dolly closed her eyes again, and by-and-bye he knew that she had fallen into a light sleep, while old Oliver moved noiselessly to and fro, only now and then saying half aloud, in a tone of strange earnestness and entreaty, “Lord! dear Lord!”

After awhile the old man came and bent over them both, taking Dolly’s arm softly between his withered fingers, and looking down at it with a shaking head.

“She’s very thin, Tony; look at this little arm,” he said, “wasting away! wasting away! I’ve watched all my little ones waste away except my poor Susan. Couldn’t there anything be done to save her?”

“Ay!” answered Tony, in an energetic whisper, while he clasped Dolly a little tighter in his arms; “ay! they could cure her easily at the hospital. Bless yer! there were little ’uns ten times worse than her as they sent home cured. Let us take her there as soon as ever she wakes up, and she’ll be quite well directly, I promise you. The doctor knows me, and I’ll speak to Mr. Ross for her. Do you get a bit of dinner, and hearten yourself up for it; and we’ll set off as soon as she’s awake.”

Old Oliver turned away comforted, and prepared his own and Tony’s dinner, and put a mince-pie into the oven to be ready to tempt Dolly’s appetite when she awoke. But she slept heavily all the afternoon till it was almost dark outside, and the lamps were being lit, when she awoke, restless and feverish.

“Would Dolly like to go to that nice place, where the little girls had the dolls and the music?” asked Tony, in a quavering voice which he could scarcely keep from sobs; “the good place where Tony got well again, and they gave him his new clothes? Everybody ’ud be so wery kind to poor little Dolly, and she’d come home again, quite cured and strong, like Tony was.”

“Yes, yes!” cried Dolly, eagerly, raising herself up in his arms; “it’s a nice place, and the sun shines, and Dolly ’ud like to go. Only she’ll be sure to come back to gan-pa.”

It was some time yet before they were quite ready to start, though Dolly could not be coaxed to eat the hot mince-pie, or anything else. Old Oliver had to get himself into his drab overcoat, and the ailing child had to be protected in the best way they could against the searching wind. After they had put on all her own warmest clothing, Tony wrapped his own thick blue jacket about her, and lifting her very tenderly in his arms, they turned out into the streets, closely followed by Beppo.

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It was now quite night, but the streets were well lighted from the shop windows, and throngs of people were hurrying hither and thither; for it was boxing-night, and all the lower classes of the inhabitants were taking holiday. But old Oliver saw and heard nothing of the crowd. He walked on by Tony's side; with feeble and tottering steps, deaf and blind, but whispering all the while, with trembling lips, to One whom no one else could see or hear. Once or twice Tony saw a solemn smile flit across his face, and he nodded his head and raised his hand, as one who gives his assent to what is said to him. So they passed on through the noisy streets till they reached quieter ones, were there were neither shops nor many passers-by, and there they found the home where they were going to leave their treasure for a time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

No room for Dolly.

Old Oliver rang the house-bell very quietly, for Dolly seemed to be asleep again, and lay quite still in Tony's arms, which were growing stiff, and benumbed by the cold. The door was opened by a porter, whose face was strange to them both, for he had only come in for the day while the usual one took holiday. Old Oliver presented himself in front, and pointed at his little grandchild as Tony held her in his arms while he spoke to the porter in a voice which trembled greatly.

"We've brought you our little girl, who is very ill," he said, "but she'll soon get well in here, I know. I'd like to see the doctor, and tell him all about her."

"We're quite full," answered the porter, filling up the doorway.

"Full?" repeated old Oliver, in a tone of questioning.

"Ay! all our cots are full," he replied, "chockfull. There ain't no more room. We've turned two or three away this morning, when they came at the right time. This isn't the right time to bring any child here."

"But my little love is very ill," continued old Oliver; "this is the right place, isn't it? The place where they nurse little children who are ill?"

"It's all right," said the porter, "it's the right place enough, only it's brimful, and running over, as you may say. We couldn't take in one more, if it was ever so. But you may come in and sit down in the hall for a minute or two, while I fetch one of the ladies."

