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Without a sound he crept across the room.

Whif.

By SYDNEY WATSON,

Author of "Wops the Waif," "Run Down," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGGARS' OPERA.

"What is this sign that is claiming the sight?—
Lodgings within here, at five cents per night!
Let me examine this cheap-entered nest,
Pay my five cents, and go in with the rest;
Let me jot down with sly pen, but sincere,
What in this garret I see, smell, and hear.
Great, gloomy den! where on close-clustered shelves,
Shelterless wretches can shelter themselves;
Pestilence-drugged is the murderous air,
Full of the breathings of want and despair!
Horrible place!—where the crushed race
Winces 'neath Poverty's dolefullest blight—
Bivouac of suffering, sin, and disgrace:
What can you look for, at five cents per night?"

"PEG!" This in a man's gruff voice.
"Hullo!" The reply in sleepy tones from a woman.
"Wot's the time?"

"Dunno!"

"Yer'd better look slippy an' find out, old woman; if yer don't I'll go fur yer, so I tells yer straight!"

"Oh, bother, Ginger! why don't yer go ter sleep, I'm as tired as a dawg, an'—"

The woman's speech was suddealy cut short. Her fiery spouse, Ginger Jinks, had his own ideas of women's rights, which he would sometimes embody in one growling, grumbling sentence, "She's a right to hold her jaw, to shut up!" On this occasion he did not propound his theory. Perhaps he considered that he had talked often enough before, or it might be that it was because he had awoke in a vile temper. His throat was as dry as a lime-basket, his head throbbbed, and his limbs ached.

Well, whatever might have been the cause of his outburst, the fact remains the same—he cut short his wife's protest by hurling a heavy, dirty, dilapidated boot at her head.

It was not the boot so much as the awful threats accompanying the action which hurried Peg Jinks's movements. She sprang to her feet. Her clothes hung in filthy tatters about her.

Her clothes! Why, if she had offered herself as she stood to some Jew marine store-dealer he would have raised his shaggy eyebrows in unutterable surprise, and with out-spread hands would have cried, "Vot! you want me to puy yer out an' out. Vy, my tear, ter dirty togs vot you haf on vould sp spoil efen my ruppish sack, an' as ter yourself, vy yer pones are nuffin in de scale. Ah no, my tear, I can't puy yer ter-day."

Yes, 'tis true, Peg Jinks was a wretched-looking creature.

She was not more than forty, but she looked sixty. Her brown, wrinkled face and sunken eyes proclaimed the awful fact that she was a joyless, hopeless woman.

She shuffled across the room, and, opening the door, passed down the creaking staircase.

Up that same wretched staircase there came a villainous combination of odours. Paraffin oil and bad coffee; rank tobacco smoke and fried steak and onions; frizzling, rafty bacon, and toasted bloaters—all these things mingled with that strange, detestable, close, sour, squalid smell that seems the ordinary atmosphere of the very lowest and commonest of common lodging-houses. For this is the scene of the above conversation, a common lodging-house for tramps.

"The Beggars' Opera," was the name by which the house was known.

The couple whom we have introduced to the readers had tramped late on the Friday night from Ryde, and, after supper on the pieces gathered earlier in the day, washed down with heavy draughts of beer, they had lain down on the filthy floor of the filthy room, among eight other equally low, depraved, filthy men and women.

Yes, it is true! Utterly regardless of age or sex, the whole were herded together upon that wretched floor.

"'Twas sad to see, in that great misery-cup,
How guilt and innocence were all mixed up:
Here lay a fellow, stupid, dull and dumb,
Whose breath was like a broken keg of rum;
And there a baby, looking scared and odd,
Who had not been a month away from God.
Here a clean woman, toiling for her bread;
And there a wretch whose weary heart was dead.
Here a sound rascal, lazy, loud, and bold;
And there the helpless, weak, and sick and old."

Poor Peg had laid a sleeping boy down in a corner of the crowded room, and, propping herself against the wall near by him, she, too, was soon asleep like the rest.

In spite of the awful scenes she witnessed night after night in the wretched dens in which they slept, Peg had something of the woman left in her, and hated having to herd in such close proximity to strangers.

Once more those ricketty stairs creaked with the light weight of Peg Jinks. Her hacking cough roused her husband from the half slumber into which he had relapsed. He sat up to receive her report.

"Well, wot's the time, ole hag?" were the words which greeted her.

"Arf past eight, Ginger!" Peg watched him out of the corner of those dull, hopeless eyes as she spoke. She never knew what form his wanton brutality would take.

"Fetch that boot over, d'year, an' don't let me hev ter give yer another livener."

She was stooping wearily to pick up the missile, when his next question came.

"Where's Whif?"

"Dunno, Ginger. I 'spects he's got up long ago, an' gone moonin' round the streets, like he allus does. But we ain't got no call to be afeard. He's too 'cute to lose hisself. He'll be back to breakfast, you'll see!" Saying which, Peg once more shuffled downstairs.

A quarter of an hour later she was bending over the fire, frying their meagre breakfast.

At the door, leaning against the uprights, Ginger smoked his pipe. He was the type of a low bully, with a bloated, red, sensual face, grimed with a week's dirt. His nose twisted into many a horrid crook, his mouth drawn down one side, some thick surgical stitches showing plainly—these latter disfigurements caused by a brutal fight years before. His red, coarse, dirty hair was cropped close. His very clothing seemed to add to his utterly disgraceful appearance. He wore a shabby, well-worn suit of a loud, vulgar pattern. An old tall white hat, very much battered, but adorned with a broad, black band, was set jauntily upon his head.

"Wot's come ter that young 'un, I'd like ter know, that he ain't turned up yet?"

In meekest tones came the reply, "I dunno, I'm sure, Ginger. But breakfast is quite ready; ef yer likes ter come an' hev yours while its 'ot, I'll go an' look fur him a bit."

This suggestion was so manifestly free from reproach, and appealed so strongly to Ginger Jinks in the direction of his appetite, that with no more than the inevitable oath, without which he never spoke, he replied, "Go on, then, ole hag."

As the poor miserable-looking woman passed through the door, the man looked up, his bleared, cold, evil eyes following her with a look of loathing in them, as he muttered, "Wot a fool I must hev bin ever to hev got tied up to a scraggy piece like her!"

Poor Peg, hungry, faint, tired—she was always tired now—passed out of sight of the house, and turned up a narrow turning which led to the lower part of the town.

She leaned her aching head against some wooden palings, covered her face with her hands, and wept a few hot, sorrowful tears.

While *he* was wondering how he "could have been such a fool as to marry her," Peg was wondering however she could have married him.

She was not "scraggy" then. It would be hard to trace in Peg Jinks, the fair, auburn-haired, beautiful Margaret Annette of twenty years ago.

Ah! how it all came back to her, that day when he passed by her grandmother's cottage. He was called "Captain Jinks" then—why, she never knew, for he was never a gentleman—was not even educated in the simplest sense of the word, but she was fascinated by his oily words; for she was simple and guileless then, and he was so handsome and dashing.

Then—what an oft-repeated tale—she told him all the story of her life. The dear old woman who sat dozing in the wide chimney-corner was her grandmother. Her father and mother were dead. She had just had three hundred pounds and a pretty little house in Hampshire left her by an aunt. Her grandmother would not leave the old cottage, but was going to have an orphan niece to live with her, and she, Margaret, who was tired of the solitude of that cottage in the wood, was going away soon to live in her own house.

"But you cannot intend to live alone, my poor girl, surely!" The handsome young stranger had spoken in tones of such tenderness and sympathy as he said this, and had told his own story of orphanhood with so much pathos, that Margaret forgot that they had never met before, and told him all that was in her heart.

"Three hundred pounds and a house." This was too good a prize to be flung lightly away, especially when there was a pretty, guileless girl thrown in with it.

As Charley Jinks walked back through the wood that day, he determined to lay siege to that girl and her property.

And he did, and secured it.

How was she to know that the honeyed words he poured into her ears were most of them scraps of some senseless love-play, in which he had often taken part in the low travelling theatre to which he was attached? How could she tell that he did not care one bit for herself, but was angling for her money?

With all the affectation, the stagey-style of the low theatre, he told her he wished she was in deep poverty, that there might be no doubt about the disinterestedness of his affection. And she had declared, with tears in her eyes, that it was cruel for him to talk like that. Did not all her heart tell *her* how true he was?

All that was twenty years ago. What a lifetime of woe and sorrow had been gathered up in those years!

But she could not afford to stand weeping while "Whif" was missing.

Little Whif! Quaint, pretty, clever, precocious little Whif! Whif, who, with his little suit of spangled tights, not only turned such pretty summersaults, but turned the coppers out of the pockets of the people, when, with little panting, heaving breast, he carried round the big, pinky, pearly shell.

"Whif!" How her woman-heart dwelt in unutterable tenderness upon his name. Whenever she thought of him, how she wished he was her own child. But there, she could not have loved him more if he had been, she thought.

But Whif is missing and must be found. Up one street and down the other went the weary Peg, but she failed to find him, and yet dreaded to return without him.

She dreaded the cruel blows from her brutal husband, who would be only too glad to have an excuse for beating her.

Later on she met her husband, and received his curses and his blows, then together they ransacked the town. Here and there in the streets people crowded around some singer or performer. It wanted but two days to the Regatta, and all kinds of attractions had been provided in the fashionable watering-place. Into all these little crowds Ginger or his wife found their way in search of Whif.

Quite a hundred people were gathered about, and watching the movements of the signalmen at the Club-House flagstaff. Signal after signal was run up, answered from the various yachts, and replied to in turn by others.

To the landsmen, the visitors, the uninitiated, all this display of bunting was so much mystery. What *did* those flags mean? How could people understand them?

One fussy little old gentleman—a cockney, evidently, by his accent—fairly worried the signalmen by his constant enquiries "What does that mean?"

At last, with a merry twinkle in his eye, and a wink at his colleagues, one of the signalmen did reply.

He had just run up five flags. They flew gaily, spread to the breeze.

"You see there are five of them, sir!" not a muscle of the man's features moved as he looked into the fussy old gentleman's face.

"Yes, I see there are five, but what do they stand for?" He drew nearer with suppressed delight as he pressed his question. The amused crowd drew nearer still, instinctively scenting some fun.

"What do they stand for, sir? Well, they stand for K. H. F. O. D; now you know, don't you, sir?"

There was quite a disappointed expression on the old gentleman's face as he heard the last words. Dare he ask again? Would another question be suffered? At least he would try; so with a cheery smile he said, "Thank you, friend, it is very kind of you. But what does K. H. F. O. D. mean?"

The crowd need not to have pressed together so closely; they all heard the reply as the signalman's voice rang out full of merriment, "Kill half a fowl for owner's dinner."

Ginger Jinks stood long enough in the crowd to catch the fun and join in the hearty laugh that followed, then he pushed on again along the beach as far as Egypt Point.

Every open-air negro entertainment, every crowd around some rope-tyer extraordinary, every tribe of paddling children, were visited over and over again by Peg and Ginger, but Whif was nowhere to be found.

Where was he? What would they do without him?

The few tricks which Ginger could perform would neither draw nor hold a crowd, and, what was much more important to him, would not command the coppers.

None of these thoughts occupied Peg's mind so much as this personal one: "What should she do without the boy?" Amid all the ill-treatment of Ginger, the one bright spot in her life was her love for Whif, and his for her.

How vividly did that day stand out, when she had weakly, wickedly, yielded to Ginger's threats and stolen away the three-year-old boy.

The day passed without finding Whif, and Ginger, as usual, vented his wrath upon poor Peg.

But, where *was* Whif all this time?

CHAPTER II.

WHIF EN VOYAGE.

