MY DOGGIE AND I
by R.M. Ballantyne

Chapter One.

Explains Itself.

I possess a doggie—not a dog, observe, but a doggie. If he had been a dog I would not have presumed to intrude him on your notice. A dog is all very well in his way—one of the noblest of animals, I admit, and pre-eminently fitted to be the companion of man, for he has an affectionate nature, which man demands, and a forgiving disposition, which man needs—but a dog, with all his noble qualities, is not to be compared to a doggie.

My doggie is unquestionably the most charming, and, in every way, delightful doggie that ever was born. My sister has a baby, about which she raves in somewhat similar terms, but of course that is ridiculous, for her baby differs in no particular from ordinary babies, except, perhaps, in the matter of violent weeping, of which it is fond; whereas my doggie is unique, a perfectly beautiful and singular specimen of—of well, I won't say what, because my friends usually laugh at me when I say it, and I don't like to be laughed at.

Freely admit that you don't at once perceive the finer qualities, either mental or physical, of my doggie, partly owing to the circumstance that he is shapeless and hairy. The former quality is not prepossessing, while the latter tends to veil the amiable expression of his countenance and the lustre of his speaking eyes. But as you come to know him he grows upon you; your feelings are touched, your affections stirred, and your love is finally evoked. As he resembles a door-mat, or rather a scrap of very ragged door-mat, and has an amiable spirit, I have called him "Dumps." I should not be surprised if you did not perceive any connection here. You are not the first who has failed to see it; I never saw it myself.

When I first met Dumps he was scurrying towards me along a sequestered country lane. It was in the Dog Days. Dust lay thick on the road; the creature's legs were remarkably short though active, and his hair being long he swept up the dust in clouds as he ran. He was yelping, and I observed that one or two stones appeared to be racing with, or after, him. The voice of an angry man also seemed to chase him, but the owner of the voice was at the moment concealed by a turn in the lane, which was bordered by high stone-walls.

Hydrophobia, of course, flashed into my mind. I grasped my stick and drew close to the wall. The hairy whirlwind, if I may so call it, came wildly on, but instead of passing me, or snapping at my legs as I had expected, it stopped and crawled towards me in a piteous; supplicating manner that at once disarmed me. If the creature had lain still, I should have been unable to distinguish its head from its tail; but as one end of him whined, and the other wagged, I had no difficulty.

Stooping down with caution, I patted the end that whined, whereupon the end that wagged became violently demonstrative. Just then the owner of the voice came round the corner. He was a big, rough

fellow, in ragged garments, and armed with a thick stick, which he seemed about to fling at the little dog, when I checked him with a shout—

"You'd better not, my man, unless you want your own head broken!"

You see I am a pretty well-sized man myself, and, as I felt confidence in my strength, my stick, and the goodness of my cause, I was bold.

"What d'you mean by ill-treating the little dog?" I demanded sternly, as I stepped up to the man.

"A cove may do as he likes with his own, mayn't he?" answered the man, with a sulky scowl.

"A 'cove' may do nothing of the sort," said I indignantly, for cruelty to dumb animals always has the effect of inclining me to fight, though I am naturally of a peaceable disposition. "There is an Act of Parliament," I continued, "which goes by the honoured name of Martin, and if you venture to infringe that Act I'll have you taken up and prosecuted."

While I was speaking I observed a peculiar leer on the man's face, which I could not account for. He appeared, however, to have been affected by my threats, for he ceased to scowl, and assumed a deferential air as he replied, "Vell, sir, it do seem raither 'ard that a cove should be blowed up for kindness."

"Kindness!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Ay, kindness, sir. That there hanimal loves me, it do, like a brother, an the love is mootooal. Ve've lived together now—off an' on—for the matter o' six months. Vell, I gits employment in a factory about fifteen miles from here, in which no dogs is allowed. In coorse, I can't throw up my sitivation, sir, can I? Neither can my doggie give up his master wot he's so fond of, so I'm obleeged to leave 'im in charge of a friend, with stric' orders to keep 'im locked up till I'm fairly gone. Vell, off I goes, but he manages to escape, an' runs arter me. Now, wot can a feller do but drive 'im 'ome with sticks an' stones, though it do go to my 'eart to do it? but if he goes to the factory he's sure to be shot, or scragged, or drownded, or somethink; so you see, sir, it's out o' pure kindness I'm a peltin' of 'im."

Confess that I felt somewhat doubtful of the truth of this story; but, in order to prevent any expression of my face betraying me, I stooped and patted the dog while the man spoke. It received my attentions with evident delight. A thought suddenly flashed on me:—

"Will you sell your little dog?" I asked.

"Vy, sir," he replied, with some hesitation, "I don't quite like to do that. He's such a pure breed, and—and he's so fond o' me."

"But have you not told me that you are obliged to part with him?"

I thought the man looked puzzled for a moment, but only for a moment. Turning to me with a bland smile, he said, "Ah, sir I that's just where it is. I am obleeged to part with him, but I ain't obleeged to sell him. If I on'y part with 'im, my friend keeps 'im for me, and we may meet again, but if I sell 'im, he's gone for ever! Don't you see? Hows'ever, if you wants 'im wery bad, I'll do it on one consideration."

"And that is?"

"That you'll be good to 'im."

I began to think I had misjudged the man. "What's his name?" I asked.

Again for one moment there was that strange, puzzled look in the man's face, but it passed, and he turned with another of his bland smiles.

"His name, sir? Ah, his name? He ain't got no name, sir!"

"No name!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"No, sir; I object to givin' dogs names on principle. It's too much like treatin' them as if they wos Christians; and, you know, they couldn't be Christians if they wanted to ever so much. Besides, wotever name you gives 'em, there must be so many other dogs with the same name, that you stand a chance o' the wrong dog comin' to 'e ven you calls."