Old Oliver and Tony entered, and sat down upon a bench inside. There was the broad staircase, with its shallow steps, which Dolly's tiny feet had climbed so easily, and it led up to the warm, pleasant nurseries, where little children were already falling asleep, almost painlessly, in their cosy cots. Tony could not believe that there was not room for

their darling, who had been so willing to come to the place she knew so well, yet a sob broke from his lips, which disturbed Dolly in her sleep, for she moaned once or twice, and stirred uneasily in his arms. The old man leaned his hands upon the top of his stick, and rested his white head upon them, until they heard light footsteps, and the rustling of a dress, and they saw a lady coming down stairs to them.

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“I think there’s some mistake here, ma’am,” said Oliver, his eye wandering absently about the large entrance-hall; “this is the Hospital for Sick Children, I think, and I’ve brought my little grandchild here, who is very ill indeed, yet the man at the door says there’s no room for her. I think it must be a mistake.”

“No,” said the lady; “I am sorry to say it is no mistake. We are quite full; there is not room for even one more. Indeed, we have been obliged to send cases away before to-day. Who is your recommendation from?”

“I didn’t know you’d want any recommendation,” answered old Oliver, very mournfully; “she’s very ill, and you could cure her here, and take better care of her than Tony and me, and I thought that was enough. I never thought of getting any recommendation, and I don’t know where I could get one.”

“Mr. Ross ’ud give us one,” said Tony, eagerly.

“Yet even then,” answered the lady, “we could not take her in until some of the cots are empty.”

“You don’t know me,” interrupted Tony, eagerly; “but Mr. Ross brought me here, a year ago now, and they cured me, and set me up stronger than ever. They was so wery kind to me, that I couldn’t think of anythink else save bringing our little girl to ’em. I’m sure they’d take her in, if they only knew it was her. You jest say as it’s Tony and Dolly, as everybody took such notice of, and they’ll never turn her away, I’m sure.”

“I wish we could take her,” said the lady, with tears in her eyes; “but it is impossible. We should be obliged to turn some other child out, and that could not be done to-night. You had better bring her again in the morning, and we’ll see if there is any one well enough to make room for her. Let me look at the poor child for a minute.”

She lifted up the collar of Tony’s blue jacket, which covered Dolly’s face, and looked down at it pitifully. It was quite white now, and was pinched and hollow, with large blue eyes shining too brightly. She stretched out her arms to the lady, and made a great effort to smile.

“Put Dolly into a pretty bed,” she murmured, “where the sun shines, and she’ll soon get well and go home again to gan-pa.”

“What can I do?” cried the lady, the tears now running down her face. “The place is quite full; we cannot take in one more, not one. Bring her here again in the morning, and we will see what can be done.”

“How many children have you got here?” asked old Oliver.

“We have only seventy-five cots,” she answered, sobbing; “and in a winter like this they’re always full.”

“Only seventy-five!” repeated the old man, very sorrowfully. “Only seventy-five, and there are hundreds and hundreds of little children ill in London! They are ill in houses like mine, where the sun never shines. Is there no other place like this we could take our little love to?”

“There are two or three other Hospitals,” she answered, “but they are a long way off, and none of them as large as ours. They are sure to be full just now. I think there are not more than a hundred and fifty cots in all London for sick children.”

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“Then there’s no room for my Dolly?” he said.

The lady shook her head without speaking, for she had her handkerchief up to her face.

“Eh!” cried old Oliver in a wailing voice, “I don’t know whatever the dear Lord ’ill say to that.”

He made a sign to Tony that they must be going home again; and the boy raised himself up with a strange weight and burden upon his heart. Old Oliver put his stick down, and took Dolly into his own arms, and laid her head down on his breast.

“Let me carry her a little way, Tony,” he said. “She’s as light as a feather, even to poor old grandpa. I’d like to carry my little love a bit of the way home.”

“I’ll tell you what I can do,” said the lady, wrapping Dolly up and kissing her before she covered her pale face, “if you will tell me where you live I will speak to the doctor as soon as he comes in—for he is out just now—and perhaps he will come to see her. He knows a great deal about children, and is fond of them.”

“Thank you, thank you kindly, ma’am,” answered old Oliver, feeling a little comforted. But when they stood outside, and the bleak wind blew about them, and he could see the soft glimmer of the light in the windows, within which other children were safely sheltered and carefully tended, his spirit sank again. He tottered now and then under his light burden; but he could not be persuaded to give up his little child to Tony again. These streets were quiet, with handsome houses on each side, and from one and another there came bursts of music and laughter as they passed by; yet Tony could catch most of the words which the old man was speaking.