"I'm just the oddest, merriest scamp
That ever you did see;
At least, that's what the people all
Are always telling me.
I can't tell why I'm such a tease,
And have such tiresome ways;
I only know it can't be helped,
I've been so all my days.
They say I'm just no good at all,
Except to laugh and play;
I'm fond of fun, and very small,
And always in the way."

WHIF loved the fresh air. He hated above all things the stifling atmosphere of those lodging-house sleeping-rooms. He awoke at five o'clock that Saturday morning in the foul-smelling den at the Beggars' Opera we have already described.

His quick, enquiring eyes, took in the whole scene at a glance—those men and women lying herded together upon that filth-begrimed floor. But his eye rested longest upon Ginger Jinks and Peg.

Something very like a shudder passed over the little fellows' frame as he looked at the man's brutal features; Whif hated him.

Then came a tender, yearning look, as his glance travelled to poor Peg's woe-begone face. To his little uninstructed mind there came the thought, "She got as near to me as she could, 'cos she loves me."

But Peg was asleep, as were all the others. Without a sound he crept across the room, skilfully placing his chubby bare feet between the sleeping bodies, then in another minute he was standing in the street in the glorious sunlight of an August morning.

As he had passed through the kitchen, on his way to the street, he had spied a pile of broken food. Snatching up a piece of paper he had wrapped up a few pieces of meat, and bread-and-butter, and with this provision started on his travels.

Whif had no idea at the time of running away, but, child as he was, he knew that it would be some hours before breakfast would be ready.

The first thing he did when he found himself clear of the corner occupied by the Beggars' Opera was to lay down his little parcel of food upon a stone step, and turn two or three summersaults. They were not so much an expression of childish gladness, as a means of taking out of his limbs that cramped stiffness which came from lying upon the hard floor all night. Then slowly he passed up the street.

Early as it was, the yachtsmen and shipwrights were already astir, and more than one looked at the odd little figure with passing curiosity.

Presently the street became narrower, and shops lined both sides. But there was nothing in closed shops to interest Whif, so he continued his walk. He was passing an opening, when the fresh blast of the cool sea-breeze came sweeping by, and he stopped a moment to look down through the archway.

He caught a glimpse of shining, dancing, rippling little waves. He saw the mast and funnel of a steamer. Then, for the first time, there came a definite wish in his childish heart to go away in that ship. It was not any particular desire to leave Peg and Ginger, but an intense yearning for the ship, for the sea.

Whif had crossed from Portsmouth to Ryde a few days before, and had not forgotten that voyage. He had heard of

vessels going to wonderful countries, where monkeys and parrots were thicker than sparrows in England. He had sat in the hot, crowded lodging-house kitchens, and listened with breathless interest to the stories of some sailor-tramp as he told of the wonders of foreign lands. Now, without thinking of all that it might mean, this little five-year-old Whif stepped softly from the pontoon to the steamer's deck.

How was he to know, poor little chap, that the vessel was the Isle of Wight steamer, and that in an hour and a half it would leave for Southampton! All Whif knew was that it was a ship.

He saw no one on deck. His little bare feet made no sound as he crept about, and looked here and looked there. Then he



"Hullo! young shaver, what are you up to?"

wondered what it was like "downstairs," so, softly, silently, he trod the indiarubber-covered steps, and stood in the fore-cabin. No one was here either.

The stillness affected little Whif. He had not had a very long night's sleep. He saw a snug-looking coil of canvas and baize under the seat right away in the corner; why should he not finish his nap?

Another minute and Whif had crawled in, well out of sight, and was soon fast asleep.

About twenty minutes past eight he awoke, and, wondering for a moment where he was, he crept out of his nest.

The first thing which struck him was that he was hungry, so, unrolling his packet of food, he began to discuss the merits of meat and bread.

Suddenly he heard footsteps overhead, and a man's voice rolled forth in song—

"God gave His Son for me,
Oh, wondrous love!
From sin to set me free,
Oh, wondrous love!"

A guilty rebel I,
Doomed and condemned to die—
He did not pass me by,
Oh, wondrous love!"

Whif did not understand the words but he enjoyed the tune, and listened eagerly to the next words:—

"Jesus paid all my debt,
Oh, wondrous love!
Wildest extremes he met,
Oh, wondrous love!
Justice is satisfied,
Heaven's gate thrown open wide,
God now is glorified,
Oh, wondrous love!"

The voice sounded each moment nearer. Then a shadow filled the line of light in the hatchway and the tread of a man's feet upon the stairs kept company with the next words—

"There, there, at God's right hand,
Oh, wondrous love!
I see my Surety stand,
Oh, won—."

The song suddenly ceased, as the singer, a sailor, reached the deck of the fore-cabin and spied Whif.

He was a pleasant-looking man, and held in his hands an oil-feeder and a bunch of tow. He had evidently come to clean and trim the cabin lamp.

For a single moment he gazed in astonishment at Whif's dirty, though pretty, little face, and quaint garb. There was no trace of fear or shyness in the boy as he looked up, and in reply to the sailor's question—"Hullo, young shaver, what are you up to?"—said naturally, not saucily, "Why, I'm havin' my breffast!"

"I see you are!" continued the sailor smiling. "But how came you here?"

"Oh, I comed down them stairs, I did," said Whif, pointing to the ladder.

The sailor laughed a low, merry laugh as he pushed his enquiries further: "But *where* did you come from?"

Whif looked quite grave, and gave a little sigh as he said, "I doesn't know fur certain. I asked old Peg once, an' she said she fort I come from the Garden of Eden, 'cos all the angels come from there, an' she says, 'You blessed little Whif, you's an angel!' But I fink she's mistaked, 'cos I've seed picturs of angels an' they's allus got clean faces an' hands, and white shiny night-gownds on, an' wings. I ain't never had none of them things, so I finks Peg didn't know. 'Sides, Ginger Jinks allus said she wur a fool, an' he said that so often, that I asked a man once in the kitchen wot a fool wur, an' he said, 'A cove wot don't know nuffin.' Well, Peg is a woman cove, so p'raps she didn't know. But she liked me allus, an' never whacked me, an' I liked her, I did."

The sailor laughed softly again, saying, "Well, if you didn't come from the Garden of Eden, where do you think you came from?"

"Dunno, I'm sure" replied Whif.

"Well, where are you going to, then?"

"To the place where the monkeys and parrots is. How soon shall we be afore we gits there?"

The sailor did not understand Whif's reference to foreign parts, but having seen some cages with birds, and two tiny marmosets and a gorgeous parrot, upon the pier a few minutes before, he supposed that the boy had run on to the boat from Southampton pier, where they then lay, to eat his breakfast and satisfy his childish curiosity.

Having seen the last morsel of bread-and-meat disappear into Whif's little mouth, he said, "Now then, youngster, you must cut away from this as fast as you can, before the steward comes and makes it too warm for you."

Tears stood in the eyes of Whif, as he whisked up the ladder with the spring of a squirrel. Was this to be the end of his adventure? Was he to be turned out of the ship without sailing over the beautiful waters? He did not know that while he slept the steamer had crossed the Solent and steamed up those ovely waters.

It took but a moment or two for him to reach the pier, then he gazed about in astonishment. His wonder was past expression. He thought that somehow in that sleep he must have crossed the ocean, for all was strange and new to him. Was this the wonderful, foreign land he had wanted to see?

He stood in bewildered wonder!

Suddenly, close to him, a shrill voice shouted, "Polly wants breakfast."

Whif turned toward the voice, and there, to his intense delight, were the birds and monkeys he had thought to find in other lands.

"Scratch Polly's pole." "Ain't I a beauty?" "Pretty Poll!" screamed the parrot, to Whif's amazement and delight. Two little love-birds held their pretty green heads on one side, and looked inquisitively at him, winking and blinking their little bead-like eyes.

The monkeys bounded about in their cage, and stretched out their human-like hands towards the boy.

Whif was in a land of wonders. Could he have read he would have known that these things were not natives of this, to him, new land, for, upon labels attached to the cages, was this inscription: "Consigned to Mrs. Wright, 3, High Street, West Cowes, Isle of Wight."

While still wondering and gazing upon these pets, there came a couple of men from the steamer, and carried the cages on board. The pier began to be busy with people. The train from Southampton station had discharged her passengers, and the next ten minutes was bustle and confusion. Then, slowly at first, but faster each moment, the steamer passed down the waters.

For a moment or two little Whif felt lonely and sad. But he had had a good breakfast, the sun was shining, he had a half-penny in his pocket, Ginger Jinks was nowhere near, all was new around him, so what more could he want. Once more he started on his travels.

Along the pier, through the carriage-gate into the town, evading, unknowingly, the turnstile and pay-taker, along the High Street among the shops.

With longing heart and wide open eyes, he looked at a large dapple-grey rocking horse, and wondered for a moment if his half-penny would pay for it. While he thus stood enraptured, the bleat of a goat fell upon his ear. Turning, he saw the prettiest of pretty little goat-carriages.

The notes of that pipe that lured the children of Hamelin away from home and friends was not more powerful than the bleat of that goat. Whif followed it as closely as he could.

His little eyes were full of a new light. He forgot time, place, circumstances, Peg, Ginger, parrots, monkeys—forgot everything but the delight of the moment.

The little equipage turned to the right. On it went, until presently it came to the Itchen Ferry, and rattled over the shingle on to the ferry boat. Whif followed it!

He was confronted by a burly, red-faced man. "Where's yer ha'penny?" he asked.

"In my pocket!" As he spoke, Whif put his dirty little hand into that tiny receptacle as though he would keep his treasure there.

"Well, fork it out ef yer wants to go over," said the man gruffly.

"Go over?" What did he mean, thought Whif. Was the goat-carriage going over? If so, he must go too, that was certain. He reluctantly gave up his "ha'penny," but comforted himself by saying to the lad in charge of the attraction, "Please may I stroke the goat once? I'll do it soft an' not hurt him."

What was a halfpenny to the joy of being allowed to stroke that pretty creature? Having received permission, he softly patted the goat again and again, until the ferry, reaching the other side, once more moved on, Whif following it. On, on it went, but the delighted boy never tired. Then suddenly the goat quickened its pace, the lad in charge of it ran quickly ahead and opened a gate, and goat, carriage, and lad passed through. The gate shut with a clang, and a sense of awful loss filled the heart of Whif.

Children, like adults, have their Will-o'-the-wisp, their mirage. Would Whif in years to come remember how he was lured onward by something which he did not own, and which only ended in disappointment? Would he learn in after-days the great secret of life, "Finding Christ," and thus once and for ever say, "Farewell" to disappointment?