"That's a strange reason. How then do you call him to you?"

"Vy, w'en I wants 'im I shouts 'Hi,' or 'Hallo,' or I vistles."

"Indeed," said I, somewhat amused by the humour of the fellow; "and what do you ask for him?"

"Fi' pun ten, an' he's dirt cheap at that," was the quick reply.

"Come, come, my man, you know the dog is not worth that."

"Not worth it, sir!" he replied, with an injured look; "I tell you he's cheap at that. Look at his breedin', and then think of his affectionate natur'. Is the affections to count for nuffin'?"

Admitted that the affections were worth money, though it was generally understood that they could not be purchased, but still objected to the price, until the man said in a confidential tone—

"Vell, come, sir, since you do express such a deal o' love for 'im, and promise to be so good to 'im, I'll make a sacrifice and let you 'ave 'im for three pun ten—come!"

Gave in, and walked off, with my purchase leaping joyfully at my heels.

The man chuckled a good deal after receiving the money, but I took no notice of that at the time, though I thought a good deal about it afterwards.

Ah! little did I think, as Dumps and I walked home that day, of the depth of the attachment that was to spring up between us, the varied experiences of life we were destined to have together, and the important influence he was to exercise on my career.

Forgot to mention that my name is Mellon—John Mellon. Dumps knows my name as well as he knows his own.

On reaching home, Dumps displayed an evidence of good breeding, which convinced me that he could not have spent all his puppyhood in company with the man from whom I had bought him. He wiped his feet on the door-mat with great vigour before entering my house, and also refused to pass in until I led the way.

“Now, Dumps,” said I, seating myself on the sofa in my solitary room (I was a bachelor at the time—a medical student, just on the point of completing my course), “come here, and let us have a talk.”

To my surprise, the doggie came promptly forward, sat down on his hind-legs, and looked up into my face. I was touched by this display of ready confidence. A confiding nature has always been to me powerfully attractive, whether in child, cat, or dog. I brushed the shaggy hair from his face in order to see his eyes. They were moist, and intensely black. So was the point of his nose.

“You seem to be an affectionate doggie, Dumps.”

A portion of hair—scarce worthy the name of tail—wagged as I spoke, and he attempted to lick my fingers, but I prevented this by patting his head. I have an unconquerable aversion to licking. Perhaps having received more than an average allowance, in another sense, at school, may account for my dislike to it—even from a dog!

“Now, Dumps,” I continued, “you and I are to be good friends. I’ve bought you—for a pretty large sum too, let me tell you—from a man who, I am quite sure, treated you ill, and I intend to show you what good treatment is; but there are two things I mean to insist on, and it is well that we should understand each other at the outset of our united career. You must never bark at my friends—not even at my enemies—when they come to see me, and you must not beg at meals. D’you understand?”

The way in which that shaggy creature cocked its ears and turned its head from side to side slowly, and gazed with its lustrous eyes while I was speaking, went far to convince me it really did understand what I said. Of course it only wagged its rear tuft of hair in reply, and whimpered slightly.

Refer to its rear tuft advisedly, because, at a short distance, my doggie, when in repose, resembled an elongated and shapeless mass; but, when roused by a call or otherwise, three tufts of hair instantly sprang up—two at one end, and one at the other end—indicating his ears and tail. It was only by these signs that I could ascertain at any time his exact position.

I was about to continue my remarks to Dumps when the door opened and my landlady appeared bearing the dinner tray.

“Oh! I beg parding, sir,” she said, drawing back, “I didn’t ’ear your voice, sir, till the door was open, an’ I thought you was alone, but I can come back a—”

“Come in, Mrs Miff. There is nobody here but my little dog—one that I have just bought, a rather shaggy terrier—what do you think of him?”

“Do ’e bite, sir?” inquired Mrs Miff, in some anxiety, as she passed round the table at a respectful distance from Dumps.

“I think not. He seems an amiable creature,” said I, patting his head. “Do you ever bite, Dumps?”

"Well, sir, I never feel quite easy," rejoined Mrs Miff in a doubtful tone, as she laid my cloth, with, as it were, one eye ever on the alert: "you never knows w'en these 'airy creatures is goin' to fly at you. If you could see their heyes you might 'ave a guess what they was a thinkin' of; an' then it is so orkard not knowin' w'ich end of the 'airy bundle is the bitin' end, you can't help bein' nervish a little."

Having finished laying the cloth, Mrs Miff backed out of the room after the manner of attendants on royalty, overturning two chairs with her skirts as she went, and showing her full front to the enemy. But the enemy gave no sign, good or bad. All the tufts were down flat, and he stood motionless while Mrs Miff retreated.

"Dumps, what do you think of Mrs Miff?"

The doggie ran to me at once, and we engaged in a little further conversation until my landlady returned with the viands. To my surprise Dumps at once walked sedately to the hearth-rug, and lay down thereon, with his chin on his paws—at least I judged so from the attitude, for I could see neither chin nor paws.

This act I regarded as another evidence of good breeding. He was not a beggar, and, therefore, could not have spent his childhood with the man from whom I had bought him.

"I wish you could speak, Dumps," said I, laying down my knife and fork, when about half finished, and looking towards the hearth-rug.

One end of him rose a little, the other end wagged gently, but as I made no further remark, both ends subsided.

"Now, Dumps," said I, finishing my meal with a draught of water, which is my favourite beverage, "you must not suppose that you have got a greedy master; though I don't allow begging. There, sir, is your corner, where you shall always have the remnants of my dinner—come."

The dog did not move until I said, "come." Then, with a quick rush he made for the plate, and very soon cleared it.