[Illustration: *No room for Dolly*]

“Dear Lord,” he said, “there’s only room for seventy-five of thy little lambs that are pining and wasting away in every dark street and alley like mine. Whatever can thy people be thinking about? They’ve got their own dear little children, who are ill sometimes, spite of all their care; and they can send for the doctor, and do all that’s possible, never looking at the money it costs; but when they are well again they never think of the poor little ones who are sick and dying, with nobody to help them or care for them as I care for this little one. Oh, Lord, Lord! let my little love live! Yet thou knows what is best, and thou’lt do what is best. Thou loves her more than I do; and see, Lord, she is very ill indeed.”

They reached home at last, after a weary and heartbroken journey, and carried Dolly in and laid her upon old Oliver’s bed. She was wide awake now, and looked very peaceful, smiling quietly into both their faces as they bent over her. Tony gazed deep down into her eyes, and met a glance from them which sent a strange tremor through

him. He crept silently away, and stole into his dark bed under the counter, where he stretched himself upon his face, and buried his mouth in the chaff pillow to choke his sobs. What was going to happen to Dolly? What could it be that made him afraid of looking again into her patient and tranquil little face?

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CHAPTER XIX.

The Golden city.

Tony lay there in the dark, overwhelmed by his unusual terror and sorrow, until he heard the voice of old Oliver calling his name feebly. He hurried to him, and found him still beside the bed where Dolly was lying. He had taken off most of her clothes, and put her white nightgown over the rest, that she might sleep warmly in them all the night, for her little hands and feet felt very chilly to his touch. The fire had gone out while they were away, and the grate looked very black and cheerless. The room was in great disorder, just as they had left it, and the gas, which was burning high, cast a cruel glare upon it all. But Tony saw nothing except the dear face of Dolly, resting on one check upon the pillow, with her curly hair tossed about it in confusion, and her open eyes gathering a strange film. Beppo had made his way to her side, and pushed his head under her lifeless little hand, which tried to pat it now and then. Old Oliver was sitting on the bedstead, his eyes fastened upon her, and his whole body trembled violently. Tony sank down upon his knees, and flung his arm over Dolly, as if to save her from the unseen power which threatened to take her away from them.

“Don’t ky, gan-pa,” she said, softly; “don’t ky more than a minute. Nor Tony. Are I going to die, gan-pa?”

“Yes, my little love,” cried old Oliver, moaning as he said it.

“Where are I going to?” asked Dolly, very faintly.

“You’re going to see my Lord and Master,” he said; “him as loves little children so, and carries them in his arms, and never lets them be sorrowful or ill or die again.”

“Does he live in a bootiful place?” she asked, again.

“It’s a more beautiful place than I can tell,” answered old Oliver. “The Lord Jesus gives them light brighter than the sun; and the streets are all of gold, and there are many little children there, who always see the face of their Father.”

“Dolly’s going rere,” said the little child, solemnly.

She smiled for a minute or two, holding Beppo’s ear between her failing fingers, and playing with it. Tony’s eyes were dim with tears, yet he could see her clear face clearly through them. What could he do? Was there no one to help?

“Master, master!” he cried. “If the Lord Jesus is here he can save her. Ask him, master.”

But old Oliver paid no heed to him. For the child who was passing away from him he was all eye and ear, watching and listening as keenly as in his best and strongest days; but he was blind and deaf to everything else around him. Tony's voice could not reach his brain.

"Will gan-pa come rere?" whispered the failing and faltering voice of Dolly.

"Very soon," he answered; a radiant smile coming to his face, which made her smile as her eyes caught the glory of it. "Very, very soon, my little love. You'll be there to meet me when I come."

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“Dolly’ll watch for gan-pa,” she murmured, with long pauses between the words, which seemed to drop one by one upon Tony’s ear; “and Dolly’ll watch at the door for Tony to come home; and she’ll fret ever so if he never comes.”