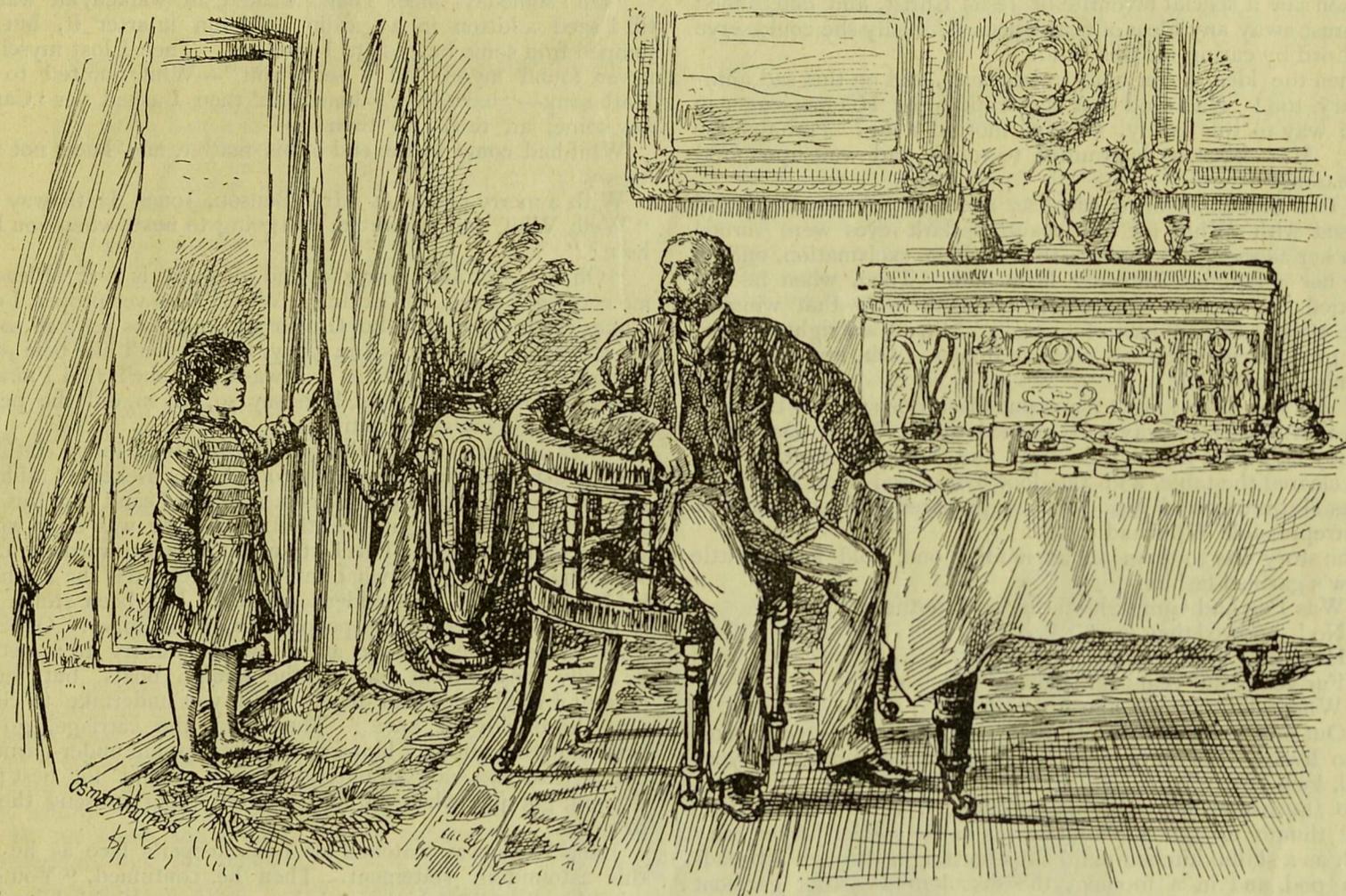
CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

JONAS HATHAWAY, Esq., sat alone in his luxurious dining-room, at two o'clock luncheon. He was a moody man at all times, but to-day he was fairly glum.

Mrs. Benson, his housekeeper, watched him curiously all the day. She knew what troubled him, and she hoped, as she had hoped every 3rd of August for the past six years, to see some sign of tenderness in him, some signs of relenting, toward his absent daughter.

Her own heart yearned for the gentle, loving Miss May. She prayed morning, noon, and night that God would incline her master's heart toward his lost child.



"He turned in amazement, and looked at the odd little figure."

She felt that it was rank, unpardonable sin on the part of this Jonas Hathaway, Esq., to hold his anger against his daughter, simply because she had married against his will.

So the morning of this 3rd of August, Mrs. Benson had watched her master as he wandered restlessly to and fro, in and out of the house, but the gloom seemed to settle upon him deeper every hour.

Luncheon served, she left the dining-room for a few minutes to give an order in the kitchen.

Jonas Hathaway toyed with his knife and fork, but forgot to eat. He was suddenly startled by a rich, sweet, but childish voice, saying, "Hullo! Is you havin' yous dinner? Wot's you got? 'Cos I wants some, please. I'se awful hungry!"

He turned in amazement, and looked at the odd little figure framed in the sunlit French window that opened upon the lawn.

The speaker was a boy of five, or a little over. He was dirty, very dirty, but handsome withal. His skin was a rich olive, his hair long, and unkempt, and dirty, but was naturally of a bright, glossy black, and full of curls. His eyes were large, full, and dark.

But it was his costume which gave such oddness to his appearance.

He wore a soldier's scarlet, short-waisted jacket, which came almost to his knees. It was sadly discoloured, the gold stripes and badge upon it were tarnished, and the buttons were more of a bronze hue than gilt. It was buttoned the whole way up the front, except the last two at the bottom, sufficient to allow play for the little chap's well-formed legs. These were encased in a baggy pair of knickerbockers, that left plenty of room for his brown, dusty, little bare feet to skip and jump, as they seemed always to be doing.

For a moment Jonas Hathaway was too much astonished to speak, at last he said, with the faintest suspicion of a smile, "Who are you?"

The boy advanced a few paces as he replied, "Oh, I'm Whif, I am!"

The next question seemed the most natural to Mr. Hathaway. "Where do you come from, Whif?"

"Out of the smoke," answered the little chap, eyeing the food greedily.

What could Jonas Hathaway do but laugh at this odd youngster? He could not refrain, so laughed lightly at the answer and pushed it with another question, "Who told you that you came out of the smoke?"

"Old Peg and Ginger did." There was a little sigh from Whif as he uttered Peg's name.

"And who are Peg and Ginger, pray?"

"Don't know!" replied Whif. "Don't fink any one knows. I asked 'Old Salt' wot's got a wooden leg an' sings, 'Sheer hulk, poor Tom Bowlin,' once, who they wur, an' he said they wur fust cousins to nobody. Old Salt knowed all 'bout whales an' ships an' everythink, so I 'spects he wur right 'bout Peg an' Ginger, don't you? But can't I hev some dinner, please?"

Whif needed but the smiling nod to assure him, and in a moment had climbed into one of the richly-covered leather chairs, and was soon busily employed with some cold veal pie.

Amidst much amusing chatter from the boy in response to his questioning, Mr. Hathaway caught the rustle of Mrs. Benson's dress. This was followed by a startled exclamation of, "Oh, gracious, Goodness!"

It would be hard to say which astonished the good woman most, the presence of Whif or the quiet laughter of her master.

But Mrs. Benson had a warm heart, and was gifted with a large amount of common sense. Everyone knows how uncommon this latter quality is, but few people learn that life in Christ ought to fill the Christian with common sense as surely as it fills him with piety.

Mrs. Benson saw the dust patches that had rubbed off Whif's little travel-stained, bare feet, disfiguring the rich leather of the chair in which he knelt up. She hated dirt in any form, especially dirty flesh; and certainly Whif's face, hands, hair, and feet, were all very dirty; but she loved children. She loved the children's Christ, He who said, "Suffer the little ones to come unto ME, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

They were barefooted children who had been playing about in the sand all day, doubtless. Did not the dust come off their feet upon his vesture—that seamless vesture, which was sufficiently choice and valuable to prompt heathen soldiers to cast lots for it, so that it should not be rent?

Were the faces and hands of those olive-skinned children perfectly, sweetly clean? Were their little bodies as fair as clear water could make them, or as redolent as Pear's Soap could turn them out?

"No!" thought Mrs. Benson, "this is hardly likely. And yet He said, 'For of such is the kingdom of heaven.'" And looking at that dirty, dusty, oddly-dressed little figure, Mrs.

Benson saw a special favourite of Jesus Christ, and determined to thrust away any ideas of fastidiousness, if only she could serve her Lord by caring for this child.

Then the idea of her master laughing, and on this sad anniversary, too! Had God sent this child to be His messenger in some way to the lonely, moody, morbid man? Perhaps He had. Mrs. Benson determined to watch and wait upon God for leading.

In that first moment of surprise, she was yet interested and amused with Whif, for his beautiful dark eyes were turned upon her as she gave vent to that sudden exclamation, and he gave her a familiar, knowing little nod. Then, when he had emptied his mouth sufficiently, he said, with that winning smile which seemed part of himself, "Oh, its all right, missus. The gov'nor here let me come to dinner. Oh, my eye! ain't this nice, that's all!"

It did not take long to acquaint Mrs. Benson with the very little that Mr. Hathaway had learned about Whif. But when the boy had quite finished his meal, and the astonished servant had cleared the table, and the door had closed upon her, both Jonas Hathaway and Mrs. Benson prepared to listen to all that the irrepressible Whif had to tell.

The story was to them an astounding one, told in the little fellow's garbled fashion.

"Was Peg and Ginger his father and mother?"

"No! knowed they worn't."

"How long had he been with them?"

"Fur years, an' years, an' years!"

"Where did they get him from?"

"Out of a hornet's nest, Ginger said, an' that's wot makes me so lively. Yer ain't seed me chuck a back-flap, hav yer? Well, look yer!"

To the astonishment of his questioners, Whif ran his little dirty thumb up the line of buttons in the soldier-jacket, very much as a skilful kitchen-maid slips her finger through a broad-bean pod, and in a moment the discoloured scarlet garment was tossed into the wide arm chair, raising quite a little cloud of dust. Then, springing into a clear space of the room, the little acrobat threw three distinct summersaults, accompanying them with the professional "One—two—three—Houp-la."

With the marvellous quickness that accompanied all he did, the boy jumped into his jacket again, gave one spring and landed cross-legged upon the padded arm of the handsome leather couch. Then he went on with his story. "It wur ever so long ago, I don't know how many years, I woked one mornin', and they wos all asleep. An' the place smelt so nasty, 'cos o' course they was all drunk afore they laid down. The sun wur shinin' outside, so I creeps, an' creeps, an' creeps over all on' 'em, an' gits downstairs an' goes along the streets till I comes to a great big ship. My eye! it wur a whopper! Then I finks o' wot 'Old Salt' said 'bout them places where the monkeys and the parrots wur, an' it wur only big ships wot went there, so I went on the ship. But I didn't see no one, an' I wur sleepy, so I jist laid down in a corner, an' I never woked till I wur at the place where the monkeys an' all them other things wur."

The faces of the two listeners were a study as they listened to this strange story. Yet they knew, that as far as the boy understood things himself, he was telling them the truth. It was evident that he had lived through what he told.

"Well," continued Whif. "I wur sittin' up eatin' some bread an' meat wot I tooked from the kitchen where Peg an' Ginger an' me slept, an' a sailor come down the stairs in the ship, singing

'Oh, won—drous love.'

Whif had a quick ear for music, a rich, sweet voice, and he broke out into this refrain, which had lingered in his brain through all the adventures of the day.

But he did not pause in his recital. "Oh my! yer ought to hev heard him sing. Then after he seed me, he said I must go out o' the ship sharp. So I run up stairs an' out on to the for'n place, an' there wur ever so many monkeys and parrots, an'—oh my!"

A deep sigh escaped Whif here, and he paused for a moment.

"Well, what happened, little man, when you saw the parrots and monkeys?" asked Jonas Hathaway.

"Oh! two sailors come along an' took them all up in cages, an' carried them on the ship.

Then came the story of the goat-carriage, and how he had ollowed it for "hundreds an' hundreds o' miles till it turned into a place, an' never comed out any more."

"When was this, Whif?"

"Oh! someday, once. Then I walked, an' walked, an' walked, till I seed a kitten in a gardin an' I run in arter it, but she jumped frou some bushes an' I lost her. Then I lost myself an' never found myself till I seed you"—Whif pointed to Mr. Hathaway—"havin' yer's dinner, an' then I asked yer 'Can't I hev some, an' then—an' then—'"

Whif had come to the end of his matter, and knew not what to say.

With a merry glance at Mrs. Benson, Jonas Hathaway said, "Well, Whif, and where are you going to next, when you leave here?"

"Oh, my! yer ain't going to send me away, is yer? Please let me stay right along, all the time. Why, I likes yer proper, I does. I likes yer better nor I did Ginger an' Peg, 'cos yer's all so nice an' clean like. I knows I'm dirty, but I don't like bein' dirty, I don't, an' ef the lady here will wash me, she'll find I'm a real beauty—least, ole Peg used to say so, an' so did the people, when I wored my spangle tights."