"Well, you have been well trained," said I, regarding him with interest; "such conduct is neither the result of instinct nor accident, and sure am I, the more I think of it, that the sulky fellow who sold you to me was not your tutor; but, as you can't speak, I shall never find out your history, so, Dumps, I'll dismiss the subject."

Saying this, I sat down to the newspaper with which I invariably solaced myself for half an hour after dinner, before going out on my afternoon rounds.

This was the manner in which my doggie and I began our acquaintance, and I have been thus particular in recounting the details, because they bear in a special manner on some of the most important events of my life.

Being, as already mentioned, a medical student, and having almost completed my course of study, I had undertaken to visit in one of the poorest districts in London—in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel; partly for the purpose of gaining experience in my profession, and partly for the sake of carrying the Word of

Life—the knowledge of the Saviour—into some of the many homes where moral as well as physical disease is rife.

Leanings and inclinations are inherited not less than bodily peculiarities. My father had a particular tenderness for poor old women of the lowest class. So have I. When I see a bowed, aged, wrinkled, white-haired, feeble woman in rags and dirt, a gush of tender pity almost irresistibly inclines me to go and pat her head, sit down beside her, comfort her, and give her money. It matters not what her antecedents may have been. Worthy or unworthy, there she stands now, with age, helplessness, and a hopeless temporal future, pleading more eloquently in her behalf than could the tongue of man or angel. True, the same plea is equally applicable to poor old men, but, reader, I write not at present of principles so much as of feelings. My weakness is old women!

Accordingly, on my professional visiting list—I had at that time a considerable number of these. One of them, who was uncommonly small, unusually miserable, and pathetically feeble, lay heavy on my spirit just then. She had a remarkably bad cold at the time, which betrayed itself chiefly in a frequent, but feeble, sneeze.

As I rose to go out, and looked at my doggie—who was, or seemed to be, asleep on the rug—a sudden thought occurred to me.

“That poor old creature,” I muttered, “is very lonely in her garret; a little dog might comfort her. Perhaps—but no. Dumps, you are too lively for her, too bouncing. She would require something feeble and affectionate, like herself. Come, I’ll think of that. So, my doggie, you shall keep watch here until I return.”

Chapter Two.

Introduces a Young Hero.

The day had become very sultry by the time I went out to visit my patients. The sky was overcast with dark thunderous clouds, and, as there seemed every chance of a heavy shower, I returned to my lodgings for an umbrella.

“Oh, Mr Mellon!” exclaimed my landlady, as I entered the lobby, “was there ever a greater blessin’—oh!—”

“Why, what’s the matter, Mrs Miff?”

“Oh, sir! that ’orrid little dog as you brought ’as gone mad!”

“Is that the blessing you refer to, Mrs Miff?”

“No, sir; but your comin’ back is, for the creetur ’as bin rampagin’ round the room, an yellin’ like a thing possessed by demons. I’m so glad you’ve come!”

Feeling sure that the little dog, unaccustomed, perhaps, to be left alone in a strange place, was merely anxious to be free, I at once went to my room-door and opened it. Dumps bounced out, and danced joyfully round me. Mrs Miff fled in deadly silence to her own bedroom, where she locked and bolted herself in.

"Dumps," said I, with a laugh, "I shall have to take you with me at the risk of losing you. Perhaps the memory of the feed I've given you, and the hope of another, may keep you by me. Come, we shall see."

My doggie behaved much better than I had anticipated. He did indeed stop at several butchers' shops during our walk, and looked inquiringly in. He also evinced a desire to enter into conversation with one or two other sociable dogs, but the briefest chirp or whistle brought him at once obediently to my heel, just as if he had known and obeyed me all his life.

When we reached the poorer parts of the city, I observed that the free-and-easy swagger, and the jaunty hopping of each hind-leg alternately, gave place to a sedate walk and a wary turn of the head, which suggested keen suspicious glances of the unseen eyes.

"Ah!" thought I, "evidently he has suffered hardships and bad treatment in places like this."

I stooped and patted his head. He drew closer to me, as if seeking protection.

Just then a low grumbling of thunder was heard, and soon after the rain came down so heavily that, the umbrella forming an insufficient protection, Dumps and I sought shelter in the mouth of an alley. The plump was short-lived, and the little knots of people who had sought shelter along with us melted quickly away.

My doggie's aspect was not improved by this shower. It had caused his hairy coat to cling to his form, producing a drowned-rat aspect which was not becoming; but a short run and some vigorous shakes soon restored his rotundity.

In a few minutes thereafter we reached a narrow square or court at the end of a very dirty locality, in one corner of which was a low public-house. Through the half-open swing-door could be seen the usual melancholy crowd of unhappy creatures who had either already come under the full influence and curse of strong drink, or were far on the road to ruin. It was a sight with which I had become so familiar that, sad though it was, I scarce gave it a thought in passing. My mind was occupied with the poor old woman I was about to visit, and I would have taken no further notice of the grog-shop in question if the door had not opened violently, and a dirty ragged street-boy, or "waif," apparently about eight or nine years of age, rushed out with a wild cry that may be described as a compound cheer-and-yell. He came out in such blind haste that he ran his ragged head with great violence against my side, and almost overturned me.

"Hallo, youngster!" I exclaimed sternly.

"Hallo, oldster!" he replied, in a tone of the most insolent indignation, "wot ever do you mean by runnin' agin my 'ead like that? Hain't you got no genteel boys in the West-end to butt agin, that you come all the way to Vitechapel to butt agin *me*? I've a good mind to 'and you over to the p'leece. Come, you owes me a copper for that."

The ineffable insolence of this waif took me quite by surprise. He spoke with extreme volubility, and assumed the commanding air of a man of six-feet-four, though only a boy of four-feet-six. I observed, however, that he kept at a sufficient distance to make sure of escaping in the event of my trying to seize him.