Tony felt her stir restlessly under his arm, and stretch her tiny limbs upon the bed as if she were very tired, and the languid eyelids drooped slowly till they quite hid her blue eyes, and she sighed softly as children sigh when they fall asleep, weary of their play. Old Oliver laid his shaking hand tenderly upon her head.

“Dear Lord!” he said, “take my little love to thyself. I give her up to thee.”

It seemed to Tony as if a thick mist of darkness fell all about him, and as if he were sinking down, down, very low into some horrible pit where he would never see the light of day again. But by-and-bye he came to himself, and found old Oliver sobbing in short, heavy sobs, and swaying himself to and fro, while Beppo was licking Dolly’s hand, and barking with a sharp, quiet bark, as he had been wont to do when he wanted her to play with him. The child’s small features were quite still, but there was an awful smile upon them such as there had never been before, and Tony could not bear to look upon it. He crossed her tiny hands lightly over one another upon her breast, and then he lifted Beppo away gently, and drew the bed-clothes about her, so as to hide her smiling face.

“Master,” he cried, “master, is she gone?”

Old Oliver only answered by a deep moan; and Tony put his arm about him, and raised him up.

“Come to your own chair, master,” he said.

He yielded to Tony like a child, and seated himself in the chair, where he had so often sat and watched Dolly while he smoked his pipe. The boy put his pipe between his fingers; but he only let it fall to the ground, where it broke into many pieces. Tony did not know what to do, nor where to go for any help.

“Lord,” he said, “if you really love the old master, do something for him; for I don’t know whatever to do, now little Dolly’s gone.”

He sat down on his old box, staring at Oliver and the motionless form on the bed, with a feeling of despair tugging at his heart. He could scarcely believe it was all true; for it was not very long since—only it seemed like long years—since he had leaped over the counter in his light-heartedness. But he had not sat there many minutes before he heard a distinct, rather loud knock at the shop-door, and he ran hastily to ask who was there.

“Antony,” said a voice he knew very well, “I have come with the doctor, to see what we can do for your little girl.”

In an instant Tony opened the door, and as Mr. Ross entered the boy flung his arms round him, and hid his face against him, sobbing bitterly.

“Oh! you’ve come too late,” he cried, “you’ve come too late! Dolly’s dead, and I’m afraid the master’s going away from me as well. They couldn’t take her in, and she died after we had brought her home.”

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The doctor and Mr. Ross went on into the inner room, and Tony pointed silently to the bed where Dolly lay. Old Oliver roused himself at the sound of strange voices, and, leaning upon Tony's shoulder, he staggered to the bedside, and drew the clothes away from her dear, smiling face.

"I don't murmur," he said. "My dear Lord can't do anything unkind. He'll come and speak to me presently, and comfort me; but just now I'm deaf and blind, even to him. I've not forgot him, and he hasn't forgot me; but there's a many things ought to be done, and I cannot think what."

"Leave it all to us," said Mr. Ross, leading him back to his chair. "But have you no neighbour you can go and stay with for to-night? You are an old man, and you must not lose your night's sleep."

"No," he answered, shaking his head; "I'd rather stay here in my own place, if I'd a hundred other places to go to. I'm not afraid of my little love,—no, no! When everything is done as ought to be done, I'll lie in my own bed and watch her. It won't be lonesome, as long as she's here."

In an hour's time all was settled for that night. A little resting-place had been made for the dead child in a corner of the room, where she lay covered with a coarse white sheet, which was the last one left of those which old Oliver's wife had spun in her girlhood. The old man had given his promise to go to bed when Mr. Ross and the doctor were gone; and he slept lightly, his face turned towards the place where his little love was sleeping. A faint light burnt all night in the room, and Tony, who could not fall asleep, sat in the chimney-corner, with Beppo upon his knees. There was an unutterable, quiet sorrow within him, mingled with a strange awe. That little child, who had played with him, and kissed him only a day since, was already gone into the unseen world, which was so very near to him now, though it had seemed so very far away and so empty before. It must be very near, since she had gone to it so quickly; and it was no longer empty, for Dolly was there; and she had said she would watch at the door till he came home.

CHAPTER XX.

A *fresh day dawns*.