It was an extraordinary thing to do, but then Jonas Hathaway was an extraordinary man. He took his housekeeper aside and said, "What is to be done, Benson? I feel I can't turn this child out. He is a downright beautiful boy, if he was only washed and decently dressed. I feel strangely drawn towards him. Of course he is slangy, but what can we expect after the life he has led? though it is very evident to me he has been stolen from some place by these tramp people, Peg and Ginger. Of course, I will make some enquiries at the docks, and try to ascertain if he really landed from one of the foreign boats, but for the present I shall keep him here. Will you undertake to cleanse him thoroughly at once? Then take the carriage, go into Southampton, and buy him some clothes—some under-garments, and at least two suits of outer clothing, one fit for best; get it good, get just what you like, and tell them to send the bills in to me.

Jonas Hathaway watched his housekeeper's face as he made this astounding statement. Then he continued, "You don't mind his dirty little highness being an inmate of this house, and a subject of your care, do you?"

"For of such is the kingdom of heaven." Mrs. Benson's voice had a quivering pathos in it as she uttered these words, continuing, "These were the words that came to my heart as I saw the little fellow, with all his dirt, perched upon that chair, sir. He is good enough for God, sir; Christ loves him; who am I, to despise him?" Her voice dropped to a sudden reverential gravity as she spoke the next words, "'Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name, receiveth Me.' Think of that, sir. Receiving this child in the name of Christ, because Christ loved him and died for him, is equivalent to receiving Christ as a guest in the house."

At any other time Jonas Hathaway would have spurned this Bible reference. He *thought* he did not believe in the Bible, but this idea evidently aroused and interested him. His voice was a little husky as he said, with a faint sigh, "You are a good woman, Benson. Perhaps, after all, there *is* something in your way of thinking."

"'There is none righteous (good), no not one.' It is not personal goodness, sir," she replied, "it is Christ Jesus who is the Righteous One. It is not my way of thinking, but God's way that we must follow."

Then, as Jonas Hathaway turned away toward the library, she called Whif to her.

"Right, yes, missus!" shouted the boy, "Eh—oh—ah—houp-la—here we are again!" and with a succession of rapid turns and quaint, laughable twistings, he stood panting at her side.

Slipping his hand into hers, Whif looked up into her face with his roguish smile, saying, "Well, wot's yer say? Is yer goin' to love me? I allus feel all the time as I wants someone to love me."

Mrs. Benson's eyes filled with tears, a smile played round the corners of her mouth, as, forgetful of his dirty face, she clasped him in her arms and kissed him passionately, saying at the same time, "You precious little wheedler! I declare you've won your way into all our hearts."

Whif, open-mouthed, lustrous-eyed, skipped by her side, half wondering whether it was not a dream. He did not know, his childish mind could not yet grasp the thought, that the God who watched the wild boy, Ishmael, and preserved him amid a desert wild, was watching and caring for him.

Perhaps some such thought as this came to Mrs. Benson, but she did not utter it. She pondered all these things in her heart.

CHAPTER IV.

IS POVERTY A CRIME? WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE?

"Want—want—want—want! O God! forgive the crime,
If I, asleep, awake, at any time,
Upon my bended knees, my back, my feet,
In church, on bed, on treasure-lighted street,
Have ever *hinted*, or, much less, have pleaded
That I hadn't ten times over all I needed!
Lord save my soul! I never knew the way
That people starve along from day to day;
May God in Heaven forgive me, o'er and o'er,
That I have never found these folks before!"

THE strong man bowed himself; covering his face with his long white delicate-looking hands, he sobbed as a child might.

"Oh Ralph, Ralph, dear! do not give way, my darling! God will help us soon, I am sure he will." The poor, pale, pinched-faced girl-wife knelt by the man's side as she spoke, and with gentle force pulled down the hands that hid his face, she was shocked, frightened at its expression.

Before she could utter another word, he spoke as he had never spoken before in her hearing, "Don't talk to me about God's help, May. It is all a farce! There is no such thing as a God whom the Christians talk about, a God of love. It is an invention of the long-headed rulers of past ages to keep the common people from rebellion. It is an invention of Rome, or some other priestcraft. God, a God of love? Bah! don't make me angry, my dear. If such a God existed, would he let me walk about day after day, willing to work, yet unable to get it. Would he let me come home tired, hungry, exhausted, despairing, forget my manhood, and sit here and sob like a baby, because of your sufferings. A God of love! and yet let both our lives be wrecked and ruined as they are to-day—we who love each other as we do. A God of love! and yet cause both our father's hearts to be steeled against us as they are—we dying slowly from sheer want, and they, to use the words of that canting book, the Bible, are 'clothed in fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day.' Aha! my dear May, there is but one God that I know; his name is Luck.' Once he was on my side, but now he has set his face dead against me. Don't pretend to talk cant my darling; you don't believe in the God of the Bible any more than I do; but because you are hungry, tired, weak and low, the superstition assails you, just as nervousness might another woman in the same condition. Once for all, poor little wife, let us determine to die if needs be, but not be superstitious fools."

Then his voice was lowered as he continued, "If the worst comes to the worst, we can fire a pan of charcoal and die together."

Mrs. Ranger shuddered as her husband spoke this last sentence, but though she knew she could not argue with him, yet some old words persisted in ringing in her ears. "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have *life*." And with a faint sigh, and thick-falling, silent tears, she thought of her dear old nurse-mother, her father's faithful housekeeper, and wished she was near to speak words of comfort.

Her conscience troubled her; she remembered how she had despised the teaching of this friend. Then suddenly the thought rushed wildly through her brain, "Why not write to her? Why not let her know where we are, and in what need we are?" Then, equally as suddenly, her heart sank, for she had solemnly promised her husband she would not in any way communicate with any of her friends.

Meanwhile her husband had flung himself wearily upon the bed, and turned his face to the wall; she knew he was thinking, brooding, and that she must not disturb him.

Slowly her own weary brain commenced to revolve the thoughts to which he had just given expression.

He had sneered at a God of love; yet somehow she could not help feeling in this her time of distress and need, that the thousands of intelligent people in the world who believed in, who trusted this God, were not all liars and hypocrites.

Then came a question to her heart which brought a flush of shame to her face. "Is God responsible for our poverty and need?"

Picture after picture passed before her mind's eye in reply, that only condemned her, and deepened the conviction that He was not.

Once more she stood in her father's library. She the idol of his heart, the mistress of his widowed home. He was dealing tenderly with her, telling her to wait awhile, before she pledged herself to gay, thoughtless, thriftless Ralph Ranger—to wait until his position was somewhat assured, until he had in some way fitted himself to battle with life.

Was she mad that morning? What evil spirit possessed her? It was the spirit of self-will. She turned with flashing eye, uttering cruel, wicked, ungrateful words to her astonished father, and, with the final declaration that she *would* marry Ralph Ranger, and just when she pleased, she had flounced out of the room.

Another picture came up accusingly before her. A quiet wedding in a London church. She seemed again to hear the



"Oh Ralph, Ralph, dear! do not give way, my darling!"

words, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church." May Ranger could order a troublesome intruder out of her room, or run away from him herself, but she could not do this with this picture, this thought. If there was no such God, then what became of her marriage? It must have been a farce; there was nothing binding in it. For she had been wedded in His divine name.

Troubled, oppressed, she buried her face in her hands to think.

Perhaps it was the shutting out of all the dingy shabbiness of that wretched bedroom and sitting-room combined, that helped her mind, her conscience, to produce the next picture.

They were roaming amid the loveliest spots on the continent, lingering longest, most delightedly, in Switzerland.

Sitting here, in their one wretched room, in this dirty back street, leading out of the Hampstead Road, London, some old lines came back to her heart with taunting, tantalizing power, making the contrast greater still between that time and the present.

“Homeward I gladly hastened back;
Summer was in the vales below,
Lingering among the purple vines;
But here the early winter's snow
Already fringed the dusky pines.
I met upon the steep ascent
The Alpine herdsmen and their flocks,
Their shouts re-echoing from the rocks,
And cow-bells tinkling as they went.”

Silent tears were streaming down the face of May Ranger, as the thought of the lavish expenditure on that wedding tour came back to her.

The joy of her six weeks amid the wildest gaieties of Parisian life now came to her heart, flogging her with relentless remorse.

to get a clerkship of some easy kind that would suit him, some situation where, like the fountains in Trafalgar Square, “he would *play* from ten to four.” He tried, in short, every way to get money without working or stealing, and very naturally he failed. He spent much pains in making a very hard, bitter bed to lie upon, and then sought to shift the blame upon others.

Ralph Ranger denied the Bible *in toto*, or he would have seen himself reflected in Adam, who shrank from bearing the blame of his own sin and said, “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.”

When he came home on this particular day, he was more than usually upset. Not only had he failed again in his quest for a well-paid sinecure, but he felt he had got the worst of an argument with a stranger which he himself had provoked.

He had seated himself wearily upon one of the stone seats on Waterloo Bridge. There was no other occupant, save a silver-haired little old lady, who was at the moment engaged in taking a small white paper parcel from a reticule.

At first he took no further notice of her beyond the first passing glance. Presently, however, the appetising smell of some choice-cut ham sandwiches caused him involuntarily to look round. She was a sharp-eyed little woman, and without



“Will you pardon an old lady's whim, sir?”

“Is God responsible for your poverty?”

All her intelligence declared “No!”

Ralph Ranger was weak, unstable as water. Frivolous, gay, extravagant. He had been handsome before the sorrow which he had made for himself and his young pretty wife had stamped him as a soured, disappointed man. He had not been so desperately in love with May Hathaway, until objections were made to the match by his own and by May's father. This piqued him, made him obstinately persistent, and he easily persuaded the infatuated girl to meet him at Waterloo Station, and be married at once.

Arrived in England after their continental roamings, he expected his father would have made over to him a sufficient sum to live upon, instead of which he found a curt note awaiting his return in which he utterly repudiated him. All this was six years before the opening of our story.

He had no knowledge of any other accomplishment or occupation save that of pleasing self, “killing time.” He tried

letting Ralph know that she had caught his hungry glance, she quietly took complete stock of him.

She saw the delicacy of his hands, she noted the cut of his shabby clothes. She saw that the cracked and split patent leather boots he wore, had been of the most expensive class; she even saw the quivering, watering corners of his mouth, and knew that he was hungry,

With a gentle, tender delicacy she leant forward, saying, “Will you pardon an old lady's whim, sir, but I have a horror of eating alone; will you help me out with these sandwiches, and join me an *al fresco* lunch.”

How could he refuse, when it was put in this way? In another moment he was devouring the sandwiches as greedily as the remains of his gentility would allow before a stranger.

What a clever little woman she was! she had hardly taken a bite herself before she discovered that there was mustard upon the meat, and declared she could not eat mustard at any time. Once more the little reticule was opened and a few

biscuits were taken out; while she laughingly said, "Forgive me for attempting to impose on your good nature, but I should be pleased if you would finish the sandwiches, there really is nothing of them."

Then she had talked brightly of many things, bringing the conversation round to the goodness of God.

Ralph Ranger had been the glad recipient of her kindness, how could he leave her abruptly because he did not care for this new topic! He was obliged to reply to her question, "Of course you believe in God, the God of the Bible, the God who loved us, and loves us still, loves us always; who gave His only begotten Son to die for us."

"I am sorry to offend your kind heart, madam, but I must be candid—I do not believe in Him," Ralph had said.

What a grave, pitying, tender voice that was that replied, "I am so sorry! You have lost so much, my friend. You deny the Bible which explains man's helpless, pain-stricken, sorrowful life as the result of the Fall; but in thus thrusting away from you the Bible, you thrust away the only comfort, joy and lasting happiness left for our poor fallen race. Denying the Fall does not prove that it is not a fact, neither does it help you to escape its consequences."