“Come,” said I, with a smile, “I think you rather owe me a copper for giving me such a punch in the ribs.”

“Vell, I don’t mind lookin’ at it in that light,” he replied, returning my smile. “I *vill* give you a copper, on’y I hain’t got change. You wouldn’t mind comin’ into this ’ere grog-shop while I git change, would you? Or if you’ll lend me a sixpence I’ll go in and git it for you.”

“No,” said I, putting my fingers into my waistcoat pocket; “but here is a sixpence for you, which you may keep, and never mind the change, if you’ll walk along the streets with me a bit.”

The urchin held out his dirty hand, and I put the coin into it. He smiled, tossed the sixpence, caught it deftly, and transferred it to his right trousers pocket.

“Vell, you are a rum ’un. But I say, all square? No dodges? Honour bright?”

“No dodges. Honour bright,” I replied.

“Come along.”

At this point my attention was attracted by a sudden change in the behaviour of Dumps. He went cautiously towards the boy, and snuffed as him for a moment.

“I say, is he wicious?” he asked, backing a little.

“I think not, but—”

I was checked in my speech by the little dog uttering a whine of delight and suddenly dancing round the boy, wagging its tail violently, and indeed wriggling its whole shapeless body with joy; as some dogs are wont to do when they meet with an old friend unexpectedly.

“Why, he seems to know you,” said I, in surprise.

“Vell, he do seem to ’ave ’ad the honour of my acquaintance some’ow,” returned the boy, whose tone of banter quickly passed away. “What d’ee call ’im?”

“Dumps,” said I.

“That won’t do. Has he a vite spot on the bridge of ’is nose?” asked the boy earnestly.

“I really cannot tell. It is not long—”

“Here, Punch, come here!” called the boy, interrupting.

At the name of Punch my doggie became so demonstrative in his affections that he all but leaped into the boy's arms, whined lovingly, and licked his dirty face all over.

"The wery dog," said the boy, after looking at his nose; "only growed so big that his own mother wouldn't know 'im.—Vy, where 'ave you bin all this long while, Punch?"

"D'you mean to say that you know the dog, and that his name is Punch?"

"Vell, you *are* green. Wouldn't any cove with half an eye see that the dog knows me, an' so, in course, I must know *him*? An' ven I called 'im Punch didn't he answer?—hey?"

I was obliged to admit the truth of these remarks. After the first ebullition of joy at the meeting was over, we went along the street together.

"Then the dog is yours?" said I as we went along.

"No, he ain't mine. He was mine once—ven he was a pup, but I sold 'im to a young lady for—a *wery* small sum."

"For how much?" I asked.

"For five bob. Yes—on'y five bob! I axed vun pound, but the young lady was so pleasant an' pritty that I come down to ten bob. Then she said she was poor—and to tell 'ee the plain truth she looked like it—an' she wanted the pup so bad that I come down to five."

"And who was this young lady?"

"Blow'd if I knows. She went off wi' my Punch, an' I never saw'd 'em more."

"Then you don't know what induced her to sell Punch to a low fellow—but of course you know nothing about that," said I, in a musing tone, as I thought of the strange manner in which this portion of my doggie's history had come to light, but I was recalled from my reverie by the contemptuous tones of my little companion's voice, as he said—

"But I *do* know something about that."

"Oh, indeed! I thought you said you never saw the young lady again."

"No more I did. Neither did I ever see Punch again till to-day, but I know for certain that my young lady never sold no dog wotsomedever to no *low* feller as ever walked in shoe leather or out of it!"

"Ah, I see," said I slowly, "you mean—"

"Yes, out with it, that's just wot I do mean—that the low feller prigged the pup from her, an' I on'y vish as I 'ad a grip of his ugly nose, and I'd draw it out from his uglier face, I would, like the small end of a telescope, and then shut it up flat again—so flat that you'd never know he'd had no nose at all!"

My little sharp-witted companion then willingly gave me an account of all he knew about the early history of my doggie.

The story was not long, but it began, so to speak, at the beginning.

Punch, or Dumps, as I continued to call him, had been born in a dry water-butt which stood in a back yard near the Thames. This yard was, or had been, used for putting away lumber.

“It was a queer place,” said my little companion, looking up in my face with a droll expression—“a sort o’ place that, when once you had gone into it, you was sure to wish you hadn’t. Talk o’ the blues, sir; I do assure *you* that w’en I used to go into that yard of a night it gave me the black-an’-blues, it did. There was a mouldiness an’ a soppiness about it that beat the katticombs all to sticks. It looked like a place that some rubbish had bin flung into in the days before Adam an’ Eve was born, an’ ’ad been forgotten tee-totally from that time to this. Oh, it was awful! Used to make my marrow screw up into lumps w’en I was used to go there.”

“But why did you go there at all if you disliked it so much?” I asked.

“Vy? because I ’adn’t got no better place to go to. I was used to sleep there. I slep’ in the self-same water-butt where Punch was born. That’s ’ow I come to scrape acquaintance with ’im. I’d bin away from ’ome in the country for a week’s slidin’.”

“A week’s what?”

“Slidin’. Don’t you know what sliding on the ice is?”

“Oh!—yes. Are you very fund of that?”

“I should think I was—w’en my boots are good enough to stick on, but they ain’t always that, and then I’ve got to slide under difficulties. Sometimes I’m out o’ boots an’ shoes altogether, in vich case slidin’s impossible; but I can look on and slide in spirit, vich is better than nuffin’. But, as I was sayin’ w’en you ’ad the bad manners to interrupt me, I ’ad bin away from ’ome for a week—”

“Excuse my interrupting you again, but where is your home, may I ask?”