Old Oliver and Tony saw their darling buried in a little grave in a cemetery miles away from their own home, and then they returned, desolate and bereaved, to the deserted city, which seemed empty indeed to them. The house had never looked so very dark and dreary before. Yet from time to time old Oliver forgot that Dolly was gone altogether, and could never come back; for he would call her in his eager, quavering tones, or search for her in some of the hiding-places, where she had often played at

hide-and-seek with him. When mealtimes came round he would put out Dolly's plate and cup, which had been bought on purpose for her, with gay flowers painted upon them; and in the evening, over his pipe, when he had been used to talk to his Lord, he now very often said nothing but repeat again and again Dolly's little prayer, which he had himself taught her, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." It was quite plain to Tony that it would never do to leave him alone in his house and shop.

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“I’ve give up my place as errand-boy,” he said to Mr. Ross, “’cause the old master grows worse and worse for forgetting, and I must mind shop for him now as well as I can. He’s not off his head, as you may say; he’s sharp enough sometimes; but there’s no trusting to him being sharp always. He talks to Dolly as if she was here, and could hear him, till I can’t hardly bear it. But I’m very fond of him,—fonder of him than anythink else, ’cept my little Dolly; and I’ve made up my mind as his Master shall be my master, and he’s always ready to tell me all he knows about him. I’m no ways afeared of not getting along.”

Tony found that they got along very well. Mr. Ross made a point of going in to visit them every week, and of seeing how the business prospered in the boy’s hands; and he put as much as he could in his way. Sad and sorrowful as the days were, they passed over, one after another, bringing with them at least the habit of living without Dolly. Every Sunday afternoon, however, old Oliver and Tony walked slowly through the streets, for the old man could only creep along with Tony’s help, till they reached the Children’s Hospital; but they never passed the door, nor entered in through it. Old Oliver would stand for a few minutes leaning heavily on Tony’s shoulder, and trembling from head to foot, as his eyes wandered over all the front of the building; and then a low, wailing cry would break from his lips, “Dear Lord! there was no room for my little love, but thou hast found room for her!”

It was a reopening of Tony’s sorrow when Aunt Charlotte came up from the country to find that the little child had gone away altogether, leaving only her tiny frocks and clothes, which were neatly folded up in a drawer, where old Oliver treasured up a keepsake or two of his wife’s. She discovered, too, that old Oliver had forgotten to write to Susan,—indeed, his hand had become too trembling to hold a pen,—and she wrote herself; but her letter did not reach Calcutta before Susan and her husband had left it, being homeward bound.

It was as nearly two years as it could well be since the summer evening when Susan Raleigh had sent her little girl into old Oliver’s shop, bidding her be a good girl till she came home, and thinking it would be only three days before she saw her again. It was nearly two years, and an evening something like it, when the door was darkened by the entrance of a tall, fine-looking man, dressed as a soldier, but with one empty sleeve looped up across his chest. Tony was busy behind the counter wrapping up magazines, which he was going to take out the next morning, and the soldier looked very inquisitively at him.

“Hallo! my lad, who are you?” he asked, in a tone of surprise.

“I’m Antony Oliver,” he said; for of late he had taken to call himself by his old master’s name.

“Antony Oliver!” repeated the stranger; “I never heard of you before.”

“Well, I’m only Tony,” he answered; “but I live with old Mr. Oliver now, and call him grandfather. He likes it, and it does me good. It’s like somebody belonging to me.”

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“Why! how long have you called him grandfather?” asked the soldier again.

“Ever since our little Dolly died,” said Tony, in a faltering voice.

“Dolly dead!” exclaimed the man, looking ready to fall down; for his face went very white, and he leaned upon the counter with his one hand. “Oh! my poor Susan!—my poor, dear girl!—however can I tell her this bad news?”

“Who are you?” cried Tony. “Are you Dolly’s father? Oh, she’s dead! She died last January, and we are more lonesome without her than you can think.”

“Let me see poor Susan’s father,” he said, after a minute or two, and with a very troubled face.

“Ay, come in,” said Tony, lifting up the flap of the counter, under which Dolly had so often played at hide-and-seek. “He’s more hisself again; but his memory’s bad yet. I know everythink about her, though; because she was so fond of me, and me of her. Come in.”