Ralph looked at the speaker in bewildered astonishment. If he had been alone with this new thought, and had carefully analysed his mind upon the subject, he would have been convinced that mentally he had never doubted the existence of God.

"The fool hath said in *his heart* there is no God." Ah! Ralph Ranger! it is only natural that your *heart* should repudiate divine truth, because it is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Your "deceived heart hath turned *you* aside;" you have "become vain in your imaginations, and your foolish heart is darkened."

Gently, but firmly, did this soft-voiced, gentle, silver-haired, old lady press these truths upon him.

Then she startled him, as, taking a new testament from her pocket, she read, "He that believeth on Him (Jesus) is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light."

"Just see what you are doing, dear friend, by thus rejecting the truth of God about yourself and your future; you are flaunting your death-warrant in His face, and you fling your pardon from you. You cannot escape the sorrows of this life, of this world, but you reject the joy of God, the companionship of Christ, the eternal sympathy of a loving Father, and the everlasting rapture of heaven." She leaned forward and laid her little gloved hand upon Ralph's wrist as she spoke the next words: "You have moved in good circles I can see. You are not a dissolute man, vice has not been your ruin, but you need a God like the God of the Bible. You need the sacrifice of Jesus. The precious blood of the Lamb is the only thing that can help you. The atonement of Christ will meet your difficulty. You look worn out in this battle of life, I can see it, and my eyes are not over good at sixty-five years of age. How much more does God see this! and Jesus says to you through me to-day, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.'"

One of those accidents common enough in the streets of the metropolis occurred just at this moment, close to the spot where the conversation had taken place. The place was soon crowded with people, and Ralph lost sight of the dear old saint who had thus sought to help him.

All the way home he had thought of these things, but the evil of his own proud heart rose fiercely to his lips; thus it happened he had spoken more sneeringly of God and His love to poor May than ever before. And now, with face turned to the wall, and fierce, bitter thoughts in his heart, he lay upon the bed, while his wife sorrowed with bowed head and crushed heart in that shabby covered chair by the window.

CHAPTER V.

AN IMPROMPTU PROGRAMME.

"**N**OW then, walk up, walk up, please! jist agoin' to commence." And as he shouted his invitation the irrepressible Whif strutted up and down in the comical style of some travelling showman.

The chairs were placed in two rows, with an open space in front of them. It was seven o'clock on the evening of that identical Saturday when he had suddenly appeared in his odd garb at the door of Mr. Hathaway's dining-room.

His visit to Southampton with Mrs. Benson during the afternoon had resulted in quite a wonderful transformation, and he now appeared in a dark velveteen knickerbocker suit, coloured stockings, low shoes, and a broad lace collar, turned deeply over the shoulders of his tunic. His hair had been carefully trimmed and shampooed, and now clustered in beautiful glossy black curls all over his head. There was no doubt, he was a singularly handsome boy. The first sight of Whif in his new attire had caused a very visible start on the part of Jonas Hathaway. Who was this boy like? Of whom did he remind him? With a puzzled expression upon his face he unconsciously glanced at Mrs. Benson, and found her gaze fixed intently upon him. In a half audible voice, and with just a shade of yearning in it, he asked "Who is he like, Benson?"

"Like?—like dear Miss May, sir!" Not another word passed between them, but both had their own thoughts. In an unlucky moment Mr. Hathaway had said to Whif, "What would you like to do?" and was met with the startling reply, "Let's play shows, shall we?"

It was a new rôle altogether for this soured, moody, embittered man, but he seemed to have no power to resist, and became a humble subject to this youthful tyrant. So, to humour the whim of Whif, he had explained to Mrs. Benson, when she came into the room, what was expected of them, saying in a tone of apology "He is not much more than a baby, so we must let him have a little fun."

"I'm the man wot takes the money," said Whif, "so you'll have ter pay for yer seats, yer know."

When a moment or two later Mr. Hathaway walked gravely up, he dropped a threepenny piece into the little olive-coloured outstretched palm, and was as gravely ushered into the front row of seats. When, however, Mrs. Benson approached, and gave the juvenile paytaker a penny, she was coolly relegated to the back seats.

Then for a quarter of an hour they watched the clever antics of Whif, as he performed all his little tricks, accompanied by much quaint gesture and exclamation.

Poor Mrs. Benson had never been to a theatre or circus in her life. In her early days she would have been horrified, and now in her Christian life would not have dared to go, or cared to go, because other higher, holier things filled her heart. She knew no heart-Christian would ever dare to go to such places and ask God for Christ's sake to bless the performance to the soul, and give some Divine strength out of it. And as she sat watching the gyrations of the graceful little Whif she determined to so teach him of Christ, and the sweetness of a holy life and service, that he should of his own free will and choice, love better things.

At eight o'clock she went to the drawing-room to take him to bed. She found him sitting upon a low stool, holding one knee in his hand, talking very old-fashionedly to her master. On hearing her message he sprang to his feet.

"Say good-night to Mr. Hathaway, my dear," she said. Whif bounded back across the hearthrug, then stood looking for a moment in the gentleman's face. Tears slowly gathered in his little dark eyes, then he said, "You have been the bestest gennelman I ever see to me, an' I do love yer; may I kiss yer, please?"

Mr. Hathaway opened his arms and Whif sprang into them, and kissed, and was kissed in return, most heartily. Then, when he had sprung again to the side of Mrs. Benson, he looked back, saying, "You is proper, you is! Good night!"

Was this her cold, sullen master? this man who had kissed that boy, whom he never saw before to-day, so rapturously? Well might Mrs. Benson wonder at the change.

For the first time that he could remember little Whif was taught to pray that night. It took some time to explain what it all meant, but the eager, intelligent little fellow understood at last, and repeated the dictated words carefully after Mrs. Benson. When the final "Amen" came she said "That will do, that is all to-night."

But Whif did not rise from his knees. Turning up his beautiful eyes he looked into her face and said, "Won't God do sumfin fur Peg an' Ginger ef I arks Him?"

"Yes, my dear! would you like to?"

"Ef yer please." Then the little fellow bent his head again and said, with a glad eagerness, "An', I say, please, good Jesus, look arter poor ole Peg, an don't let Ginger hit her about. It don't matter about him 'cos he can look arter hisself, an' knows how to fight."

Then Whif was undressed and robed in a white night-gown. A look of awe crept over his face, and his voice had a strange

subdued tone in it as he said, "Am I goin' to be a hangel, an' hev wings, 'cos I hev seed the pictures of hangels an' they had these white things on."

How forcibly came the old verse to the mind of Mrs. Benson, "Their angels (the children's angels), do always behold the face of My Father which is in Heaven." And as she looked at the lovely face before her the command came to her, "Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will give thee thy wages."

She took her trust, this sacred trust, as from God at that moment. No wonder she almost smothered the beautiful boy as she gathered him into her arms and showered kisses upon him.

The Sunday which followed this eventful day was full of wonders for Whif. He had never been in a place of worship before. The music coming from some unseen spot above and behind him; the volume of song when all the congregation joined their voices; the sudden stillness, the bowed heads as they bent in prayer; the rows of happy-faced children who sang the children's hymn in the service; the deep, sonorous voice of the speaker—all these things were so many marvels to Whif. It was very evident that he was boiling over with questions, but he had learned the lesson well which Mrs. Benson had tried to teach him before he went, and reserved them all until the service was over.

As Mr. Hathaway indulged in a nap on Sunday afternoon, his housekeeper wondered how she could interest her little charge. Remembering there was a large family Bible, with coloured prints in it, somewhere in the library, she found it out, and took Whif to a shady bower at the end of one of the lower terraces, and commenced to show the eager boy the pictures, explaining them as simply as she could.

Presently she came to one representing the first passover, which rivetted the attention of Whif.

She read the first few verses of Exodus xii., and then put the story into simple language—"They kept the lamb four days before they killed it. Then——"

She was interrupted by Whif, who said, "Wot for? Wot did they keep it for four days afore they killed it?"

An unknown listener on the other side of the bower smiled at this question, and listened as eagerly as the boy for the answer, which came readily from Mrs. Benson. "Because, my darling, God knew that all the children would get fond of the lamb during that four days, and would say to their fathers, 'What do you kill the pretty thing for, father?' Then the little children's father would be able to teach them that some day God would Himself provide a Lamb, His own Son, who should be the great Saviour for all the world.

"That's the one wot you told me about last night an' 'smorning, ain't it?" said Whif.

And again the story was told to the boy of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

How much did he understand?

Much more than Mr. Hathaway thought possible.

And what of this listener—what of Jonas Hathaway himself? Very much of this simple talk was a revelation to him.

He had been accustomed to attend service on the Sunday morning occasionally. He had sat through the services as he sat in the train on his journeys to London. Railway travelling was a bore. He did the best he could to amuse himself during the time. He gave no thought about the road (he had seen it so often), and with a sigh of relief he hurried out of Waterloo Station, thankful that the horrid process was over for a time. So to him these Sunday services were a terrible bore, and he gave a glad sigh of relief at their close, and hurried off, thankful that they were over *for a time*. The mistake he had always made was in supposing that a simple attendance at one of the enquiry offices of the Divine railway, where the line of route and conditions of travel were explained, was sufficient to warrant him in supposing that he would arrive at the universal destination (Heaven), somehow, at last. Now as he listened to Mrs. Benson's talk with Whif he heard enough to set him thinking that more was needed than he had ever apprehended before.

When, that evening, the boy had been put to bed, and Jonas Hathaway heard Mrs. Benson come downstairs to her own room again, he rang for her.

"Are you busy, Benson?" said he.

"No, sir"

"Then I wish you would sit down a little while with me, I want to talk to you." Then he told the astonished woman, that he had heard her talk with Whif in the afternoon, and

though he had always rather pooh-poohed her religion before, he could not help confessing that there was much that to him was startling in what he had heard. He even told her that he had *endured* services as he did a railway journey, and always supposed that his goodness and morality added to his nominal acceptance of the Christian creed, and his occasional attendance at the House of God, would entitle him to heaven at last.

It was scarcely to be wondered at that Mrs. Benson's face, while grave, had the faintest suspicion of a smile upon it as she said, "You must forgive me, sir, if I am very plain with you, because the consequences are so great—your soul's salvation. Would you expect that an occasional attendance at Southampton Railway Station, and the listening to what the line inspector, porter, or ticket issuer told you about the line, the route, the time, would assure your arrival at London?"

"Hardly, Benson!" replied Mr. Hathaway.

"What else would you need to do, sir?"

"Take my ticket, and get into the right train, of course, Benson," he replied.

"Have you ever taken your ticket, sir?" The voice of Mrs. Benson was full of yearning, tender enquiry. She waited a moment for the answer, which came slowly.

"I am not at all sure that I know what the ticket is."

Mrs. Benson's heart was raised to God for wisdom as she replied, "The wording on the tickets may vary a little, but the actual pass is 'The blood of Christ.' 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' 'Ye who were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' 'We have redemption through His Blood, even the forgiveness of sins.' 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.' No one can reach Heaven without this cleansing blood, sir. The whole teaching of the Bible about the journey clusters round Jesus, and his atonement. You cannot get to London on that South-Western Railway unless you get on the line—the *way*. God calls the journey to heaven a getting on the way. 'A highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness.' Then, when we wonder which among all the ways talked about is the right way, we hear Jesus Himself say, 'I am the Way; no man cometh unto the Father except by Me.' So we come to where alone there is salvation—we come to Jesus."

There was a perplexed tone in Mr. Hathaway's voice as he said, "But how can we come to Jesus? How come to someone whom we cannot see?"

"Do you never transact business by letter, sir? Have you never closed with an offer without seeing the face of the other party?"