“You may ask, but it ’ud puzzle me to answer for I ain’t got no ’ome, unless I may say that London is my ’ome. I come an’ go where I pleases, so long’s I don’t worrit nobody. I sleep where I like, if the bobbies don’t get their eyes on me w’en I’m agoin’ to bed, an’ I heat wotever comes in my way if it ain’t too tough. In winter I sleeps in a lodgin’ ’ouse w’en I can but as it costs thrippence a night, I finds it too expensive, an’ usually prefers a railway arch, or a corner in Covent Garden Market, under a cart or a barrow, or inside of a empty sugar-barrel—anywhere so long’s I’m let alone; but what with the rain, the wind, the cold, and the bobbies, I may be said to sleep under difficulties. Vell, as I was agoin’ to say w’en—”

“Excuse me once more—what is your name?” said I.

“Hain’t got no name.”

"No name! Come, you are joking. What is your father's name?"

"Hain't got no father—never 'ad, as I knows on, nor mother neither, nor brother, nor sister, nor aunt, nor wife—not even a mother-in-law. I'm a unit in creation, I is—as I once heerd a school-board buffer say w'en he was luggin' me along to school; but he was too green, that buffer was, for a school-boarder. I gave 'im the slip at the corner of Watling Street, an' they've never bin able to cotch me since."

"But you must be known by some name," said I. "What do your companions call you?"

"They call me bad names, as a rule. Some o' the least offensive among 'em are Monkey-face, Screwnose, Cheeks, Squeaker, Roundeyes, and Slidder. I prefers the last myself, an' ginerally answers to it. But, as I was agoin' to say, I'd bin away for a veek, an' w'en I comed 'ome—"

"To which part of home? for London is a wide word, you know," I said.

"Now, sir, if you go for to interrupt me like that I'll 'ave to charge a bob for this here valk; I couldn't stand it for sixpence."

"Come, Slidder, don't be greedy."

"Vell, sir, if you got as many kicks as I do, and as few ha'pence, p'r'aps you'd be greedy too."

"Perhaps I should, my boy," said I, in a gentle tone. "But come, I will give you an extra sixpence if we get along well. Let's have the rest of your story; I won't interrupt again."

"It ain't my story, it's Punch's story," returned the waif, as he stooped to pat the gratified doggie. "Vell, w'en I com'd 'ome it was lateish and I was tired, besides bein' 'ungry; so I goes right off to my water-butt, intendin' to go to bed as usual, but no sooner did I put my head in, than out came a most awful growl. The butt lay on its side, and I backed out double quick just in time, for a most 'orrible-lookin' terrier dog rushed at me. Bein' used to dogs, I wasn't took by surprise, but fetched it a clip with one o' my feet in its ribs that sent it staggerin' to the palin' o' the yard. It found a hole, bolted through, scurried up the lane yellin', and I never saw'd it more! This was Punch's mother. On goin' into the butt afterwards I found three dead pups and one alive, so I pitched the dead ones away an' shoved the live one into the breast of my coat, where he slep' till mornin'. At first I 'ad a mind to drown the pup, but it looked so comfortable an' playful, an' was such a queer critter, that I called him Punch, an' became a father to 'im. I got him bones an' other bits o' grub, an' kep' 'im in the water-butt for three veeks. Then he began to make a noise v'en I left him; so, bein' sure the bobbies would rout 'im out at last, I took 'im an' sold 'im to the first pleasant lady that seemed to fancy 'im."

"Well, Slidder," said I, as we turned down into the mean-looking alley where Mrs Willis, my little old woman, dwelt, "I am greatly interested in what you have told me about my little dog, and I am interested still more in what you have told me about yourself. Now, I want you to do me a favour. I wish you to go with me to visit an old woman, and, after that, to walk home with me—part of the way, at least."

The boy, whose pinched, hunger-smitten face had an expression of almost supernatural intelligence on it, bestowed on me a quick, earnest glance.

"No dodges? Honour bright? You ain't a school-board buffer?" he asked.

"No dodges. Honour bright," I replied, with a smile.

"Vell, then, heave ahead, an' I'll foller."

We passed quickly down to the lower end of the alley, which seemed to lose itself in a wretched court that appeared as if it intended to slip into the river—an intention which, if carried out, would have vastly improved its sanitary condition. Here, in a somewhat dark corner of the court, I entered an open door, ascended a flight of stairs, and gained a second landing. At the farthest extremity of the passage I stopped at a door and knocked. Several of the other doors of the passage opened, and various heads were thrust out, while inquisitive eyes surveyed me and my companion. A short survey seemed to suffice, for the doors were soon shut, one after another, with a bang, but the door at which I knocked did not open.

Lifting the latch, I entered, and observed that Mrs Willis was seated by the window, looking wistfully out. Being rather deaf, she had not heard my knock.

"Come in," I whispered to little Slidder, "sit down on this stool near the door, and keep quiet until I speak to you."

So saying, I advanced to the window. The view was not interesting. It consisted of the side of a house; about three feet distant, down which ran a water-spout, or drain-pipe, which slightly relieved the dead look of the bricks. From one pane of the window it was possible, by squeezing your cheek against it, to obtain a perspective view of chimney-pots. By a stretch of the neck upwards you could see more chimney pots. By a stretch of imagination you could see cats quarrelling around them,—or anything else you pleased!

Sitting down on a rickety chair beside the little old woman, I touched her gently on the shoulder. She had come to know my touch by that time, I think, for she looked round with a bright little smile.

Chapter Three.

Treats of an Old Heroine.

It was pleasant yet sad to observe the smile with which old Mrs Willis greeted me—pleasant, because it proved that she was rejoiced to see me; sad, because it was not quite in keeping with the careworn old face whose set wrinkles it deranged.

"I knew you would come. You never miss the day," she said, both words and tone showing that she had fallen from a much higher position in the social scale.