Raleigh entered the room, and saw old Oliver sitting in his arm-chair, with a pipe in his hand, and a very tranquil look upon his wrinkled face. The gas-light shone upon the glittering epaulettes and white sash of the soldier, and the old man fastened upon him a very keen, yet doubtful gaze of inquiry.

“Don’t you know me, father?” cried Raleigh, almost unable to utter a word. “It’s your poor Susan’s husband, and Dolly’s father.”

“Dolly’s father!” repeated old Oliver, rising from his chair, and resting his hand upon Raleigh’s shoulder. “Do you know that the dear Lord has taken her to be where he is in glory?”

“Yes, I know it,” he said, with a sob.

He put the old man back in his seat, and drew a chair close up to him. They sat thus together in sorrowful silence for some minutes, until old Oliver laid his hand upon the empty sleeve on Raleigh’s breast.

“You’ve lost your arm,” he said, pityingly.

“Ay!” answered Raleigh; “our colonel was set upon by a tiger in the jungle, and I saved him; but the brute tore my arm, and craunched the bone between his teeth till it had to come off. It’s spoiled me for a soldier.”

“Yes, yes, poor fellow,” answered old Oliver, “but the Lord knew all about it.”

“That he did,” answered Raleigh; “and he’s taught me a bit more about himself than I used to know. I’m not spoiled to be His soldier. But I don’t know much about the service yet, and I shall want you to teach me, father. You’ll let me call you father, for poor Susan’s sake, won’t you?”

“To be sure—to be sure,” said old Oliver, keeping his hand still upon the empty sleeve on Raleigh’s breast.

“Well, father,” he continued, “as I am not fit for a soldier, and as the colonel was hurt too, we’re all come home together. Only Susan’s gone straight on with her lady and our little girl, and sent me through London to see after you and Dolly.”

“Your little girl?” said Oliver questioningly.

“Yes, the one born in India. Her name’s Mary, but we call her Polly. Susan said it made her think of our little Dolly at home. Dear! dear! I don’t know however I shall let her know.”

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Another fit of silence fell upon them, and Tony left them together, for it was time to put up the shop shutters. It seemed just like the night when he had followed Susan and the little girl, and loitered outside in the doorway opposite, to see what would happen after she had left her in the shop. He fancied he was a ragged, shoeless boy again, nobody loving him, or caring for him, and that he saw old Oliver and Dolly standing on the step, looking out for the mother, who had gone away, never, never to see her darling again. Tony's heart was very full; and when he tried to whistle, he was obliged to give it up, lest he should break out into sobs and crying. When he went back into the house Raleigh was talking again.

"So Susan and me are to have one of the lodges of the colonel's park," he said, "and I'm to be a sort of bailiff to look after the other outdoor servants about the garden and premises. It's a house with three bedrooms, and a very pleasant sort of little parlour, as well as a kitchen and scullery place downstairs. You can see the Wrekin from the parlour window, and the moon over it; and it's not so far away but what we could get a spring-cart sometimes, and drive over to your old home under the Wrekin. As soon as ever the colonel's lady told Susan where it was, she cried out, 'That's the very place for father!' You'd like to come and live with your own Susan again, in your own country; wouldn't you now?"

"Yes, yes; for a little while," answered old Oliver, with a smile upon his face.

Tony felt a strange and very painful shrinking at his heart. If the old man went away to live with his daughter in the country, his home would be lost to him, and he would have to go out into the great city again alone, with nobody to love. He could get his living now in a respectable manner, and there was no fear of his being driven to sleep in Covent Garden, or under the bridges. But he would be alone, and all the links which bound him to Dolly and old Oliver would be snapped asunder. He wondered if the Lord Jesus would let such a thing be.

"But I couldn't leave Tony," cried old Oliver, suddenly; and putting on his spectacles to look for him.

"Come here, Tony. He's like my own son to me, bless him! He calls me grandfather, and kept my heart up when I should have sunk very low without him. My Master gave him to me the very same night he gave me my little love. No, no; Dolly loved Tony, and Susan must come here to see me, but I could never leave my boy."

Old Oliver had put his arm round Tony, drawing him closer and closer to him as he spoke, until his withered cheek pressed fondly against his face. Since Dolly died neither of them had felt such a thrill of happiness as now.