Mr. Hathaway assented, and Mrs. Benson continued, "God offers you salvation in and through His Son. He has written it down, sent it to you in the Bible, sir, and asks you to believe His testimony. Come to the call of Jesus. Look at Him!

"Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary."

And God cries to us, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' And while we look at those wounds, and wonder if we dare believe the wondrous truth of His atonement for us, we hear the words, 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of *our* peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.'

"Upon Him!" murmured Mr. Hathaway. "Upon Him! I will go to my own room, Benson, and think this out. Good night!"

"Good night, sir."

CHAPTER VI.

REMINISCENCES.

"I think," said the dear little fellow,
With a grave and gentle grace,
That the prettiest thing in all the world
Is just my mother's face."

"CAN I come in?" The voice was that of the little silver-haired woman whom we saw befriending Ralph Ranger on Waterloo Bridge. She was dressed almost exactly as we saw her last, and was standing for the moment on the landing outside the room occupied by the Rangers.

It is nearly twelve months since she first met Ralph. She had discovered his abode and his poverty, and learned somewhat of his history.

But for her loving ministrations the work-house must have been the lot of the unfortunate pair, for the bondage of pride still held Ralph Ranger, and her promise to her husband bound May's tongue.

Ralph Ranger was lying where he always lay now, a weak and wasted wretch, upon his bed. When Mrs. Sinclair passed into the room his dull eye brightened. It was evident that she had won her way into his heart, though she often wished that he would accept her Saviour as readily as he had accepted herself.

One glance at his sallow face and sunken eyes made her think that the end was near. He could not live many days, and her eye travelled in sympathetic love toward his sorrowing young wife.

Mrs. Sinclair came specially this evening to wish them good-bye for a time. She was going into Hampshire, she said, to visit her only sister. Again she urged Ralph to accept Christ. Again she met with that decisive shake of the head. It was evident that there was something to which the poor fellow was clinging.

If Ralph's persistent refusal puzzled this dear old saint, equally so did his wife's attitude. She gave a weak, verbal assent to all that was advanced, but evidently never once apprehended the two great truths,—her sin, and therefore her need of a Saviour; and the fulness of salvation provided for her in Christ.

May Ranger's god was her husband! She would have been horrified had any one declared it, but it was none the less true. There was no room for any other thought but about him, and Mrs. Sinclair partly guessed that this was the barrier.

"I shall not be away more than a week, I think," said Mrs. Sinclair, in parting, and she pressed a sovereign into poor May's hand. When the door closed upon the kindly, genial soul, it seemed to May that night settled upon her, so accustomed had she become to her almost daily visits; and now she was gone for a week, at least. She shivered as she thought what might happen in a week. And, while her poor heart yearned for tenderness, one stood by and cried, "How oft would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens, but ye would not."

* * * *

Twelve months had brought changes in the beautiful home of Jonas Hathaway.

Once more it is the 31d of August, the anniversary of May's flight, but he is no longer the wretched misanthrope he was twelve months ago.

The day after that talk with Mrs. Benson, he was beguiled again into playing with Whif. This time the game was trains and railways. Whif showed a great amount of unexpected shrewdness in dealing with his mock rolling stock and the whole play in general.

His tiny soul had become so enamoured with the wondrous stories that Mrs. Benson had told him, and his quick retentive memory had stored the names of persons and places, that even his play was coloured with them.

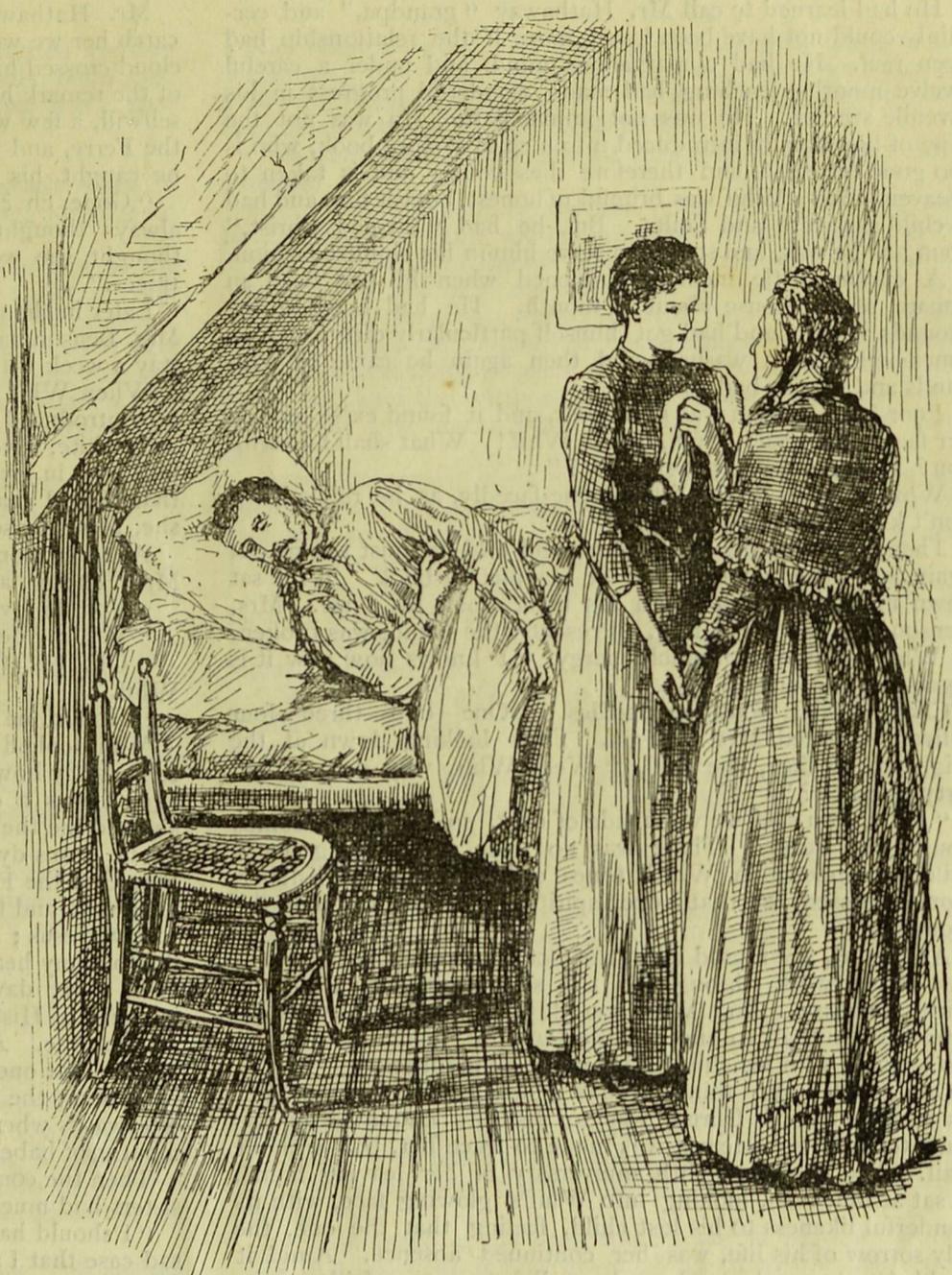
It was astonishing how many personages, offices, and objects he managed to combine in his one tiny self. He explained:

"I'm engine, buffers, train, porters, guard, ticket-chap, an' everything else, 'cept passengers, and you's got to be them. You's s'posed to hev got out of Palladise," (Whif meant Paradise). And Mr. Hathaway, though silent, quite agreed that he had got out of Paradise.

"Where does you want to go to, sir?" asked Whif in continuation.

Perhaps it was thinking of "Paradise Lost," or it might be that it was because his soul was full of thoughts of Divine things, that made Jonas Hathaway answer as he did: "I think I should like to go to Heaven, little man," said he.

"All right, sir, where's your ticket, please? Because you can't go to Heaven without a ticket, nor yet nowheres else."



She pressed a sovereign into May's hand.

Before the would-be passenger could reply, Mrs. Benson appeared suddenly upon the scene. She had heard Whif's remark, and as her master looked towards the door their eyes met. Jonas Hathaway did not flinch from her gaze as he had done the day before, but with an expressive smile, he replied to her look rather than to Whif's request. "Thank God, I have got my ticket now!"

The voice of Whif took a subdued, reverent tone, as he said, "What did you say 'Thank God' fur? Did he giv yer yer ticket?"

Still looking at Mrs. Benson, Mr. Hathaway replied, "Yes, he gave it me. It was 'by grace, through faith—not by works, lest I should boast.'"

"I don't know nothing about that there, please. But ef yer wants to go to Heaven, jump up, an' go straight on." This was from Whif.

"Thank God!" The tears of joy streamed down the face of Mrs. Benson as he gave that one word of praise.

All that happened twelve months ago. Whif has grown in every way. He has developed into a perfect little gentleman, is the idol of the house, but is not spoiled, because Mr. Hathaway, as well as Mrs. Benson, have learned to train him for God.

Neither of them can understand why the boy should remind them both of the lost May, but he does, more so every day. They have never been able to trace out anything in reference to his antecedents. There were, however, two curious physical marks by which he might one day be identified. The top joint of the little finger upon the right hand was gone; he had evidently been born without it; and he had an unmistakeable mark upon his left shoulder.

He had learned to call Mr. Hathaway "grandpa," and certainly could not have been loved more if the relationship had been real. He had a marvellous mind, and under a careful twelve months' teaching had made wonderful progress in his juvenile studies. He was not immaculate. He was not the type of boy usually introduced into a child's story book, who is too good for earth, and therefore dies young and is taken to Heaven. No; Whif was brimful of honest, boyish fun, and had a child's nature and faults. But he had "learned Christ," young as he was, and strove to serve him in his childish fashion.

A curious little incident happened when he had been an inmate of the house about a month. He had been in the grounds at play, and had got himself particularly dirty. Three times he had been washed, and then again he came in with hands and face as bad as ever.

Poor Mrs. Benson was in despair, and it found expression in her face, as she said, "Oh, Whif, Whif! What shall I do with you? How is it you get so dirty?"

Whif hung his head a little shame-facedly, as he replied, "I don't know, I'm sure."

Then once more he was washed, and told he must not go out again, but sit down and look at his picture-book. Whif sat down upon a low stool with his book upon his knee. Mrs. Benson sat silently knitting. Presently the silence was broken, as Whif declared with much energy, "I knows now how it is I gets dirty so quick!"

Click! click! went the needles. "One—two—three—four—five," counted Mrs. Benson. Then looking down at the bright eager face, she said, "Well, Whif, why do you get dirty so quick?"

"Why, you said we was made of dust, so I 'spects it comes frough the skin!" There was no trace of anything but a child's simplicity in Whif's tones of reply, and his listener, though amused, felt that a deep spiritual truth ran through the thought.

As she sat, she mused upon the fact that somehow the earth-dust does work through to the surface of even the most spiritual nature. And Whif, on this first anniversary of his entrance into that, to him, earthly Paradise, had much of the earth mixed with his childish heavenly-mindedness.

One of the first things Jonas Hathaway had done after his acceptance of Christ, was to institute enquiries for his daughter. Every attempt was made to trace her, but without avail. And on this seventh anniversary of her leaving home, he sat at luncheon, looking into Whif's glowing face, with its wonderful likeness to his lost child, feeling that the one, the only sorrow of his life, was her continued absence. Amid it all, his heart was buoyed up by a living, active faith in the God who overrules. He prayed daily for his lost May, and had that mysterious consciousness that we call the "assurance of faith" that God would yet unite them.

"We live by faith, but God by sight;
He sees the heart; help, too, he sees,
Which travelling onward through the night,
Will on the morrow give you ease.
He prompts the praying to endure,
Because the promised help is sure."