"It costs me little to visit you once a week, dear Mrs Willis," I replied, "and it gives me great pleasure; besides, I am bound by the laws of the Society which grants your annuity to call personally and pay it. I only wish it were a larger sum."

"Large enough; more than I deserve," said the old woman in a low tone, as she gazed somewhat vacantly at the dead wall opposite, and let her eyes slowly descend the spout.

The view was not calculated to distract or dissipate the mind. The bricks were so much alike that the eye naturally sought and reposed on or followed the salient feature. Having descended the spout as far as the window-sill permitted, the eyes of Mrs Willis slowly reascended as far as possible, and then turned with a meek expression to my face. “More than I deserve,” she repeated, “and *almost* as much as I require. It is very kind of the Society to give it, and of you to bring it. May God bless you both! Ah, doctor! I’m often puzzled by—eh! What’s that?”

The sudden question, anxiously asked, was accompanied by a feeble attempt to gather her poor garments close round her feet as Dumps sniffed at her skirts and agitated his ridiculous tail.

“It’s only my dog, granny,”—I had of late adopted this term of endearment; “a very quiet well-behaved creature, I assure you, that seems too amiable to bite. Why, he appears to have a tendency to claim acquaintance with everybody. I do believe he knows *you*!”

“No, no, he doesn’t. Put him out; pray put him out,” said the old woman, in alarm.

Grieved that I had unintentionally roused her fear, I opened the door and called Dumps. My doggie rose, with his three indicators erect and expectant.

“Go out, sir, and lie down!”

The indicators slowly drooped, and Dumps crawled past in abject humility. Shutting the door, I returned.

“I hope you don’t dislike little boys as well as little dogs, granny, because I have brought one to wait for me here. You won’t mind his sitting at the door until I go?”

“No, no!” said Mrs Willis quickly; “I like little boys—when—when they’re good,” she added, after a pause.

“Say I’m one o’ the good sort, sir,” suggested Slidder, in a hoarse whisper. “Of course, it ain’t true, but wot o’ that, if it relieves her mind?”

Taking no notice of this remark, I again sat down beside my old woman.

“What were you going to say about being puzzled, granny?”

“Puzzled, doctor! did I say I was puzzled?”

“Yes, but pray don’t call me doctor. I’m not quite fledged yet, you know. Call me Mellon, or John. Well, you were saying—”

“Oh, I remember. I was only going to say that I’ve been puzzled a good deal of late by that text in which David says, ‘I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.’ Now, my father and mother were both good Christians, and, although I cannot claim to be a *good* one myself, I do claim to be a poor follower of Jesus. Yet here am I—”

She paused.

"Well, granny," said I, "are you forsaken?"

"Nay, John, God forbid that I should say so; but am I not a beggar? Ah pride, pride, you are hard to kill!"

"*Are* you a beggar?" I asked in a tone of surprise. "When did you beg last, granny?"

"Is not a recipient of charity a beggar?"

"No," I replied stoutly, "he is not. A solicitor of charity is a beggar, but a recipient thereof is not. In your case it was I who was the beggar. Do you not remember when I found you first, without a crust in the house, how I had to beg and entreat you to allow me to put your name on this charity, and how you persistently refused, until at last I did it without your consent; and how, eventually, you gave in only when I charged you with pride? You are not forsaken, granny, and you are not a beggar."

"Brayvo, doctor! you have 'er there!" came in a soft whisper from the door.

For a moment I felt tempted to turn the boy out, as I had turned out the dog; but, seeing that my old woman had not overheard the remark, I took no notice of it.

"You have put the matter in a new light John," said Mrs Willis slowly, as her eyes once more sought the spout. "You often put things in new lights, and there does seem some truth in what you say. It did hurt my pride at first, but I'm gettin' used to it now. Besides," continued the old lady, with a deep sigh, "that trouble and everything else is swallowed up in the great sorrow of my life."

"Ah! you refer to your granddaughter, I suppose," said I in a tone of profound sympathy. "You have never told me about her, dear granny. If it is not too painful a subject to speak of, I should like to hear about her. When did she die?"

"Die!" exclaimed Mrs Willis with a burst of energy that surprised me—"she did not die! She left me many, many months ago, it seems like years now. My Edie went out one afternoon to walk, like a beautiful sunbeam as she always was, and—and—she never came back!"

"Never came back!" I echoed, in surprise.

"No—never. I was not able to walk then, any more than now, else I would have ranged London all round, day and night, for my darling. As it was, a kind city missionary made inquiries at all the police-offices, and everywhere else he could think of, but no clew could be gained as to what had become of her. At last he got wearied out and gave it up. No wonder; he had never seen Edie, and could not love her as I did. Once he thought he had discovered her. The body of a poor girl had been found in the river, which he thought answered to her description. I thought so too when he told me what she was like, and at once concluded she had tumbled in by accident and been drowned—for, you see, my Edie was good and pure and true. She could not have committed suicide unless her mind had become deranged, and there was nothing that I knew of to bring about that. They got me with much trouble into a cab, and drove me to the place. Ah! the poor thing—she was fair and sweet to look upon, with her curling brown hair and a smile still on the parted lips, as if she had welcomed Death; but she was not my Edie. For months and months after that I waited and waited, feeling sure that she would come. Then I was forced to leave my lodging. The landlord wanted it himself. I begged that he would let me remain, but he would not. He was a hard-hearted, dissipated man. I took another lodging, but it was a long way off, and left my name and new

address at the old one. My heart sank after that, and—and I've no hope now—no hope. My darling must have met with an accident in this terrible city. She must have been killed, and will never come back to me."

The poor creature uttered a low wail, and put a handkerchief to her old eyes.

"But, bless the Lord!" she added in a more cheerful tone, "I will go to her—soon."