"The colonel and his lady must be told about this," said Raleigh, after he had heard all that Tony had been and done for old Oliver; and when he was obliged to go away for the

night, the soldier gave him such a cordial grasp of the hand, as set all his fingers tingling, and his heart throbbing with exultation.

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CHAPTER XXI.

Polly.

The lodge stood in a very lovely place, upon a slope of ground, which rose still higher to where the colonel's grand house was situated. There was a porch before the door, built of rough logs of pines, covered with ivy and honeysuckle, and with seats in it, where you could sit and look out over a wide, rich plain, with little hills and dales in it, stretching far away towards the sky-line, where some distant mountains lay, so like to clouds, that you could scarcely tell which were soft and misty vapours, and which were solid and everlasting hills. The Severn ran through the beautiful plain with so many windings, sometimes lying in shadow under deep banks, and sometimes glistening and sparkling in the sunlight, that it looked more like many little pools scattered about the meadows than one long, continuous river. Not very far away, as Raleigh had said, stood the Wrekin, purple in the evening haze, but by day so plain, that one could see the great rock on its summit, which in olden times served as an altar to the god of fire.

Susan was very busy, and had been very busy all day over two things—preparing the house for the reception of her father, whom she had not seen for so many years, and in teaching her little girl, who was now eighteen months old, to say grand-pa. The one work was quite finished; everything was ready for old Oliver, and now she was waiting and watching to see the colonel's spring cart arrive from the station with her husband, who was gone to meet old Oliver and Tony. For Tony was not on any account to be parted from the old man—so said the colonel and his lady—but was to be employed about the garden, and as general errand boy for the house, and to live at the lodge with old Oliver. Susan's eyes were red, for as she had been busy about her work, she had several times cried bitterly over her lost little girl; but she had resolved within herself not to shed a single tear after her father was come, lest she should spoil the gladness of his coming home to her. At last the cart came in sight, and stopped, and Raleigh and Tony sprang out to help Oliver to get down, while Susan put down Polly in the porch, and ran to throw her arms round her dear old father's neck.

He was very quiet, poor old Oliver. He had not spoken a word since he left the station, but had gazed about him as they drove along the pleasant lane with almost a troubled look upon his tranquil face. When his dim eyes caught the first glimpse of the Wrekin he lifted his hat from his white and trembling head, as if to greet it like some great and dear friend, after so many years of absence. Now he stood still at the wicket, leaning upon Susan's arm, and looking round him again with a gentle yet sad smile. The air was so fresh, after the close streets of London, that to him it seemed even full of scents of numberless flowers; and the sun was shining everywhere, upon the blossoms in the garden, and the fine old elm-trees in the park, and the far-off hills. He grasped Tony's hand in his, and bade him look well about him.

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“If only my little love had had a bit of sunshine!” he said, with a mournful and tender patience in his feeble voice.

But just then—scarcely had he finished speaking—there came a shrill, merry little scream behind them, so like Dolly’s, that both old Oliver and Tony turned round quickly. It could not be the same, for this little child was even smaller than Dolly; but as she came pattering and tottering down the garden-walk towards them, they saw that she had the same fair curly hair, and blue eyes, and rosy cheeks that Dolly had had two years before. She ran and hid her face in her mother’s gown; but Susan lifted her into her arms, and held her towards old Oliver.

“Say grand-pa, and kiss him, Polly,” she said, coaxingly.

The little child held back shyly for a minute, for old Oliver’s head was shaking much more than usual now; but at length she put her two soft little hands to his face, and held it between them, while she kissed him.

“Gan-pa!” she cried, crowing and chuckling with delight.

They went indoors to the pleasant parlour, where old Oliver’s arm-chair was set ready for him by the side of the fire, for Susan had kindled a fire, saying that he would feel the fresh air blowing from the Wrekin; and Polly sat first on his knee, and then upon Tony’s, who could not keep his eyes from following all her movements. But still it was not their own Dolly who had made the old house in the close alley in London so happy and so merry for them. She was gone home to the Father’s house, and was watching for them there. Tony might be a long time before he joined her, but for old Oliver the parting would be but short. As he sat in the evening dusk, very peacefully and contentedly, while Susan sang Polly to sleep in the kitchen, Tony heard him say half aloud, as his custom was, “Yet a little, and I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”