The luncheon was an unusually silent one, for Whif was still and thoughtful. At last his little rich voice broke the silence.

"Gran'pa! I do wish I had a mother. I mean a real mother, who was my very own. Nurse Benson is so kind, but I should so like a mother of my own. Do you know, gran'pa, sometimes when I shut my eyes and think, I can almost make out what my own mother was like. I can't remember Peg or Ginger stealing me away, but I know they did now, because lots of things come into my mind that I have heard the people in the lodging-house say. Do you think, gran'pa, I shall ever be able to find out my mother? I think sometimes if I could see poor old Peg and ask her, she would tell me, now, where she took me from."

Tears stood in Whif's beautiful eyes as he continued, "I know that if I love Jesus, I shall go to heaven when I die, and then I shall see my mother—that is if—" he gave a little sigh as he said in a subdued voice, "if she loves Jesus too. I hope she does."

Mr. Hathaway did his best to comfort the boy's heart, and among other things, said, "I never thought of it before, Whif, until you spoke, but I tell you what I will do. I will try and find out Peg and Ginger, and then trace out your mother, if she is still alive."

"What do you mean by trace, gran'pa. Do you mean fasten her so that she can't get away, like Robert puts the traces on the horses?"

Mr. Hathaway smiled as he replied, "Well, Whif, if we catch her we will try and keep her in traces." Then a little cloud crossed his brow. His use of that word reminded him of the remark he had overheard in reference to his own child's selfwill, a few weeks after her leaving home. He was crossing the Ferry, and was standing near two young gentlemen, when he caught his own name, and listened to the conversation.

"Gone, eh? Gone with Ralph Ranger, has she? Well, I always thought she was a high-spirited girl, though I hardly thought she would defy her father like that and kick over the traces."

Later in the afternoon Whif was full of a new excitement, Mrs. Benson had told him that her only sister was coming to stay a week with her, and that he was sure to like her.

When Whif therefore entered the housekeeper's room and was introduced to Mrs. Sinclair, and looked at her beautiful, soft, white, silvery hair, and her sweet face, he said thoughtfully, but in joyous tones, "I am sure I shall like you, or more than that, I shall love you I know; you look so good, doesn't she, Mrs. Benson?"

Another moment and Whif was gathered into the arms of Mrs. Sinclair, and kissed quite rapturously.

"You do love Jesus, don't you, Mrs. Sinclair?"

"Yes, my dear boy; and do you?" she asked him.

"Oh, yes, that I do—more and more every day," replied Whif.

"How came you, a little boy, to love Him so?"

Whif looked confidently in her face as he said, "I cannot tell exactly how it was; but when I came here ever so long ago, I was a dirty, ragged, naughty boy and Mrs. Benson showed me the pictures in my grandpa's Bible, and told me about Jesus dying for all the world, and dying for me, and how God the Father gave His only Son to die; and I used to lie awake and think about it, and then somehow, I didn't try to love Jesus; but it seemed that He loved me so much that it broke my heart, and made me sorry I had ever grieved Him. And, every day and every night, when I was awake, I thought so much of His love, that before I knew it I was loving Him all the time. And now the text in my bedroom, which I like best is that one, 'Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.'"

"Bless the dear boy!" said Mrs. Sinclair a few minutes afterwards when he had left the room. "Surely 'out of the mouths of babes has God perfected His praise.'"

Then the conversation drifted into general subjects, for the sisters had much to say to each other.

"I should have come quite a week ago, my dear, but for a sad case that I am interested in, and I am not quite sure that I ought to have left now, yet God seemed to make it so manifest to me that I was to come and see you, that I just committed them to His care, and came off. Poor things, they are both young, and I should think they were rich at some time, and well connected. They married against their friends wishes I hear. They are now in the deepest poverty, the husband is dying, I am sure, and will not have Jesus. Think of it, sister dear! Dying in the dark. Dying with a heart full of rebellion to Christ, and his wife, poor Mrs. Ranger—"

"Mrs. Ranger! Oh, Catherine! what is his Christian name? Have you ever heard it? Tell me quick!" Mrs. Benson had started excitedly to her feet as she spoke, and now stood almost breathless with anxiety.

"Ralph!" replied the astonished Mrs. Sinclair.

"And *her* name is May!" continued her sister.

"Yes!"

"No wonder God made it manifest for you to come now, Catherine. Do you not understand, our dear May, Mr. Hathaway's daughter, ran away with a Ralph Ranger. I must go and tell the master at once. But stay, let me show you the dear girl's likeness, you will be able to recognise it, of course." As she spoke Mrs. Benson opened an album, and pointed silently to a cabinet photo of a beautiful girl.

"It is her, undoubtedly! But how altered!" Before Mrs. Sinclair had concluded that last sentence, she found herself alone. Mrs. Benson had hurried away to find Mr. Hathaway, and tell him the strange and wonderful news.

In less than half-an-hour Jonas Hathaway was on his way to London.

* * * *

We dare not attempt to describe the meeting between Jonas Hathaway and his child, May. He was shocked at the change in her appearance, and distressed at her miserable surroundings, but oh, how his heart yearned over her in love!

At the first sound of his voice, Ralph Ranger turned his face to the wall, and closed his eyes, his heart proudly rebellious. But, as he listened, it dawned upon him that this was a new Jonas Hathaway.

What was that he was saying?

"Oh, my darling! my precious child! I have advertised in almost every paper, at home and abroad, hoping, longing to find you."

As Mr. Hathaway's tender words fell upon the ears of the listening sufferer, his heart opened towards the speaker. Mr. Hathaway's first words broke down the last bit of icy pride.

"Forgive me, dear Ralph, for being hard upon you and dear May in the past. I am a different man now. I hope you will find in the future years that I shall have caught some of the gentleness of Him whose name I profess, whom I love—Jesus Christ."

"Future years!" replied Ralph, in hollow, painful tones. "There are no 'future years' for me. Mr. Hathaway. I am dying; I doubt if I shall live many days."

May knelt at the bedside sobbing. The sick man lay exhausted, looking into Mr. Hathaway's face, watching him curiously as he took a small Bible from his pocket and commenced to read. His hand rested lightly on the jet black hair of the kneeling May. The words had a new power to himself as he read them:—"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And He came and touched the bier; and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother."

Closing the book, he said, "The Christ who forgave me my sins, and made me a new creature in Himself, raised that young man to life. Now listen to me, dear children, I am going to pray that He will restore poor Ralph."

It was new to Ralph and his wife. Their hearts were tender now, and but dimly understanding it all, they yet joined mutely in the prayer.

What a prayer it was! Ralph opened his eyes once to look at Mr. Hathaway, then closed them again in deepest reverence.

Rising from his knees Mr. Hathaway said, "We have asked God to help us, and I believe He will. You, Ralph, must make up your mind to get well, and by to-morrow afternoon, please God, we will have you snugly placed at the old home."

They could only weep for joy at the prospect. Somehow, there was something in the confident tone of Mr. Hathaway's voice that inspired both May and Ralph with strong hope.

CHAPTER VII.

WHIF FINDS HIS MOTHER.

"O Home—restful home! theme of praise and of song!
Where the heart has its refuge, unfailling and strong;
Where the cares of the world sign a partial release,
And the soul can lie down to a sweet sleep of peace!
The mine whence we dig our affection's pure gold,
The fire where we warm our poor hearts when they're cold!
The grand, tender chorus, by love's fingers stirred,
Where all the sweet tones of the soul-life are heard"

"**N**OW, dear Miss May, you come down and have your tea in the dear old dining-room. Your father is waiting for you. There was a tone of suppressed weeping in Mrs. Benson's voice as she pleaded. In truth, her eyes had not been quite free from tears all the day.

Another voice repeated the request, for poor Ralph Ranger said in brisker tones than May had heard for months, "Do go my darling! I shall be all right now."

Kissing her husband, she turned towards the door, leaning upon Mrs. Benson's arm. As they passed down, shrieks of childish laughter came floating up the stairs, while Whif's voice was heard crying delightedly, "Bravo! gran'pa."

May paused for a moment and smiled sadly as she listened. "How old is this little boy you have got, Benson?" she asked.

"About six, or a little over, we judge, Miss May," she replied.

May Ranger sighed, and her eyes flooded with tears, as she murmured, "My child! I christened him Jonas after papa, he would have been six years, now. Oh my darling! my pet one! shall I ever see you again? God help me!"

Overcome with emotion she sat down upon the stairs for a moment.

It had been a trying day for her. The anxiety of her husband's removal; the sudden reaction from almost abject despair; the sight of the old home and old faces; her own old room looking just as it was when she so hastily left it; this child's merry laughter; even the term "gran'pa," by which the child called her father—all these things helped to unnerve her. But recovering herself she rose and passed down the stairs, catching the words as she crossed the hall, "Grandpa! I mean to love her. What must I call her? Auntie May, eh?"

Jonas Hathaway took his daughter to his arms, his lips quivering as he said, "Praise God, dear child, for bringing you safe back to the old nest! Now come and have some tea. But I must introduce you to our little Whif."

Turning towards the boy, they both noticed a strange, puzzled expression upon his handsome face. His eyes were fixed upon May Ranger; he seemed fascinated as he gazed intently into her face.

"What is it, Whif? What is it, my boy?" asked Jonas Hathaway. "Can't you come and shake hands with the lady?"

Glancing from May to her father, Whif advanced a step or two and then said, "Your face is like the face I sometimes see when I think of my—"

He burst into a flood of tears as he said, "Oh I wish you could be my mother, dear lady."

He put up his arms toward her, and kneeling before the beautiful child she kissed him again and again. Then holding him at arms length a moment, a strange, wild, eager look crept into her eyes as she cried, "Father! Benson! who is this child? Do you not see a likeness to me, and—"

"Yes! yes!" broke in Mrs. Benson with amazed delight; and his right hand—"

But before she could finish the sentence May Ranger was sobbing and laughing and waving Whif's little right hand triumphantly in the air, exclaiming, between her sobs, "It is! It is! It is my own child. Here is his little finger with its missing joint."

Locked in each others arms, mother and child wept together.

With a beautiful, tender grace, Whif raised the poor, worn, wasted hand of his new-found mother to his lips, and kissed it, saying, "How good Jesus is to find my own dear mother for me."

After tea, Whif said, "Gran'pa, will you read 'lost sheep,' please, for prayer time?"

Mr. Hathaway seemed to be struggling with some thought for a moment or two. Then he replied, saying, "I should like our little Whif to read it for us. Will you dear?"

"Yes, gran'pa, if it will please my mother and you."

So he read the first seven verses of the Fifteenth of Luke.

His little rich voice had a touch of glad, holy, joyful reverence in it, that filled the old, old story with a new pathos.

Then they knelt, and, amid sobs and tears, thanks were given for God's wondrous mercy.

* * * * *
Twelve months have passed, oh! so quickly to all the inmates of Mr. Hathaway's house.

Ralph recovered wonderfully, though he never again enjoyed robust health.

May yielded her heart to God the second day after her return home, after a long and touching talk with her little Whif. He told her how Christ's love to him had won his heart, then added, "You will let Him have your heart, mamma, will you not?"

"I want Him to have it, my darling," she replied; "but I do not understand how He takes it."

"No, more do I, mamma," said Whif, "but one of the texts on my bedroom wall says, 'If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.' And I asked Nurse Benson what that meant, and she said, 'Opening the door was being willing for Jesus to come in; then he would 'come in' Himself.'"

May Ranger was willing. Her heart's door was swung widely open, and Christ entered.



Kneeling before the beautiful child.

CHAPTER VIII.