For some minutes I knew not what to say in reply, by way of comforting my poor old friend. The case seemed indeed so hopeless. I could only press her hand. But my nature is naturally buoyant, and ready to hope against hope, even when distress assails myself.

"Do not say there is no hope, granny," said I at last, making an effort to be cheerful. "You know that with God all things are possible. It may be that this missionary did not go the right way to work in his search, however good his intentions might have been. I confess I cannot imagine how it is possible that any girl should disappear in this way, unless she had deliberately gone off with some one."

"No, John, my Edie would not have left me thus of her own free will," said the old woman, with a look of assurance which showed that her mind was immovably fixed as to that point.

"Well, then," I continued, "loving you as you say she did, and being incapable of leaving you deliberately and without a word of explanation, it follows that—that—"

I stopped, for at this point no plausible reason for the girl's disappearance suggested itself.

"It follows that she must have been killed," said the old woman in a low broken tone.

"No, granny, I will not admit that.—Come, cheer up; I will do my best to make inquiries about her, and as I have had considerable experience in making investigations among the poor of London, perhaps I may fall on some clew. She would be sure to have made inquiries, would she not, at your old lodging, if she had felt disposed to return?"

"Felt disposed!" repeated Mrs Willis, with a strange laugh. "If she *could* return, you mean."

"Well—if she could," said I.

"No doubt she would; but soon after I left my old lodging the landlord fled the country, and other people came to the house, who were troubled by my sending so often to inquire. Then my money was all expended, and I had to quit my second lodging, and came here, which is far, far from the old lodging, and now I have no one to send."

"Have you any friends in London?" I asked.

"No. We had come from York to try to find teaching for my darling, for we could get none in our native town, and we had not been long enough in London to make new friends when—when—she went away. My dear Ann and Willie, her mother and father, died last year, and now we have no near relations in the world."

"Shall I read to you, granny?" said I, feeling that no words of mine could do much to comfort one in so sad a case.

She readily assented. I was in the habit of reading and praying with her during these visits. I turned, without any definite intention of doing so, to the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I cannot tell why, but I paused here instead of reading on, or commenting on the words.

The old woman looked earnestly at me.

"These words," she said, "have been in my mind all yesterday and the day before. I have been greatly comforted by them, because 'He is faithful who has promised.' Pray over them, John; don't read any more."

I knelt by the poor woman's chair; she could not kneel with me in body, though she did in spirit, I doubt not. I had quite forgotten Slidder, but, on rising, observed that he had followed my example and gone down on his knees.

"Were you praying with us, Slidder?" I asked, after we left Mrs Willis, and were walking up the alley, followed by Dumps.

"Dun know, sir; I've never heard nor seen nuffin' o' this sort before. In coorse I've heard the missionaries sometimes, a-hollerin' about the streets, but I never worrited myself about *them*. I say, doctor, that's a rum go about that gal Edie—ain't it? I've quite took a fancy to that gal, now, though I ain't seen her. D'ye think she's bin drownded?"

"I scarce know what to think. Her disappearance so suddenly does seem very strange. I fear, I fear much that—however, it's of no use guessing. I shall at once set about making inquiries."

"Ha! so shall I," said the little waif, with a look of determination on his small face that amused me greatly, "for she's a good gal is Edie—if she ain't drownded."

"Why, boy, how can you know whether the girl is good or bad?"

"How can I know?" he echoed, with a glance of almost superhuman wisdom. "In coorse I know by the powers of obserwation. That old gal, Mrs Willis, is a good old thing—as good as gold. Vell, a good mother is always cocksure to 'ave a good darter—specially ven she's a only darter—so the mother o' Edie bein' good, Edie herself *must* be good, don't you see? Anythink as belonged to Mrs Willis can't help bein' good. I'm glad you took me to see her, doctor, for I've made up my mind to take that old 'ooman up, as the bobbies say w'en they're wexed with avin' nuffin' to do 'xcept strut about the streets like turkey-cocks. I'll take 'er up and do for 'er, I will."

On questioning him further I found that this ragged and homeless little waif had indeed been touched by Mrs Willis's sad story, and drawn towards her by her soft, gentle nature—so different from what he had hitherto met with in his wanderings,—and that he was resolved to offer her his gratuitous services as a message-boy and general servant, without requiring either food or lodging in return.

"But Mrs Willis may object to such a dirty ragged fellow coming about her," said I.

“Ain’t there no pumps in London, stoopid?” said Slidder, with a look of pity, “no soap?”

“True,” I replied, with a laugh, “but you’d require needles and thread and cloth, in addition, to make yourself respectable.”

“Nothink of the sort; I can beg or borrer or steal coats and pants, you know.”

“Ah, Slidder!” said I, in a kind but serious tone, “doubtless you can, but begging or borrowing are not likely to succeed, and stealing is wrong.”

“D’you think so?” returned the boy, with a look of innocent surprise. “Don’t you think, now, that in a good cause a cove might:—

“‘Take wot isn’t his’n,

An’ risk his bein’ sent to pris’n?’”

I replied emphatically that I did not think so, that *wrong* could never be made *right* by any means, and that the commencement of a course of even disinterested kindness on such principles would be sure to end ill.

“Vell, then, I’ll reconsider my decision, as the maginstrates ought to say, but never do.”

“That’s right. And now we must part, Slidder,” I said, stopping. “Here is the second sixpence I promised you, also my card and address. Will you come and see me at my own house the day after to-morrow, at eight in the morning?”

“I will,” replied the boy, with decision; “but I say, all fair an’ above-board? No school-boardin’ nor nuffin’ o’ that sort—hey? honour bright?”

“Honour bright!” I replied, holding out my hand, which he grasped and shook quite heartily.