PEG'S CONFESSION

"With drooping head, and voice so low,
That scarce it meets the listener's ears,—
While through her clasped fingers flow,
From heart's deep fountain, hot and slow,
Her penitential tears,—
She tells the story of the woe
And evil of her years.
'— O bear with me; my heart
Is sick and death-like, and my brain
Seems girdled with a fiery chain,
Whose scorching links will never part,
And never cool again.
Bear with me while I speak,—but turn
Away that gentle eye the while,—
The fires of guilt more fiercely burn
Beneath its kindly smile:
For half I fancy I can see
My mother's sainted look in thee."

It was the last week in July; Ralph and May, accompanied by little Whif, were taking their last drive for the season. To-morrow they were to leave England for Switzerland.

As the carriage rolled along, the horses suddenly shied a little at some object lying upon the bank. At first sight it looked like a bundle of filthy rags, and Whif, who was entertaining his father and mother with some of his quaint, pretty, precocious utterances, hardly took any notice of the cause of the animal's start.

He sat with his back to the horses, when suddenly his gaze became fixed upon the heap on the road-bank. His shapely, curl-crowned head was thrust hurriedly over the open side of the carriage, till he got a full view of a human face that was partly hidden by straggling dirty hair and a mere rag of a bonnet.

Another moment, and the carriage would have rolled on, but Whif rose to his feet, shouting to the coachman, "Robert, Robert! stop the carriage."

Then as he turned his face to his astonished parents, he cried, "Oh, mamma, that is poor Peg! I am sure it is! Please let me get out."

In another minute all three stood round that bundle of rags that lay upon the bank.

Whif bent over the form, and taking the thin grimy hand in his, and smoothing the wasted cheek with his other pretty delicate, little hand, he cried, "Peg! dear, dear old Peg! Don't you know me? It is Whif, little Whif, you know?"

There was a gasping sound from the poor creature, a twitching of the corners of the mouth, a swelling of the poor thin nostrils, then the eyes slowly opened. For a moment they rested upon the boy's lovely face, a sad, weak, little smile trembled for a moment about her greyish-blue lips; then, as they parted, the words dropped slowly from her in a bewildered, wondering tone.

"Whif! Wh-i-f! Yes it is, sure enuff! I'm a dyin', Whif! Ginger left me here, an' has gone on to —."

A sudden faintness overcame her, her eyes closed, and a faint shiver went over her emaciated frame.

"Oh, mamma, is she dead?" The words were almost wailed out by little Whif, whose lovely eyes were dropping crystal tears as he spoke.

"No, my darling, I don't think she is dead, but she is very weak and ill, and must be moved from here at once." The mind of May Ranger was in a tumult as she spoke. She knew that in some way this wretched woman had been the cause of years of suffering to herself. She shrunk from any contact with her, yet she longed to know the story of her child's abduction.

While she thus thought, Whif's voice again broke in, as though he knew intuitively what was passing in her mind. "Mamma! perhaps Peg did not steal me after all, or perhaps Ginger made her, and she was always so kind to me. You must not be angry with her. Don't you think you had better take her to our house, and have the doctor to her. I think that is what Jesus would have done if He had been here, and found poor Peg like this. Because, in my picture-book of the good Samaritan, the poor man looks nastier than Peg does; he's all covered with blood, and I learned the words underneath

the pictures, and said them last Sunday to Benson. 'And as He journeyed, He came where he was; and when He saw him, He had compassion on him, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.' Now, mamma, there is no inn near here; and, besides, the inns nowadays are not nice places to take people to, are they? But our house is so near, and I'm sure Jesus wants Peg to be taken there, and so do I. Do, please mamma, before she gets too ill?"

"Whif is right, my darling! It is our duty—nay, more, it is our privilege to care for this poor creature in the spirit of Him who sought us." It was the voice of Ralph Ranger who spoke.

The tears stood in his wife's eyes as, turning to the footman, she said, "Charles, help Mr. Ranger to put this poor thing into the carriage."

Once upon her feet, Peg seemed to revive somewhat and was able to help herself a little, so that a few minutes later she was driven through the gates of Ralph Ranger's beautiful grounds, and placed in the hands of kind, skilful Mrs. Benson.



"Peg! dear old Peg! Don't you know me?"

The journey to Switzerland was postponed for a time until Peg should have recovered sufficiently to tell her story.

At first it seemed doubtful whether she would not sink slowly, and leave the tale untold; but at last, after three days, she began to rally considerably.

Finding herself cleansed, and between sweet, snowy sheets, seemed to be an intense pleasure to Peg; lifting the spotless linen to her lips, she kissed it almost reverently as she said to Mrs. Benson, amid low choking sobs. "I ain't had nothin' like this, this twenty year; it's like a bit o' heaven to me."

Her delight at the marvellous change in Whif, was unbounded, but amid it all it was evident that her past sin, in connection with him, was troubling her.

There had been no attempt to extract any confession from her, but upon the fifth morning, she asked to see Whif's parents. On their arrival she sobbed quietly for a moment or two before she could speak; then as their kindly tones soothed her, she commenced:—

"I knows I don't deserve nuthin' but the workhouse or the prison, instead o' all your kindness to me, but as true as I'm here, I've longed thousands o' times to be able to take little Whif—bless 'im, the darling!—back; I've a thought an' cried over wot yer must have suffered many an' many a time; but it wur Ginger made me do it."

The tears rained down her wasted cheeks, and low sobs again broke her utterance.

"Poor thing," murmured May Ranger, as with her own delicately-scented handkerchief she wiped Peg's eyes. "If it hurts you so, Peg, do not try to tell it now, or even at all."

"Ah! but that's just what I must do," continued Peg, "or I'll never be easy."

Then in a stronger voice she went on. "It wur like this: your house wur one o' them new ones, right outside Croydon, in that new road wot ran down to they fields, worn't it?"

"Yes, Peg."

"Well, Ginger and me had been trampin' ever since day-light a'most, 'cos we wanted to git to a fair further on. We wur very tired an' had been sot down in that field at the bottom o' your garding. There worn't nothin' but a' old hedge dividin' it from the field. Well, we'd had our bit o' victuals, an' Ginger wur a smokin' his pipe, an' a watchin' a little puppy wot we'd picked up on the way about a week afore. Ginger sort o' thought as he might learn him some tricks an' make summat out o' him. I'd sort have gone off inter a doze, fur it wur very hot an' I wur very tired, when all on a sudden Ginger sez, 'Peg, ole woman!'

"'Wot?' sez I.

"He jerked his thumb over toward a hole in the hedge, where I sees the very beautifulest child I ever seed in my life; an' he sez, 'D'yer twig anything?'

"I sez, 'Twig wot, Ginger?'

"'Why, you're as thick as a haystack,' sez he, 'can't yer tumble to a slice o' luck when yer sees it?'

"But, lor, I didn't, no more nor nuffin. Well, he grinned, an' sez, 'look yere, a kid like that 'ere 'ud 'bout make our fortun'; jist look at his limbs! Then, he's got such a purty face, an' sich lovely hair! Why, ef we couldn't teach 'im no tricks there's many a market fur sich a stunner as that. Now, d'yer know wot I means?'

"By this time the child an' the puppy wur a rolling over an' over in the long grass. Oh, how often I'd a longed fur a child o' my own, an' I thought wot 'ud I give fur one like that. I knowed wot Ginger meant now, but I sort o' shrinked from a doin' anythin' like stealin' a child. Besides, I knowed as ef I wur copped I'd get twelve months at least. I s'pose Ginger seen as I sort o' wavered a bit, fur he said, sort o' oily like—he wur all that when he wanted anything as he thought he couldn't get by knocking yer about—'Why, look yer, Peg, yer may depend on't, the young un's mother hev a got a sight more brats than she knows wot to do wi', and after the fast good cry over him she'll be very glad there's one less to fed. Then the parson o' the parish an' some o' the gentry will call on her an' pity her, an' she'll be better off nor ever.'"

Peg stopped in her story, and looking up into the faces of her listeners, and seeing their grave, sad looks, she said, "I know there ain't no 'scuse for me, but yer said yer wanted to know all. God knows I've been sorry ever since I done the thing. But to go on. Ginger got up an' looked all about, and sez, 'There ain't a soul in sight, Peg, can't we sort o' 'tice the young 'un to foller the puppy jist along under the hedge to that road? then when he've got through there, an' he's out o' sight o' the house, we can easy pop him in our truck an' let him cry hissself to sleep.'

"Well, it all worked right. It worn't many yards to the edge of the meadow, and that blessed little lamb toddled through after the puppy, jist about pleased. We'd left our little truck, as we called it, in the cross road,—it wur only a Price's patent candle-box, fixed on two wheels wi' a handle, an' we used to carry all we had in there when we were trampin' about.

"All on a suddent we yeard a woman's voice a shoutin' 'Jony! Jony!' an' I got skeared, an' was running off an' leavin' the child, when Ginger lays hold on me that fierce, an' he sez (his voice sounded like a snake's hiss), 'D'yer, Peg, ef yer don't whip up that young 'un an' run wi' 'im fur yer life inter that copse there at the bottom o' the road, I'll do fur yer.'

"'Oh, I can't, I can't, Ginger,' I sez. Then he opened his knife slowly, an' grinned that horful, that I thought he meant to kill me, an' before I knowed properly wot I wur a doin', I'd snapped up the boy, and sort o' stifled his cries, an' run wi' him into the copse. Ginger wur there a'most as soon as me wi' the truck. We took one o' the roads in the copse, an' got right through wi'out meetin' a soul. But it wur many a day afore the child got quite right, an' we had to be very keerful. We got two or three ole things for him to wear, an' the first chance I sold his own things fur what I could git fur them.

"By-and-bye I got awful fond on him, but I never felt easy in my conscience. I knows you've forgiven me, yer told me so, but wot about God? I knows I ain't goin' to live much longer an' I wants to know God hev a forgiven me."

May Ranger's tones were very gentle as she told the poor dying waif of God's love in Christ. "God is so just," said she, "He will not do anything but keep His word, and He says, 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'"

Slowly, patiently, prayerfully, did May and Ralph deal with Peg, but the glimmerings of light that penetrated her poor darkened mind were very faint. Later in the day Whif spent an hour alone with her, and God fulfilled His Word again, "A little child shall lead them," for that evening she humbly, but clearly, rejoiced in the light of forgiven sins.

No one ever knew, of course, all that had passed between them, but this much May learned, that Whif had found it difficult to make Peg understand God's willingness to accept her, and pardon her, and in his childish fashion had explained it thus:—

"But yer don't know, Whif, I've been such a wicked 'un that I feels God can't never stand me, nohow," she had said.

"Peg," replied Whif, his little eyes full of tears, his little voice full of a yearning pathos, "Peg, look here, dear. Benson says sin is dirt, it's what people call foulness. Well, just think how dirty you were when my mother found you that day, and how you had sinned against her in being wicked to me, her little son, yet what did she do to you? She had you washed, and clean, nice things put on you, and forgave you, didn't she?"

"Yes, Whif, she did, bless her heart," replied Peg.

The voice of Whif was very grave as he asked the next question: "Don't you think God is better than my mother?"

"Why, yes, child."

"Then don't you see that God will take you and wash you from all your sin-dirt and forgive you, and let you wear a white robe in Heaven, for the sake of His Son, Jesus, who prayed for you along with all the sinners when He was on the cross."

Whif waited a moment or two for a reply, but Peg had closed her eyes; her lips were moving as if in prayer; and with a delicacy as rare as it was well-timed, Whif crept silently from the room. But all knew that evening that God had come to Peg's poor broken heart. She lingered until nearly Christmas, then slowly sank, leaving a gracious testimony behind, of her new creation in Christ.

* * * * *

Little Jonas Ranger is never called by his Christian name, for every one declares that Whif suits him so much better, though his grandfather declares that if it was not so long it should be little Wheedler, for he has so thoroughly won his way into everybody's heart.

Those who are spiritually-minded enough to read the signs grow conscious daily of a wondrous growth of grace in the beautiful boy—a daily transforming by beholding the Christ of his love.

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