We had both taken two or three steps in opposite directions, when, as if under the same impulse, we looked back at each other, and in so doing became aware of the fact that Dumps stood between us on the pavement in a state of extreme indecision or mental confusion.

“Hallo! I say! we’ve bin an’ forgot Punch!” exclaimed the boy.

“Dumps,” said I, “come along!”

“Punch,” said he, “come here, good dog!”

My doggie looked first at one, then at the other. The two indicators in front rose and fell, while the one behind wagged and drooped in a state of obvious uncertainty.

“Won’t you sell ’im back?” said Slidder, returning. “I’ll work it out in messages or anythink else.”

“But what of the bobbies?” I asked.

"Ah! true, I forgot the bobbies. I'd on'y be able to keep 'im for a week, p'r'aps not so long, afore they'd nab him.—Go, Punch, go, you don't know ven you're vell off."

The tone in which this was uttered settled the point, and turned the wavering balance of the creature's affections in my favour. With all the indicators extremely pendulous, and its hairy coat hanging in a species of limp humility, my doggie followed me home; but I observed that, as we went along, he ever and anon turned a wistful glance in the direction in which the ragged waif had disappeared.

Chapter Four.

In Which Dumps Finds Another Old Friend.

One morning, a considerable time after the events narrated in the last chapter, I sat on the sofa waiting for breakfast, and engaged in an interesting conversation with Dumps. The only difference in our mode of communication was that Dumps talked with his eyes, I with my tongue.

From what I have already said about my doggie, it will be understood that his eyes—which were brown and speaking eyes—lay behind such a forest of hair that it was only by clearing the dense masses away that I could obtain a full view of his liquid orbs. I am not sure that his ears were much less expressive than his eyes. Their variety of motion, coupled with their rate of action, served greatly to develop the full meaning of what his eyes said.

"Mrs Miff seems to have forgotten us this morning, Dumps," I remarked, pulling out my watch.

One ear cocked forward, the other turned back towards the door, and a white gleam under the hair, indicating that the eyes turned in the same direction, said as plainly as there was any occasion for—

"No; not quite forgotten us. I hear her coming now."

"Ha! so she is. Now you shall have a feed." Both ears elevated to the full extent obviously meant "Hurrah!" while a certain motion of his body appeared to imply that, in consequence of his sedentary position, he was vainly attempting to wag the sofa.

"If you please, sir," said my landlady, laying the breakfast tray on the table, "there's a shoe-black in the kitchen says he wants to see you."

"Ah! young Slidder, I fancy. Well, send him up."

"He says he's 'ad his breakfast an' will wait till you have done, sir."

"Very considerate. Send him up nevertheless."

In a few minutes my *protégé* stood before me, hat in hand, looking, in the trim costume of the brigade, quite a different being from the ragged creature I had met with in Whitechapel. Dumps instantly assaulted him with loving demonstrations.

"How spruce you look, my boy!"

"Thanks to *you*, sir," replied Slidder, with a familiar nod; "they do say I'm lookin' up."

"I hope you like the work. Have you had breakfast? Would a roll do you any good?"

"Thankee, I'm primed for the day. I came over, sir, to say that granny seems to me to be out o' sorts. Since I've been allowed to sleep on the rug inside her door, I've noticed that she ain't so lively as she used to was. Shivers a deal w'en it ain't cold, groans now an' then, an whimpers a good deal. It strikes me, now—though I ain't a reg'lar sawbones—that there's suthin' wrong with her in'ards."

"I'll finish breakfast quickly and go over with you to see her," said I.

"Don't need to 'urry, sir," returned Slidder; "she ain't wery bad—not much wuss than or'nary—on'y I've bin too anxious about her—poor old thing. I'll vait below till you're ready.—Come along, Punch, an' jine yer old pal in the kitchen till the noo 'un's ready."

After breakfast we three hurried out and wended our way eastward. As the morning was unusually fine I diverged towards one of the more fashionable localities to deliver a note with which I had been charged. Young Slidder's spirits were high, and for a considerable time he entertained me with a good deal of the East-end gossip. Among other things, he told me of the great work that was being done there by Dr Barnardo and others of similar spirit, in rescuing waifs like himself from their wretched condition.

"Though some on us don't think it so wretched arter all," he continued. "There's the Slogger, now, he won't go into the 'ome on no consideration; says he wouldn't give a empty sugar-barrel for all the 'omes in London. But then the Slogger's a lazy muff. He don't want to work—that's about it. He'd sooner starve than work. By consikence he steals, more or less, an finds a 'ome in the 'stone jug' pretty frequent. As to his taste for a sugar-barrel, I ain't so sure that I don't agree with 'im. It's big, you know—plenty of room to move, w'ich it ain't so with a flour-barrel. An' then the smell! Oh! you've no notion! W'y, that's wuth the price of a night's lodgin' itself, to say nothin' o' the chance of a knot-hole or a crack full o' sugar, that the former tenants has failed to diskiver."

While the waif was commenting thus enthusiastically on the bliss of lodging in a sugar-barrel, we were surprised to see Dumps, who chanced to be trotting on in front come to a sudden pause and gaze at a lady who was in the act of ringing the door-bell of an adjoining house.

The door was opened by a footman, and the lady was in the act of entering when Dumps gave vent to a series of sounds, made up of a whine, a bark, and a yelp. At the same moment his tail all but twirled him off his legs as he rushed wildly up the stairs and began to dance round the lady in mad excitement.

The lady backed against the door in alarm. The footman, anxious apparently about his calves, seized an umbrella and made a wild assault on the dog, and I was confusedly conscious of Slidder exclaiming, "Why, if that ain't *my* young lady!" as I sprang up the steps to the rescue.

"Down, Dumps, you rascal; down!" I exclaimed, seizing him by the brass collar with which I had invested him.—"Pardon the rudeness of my dog, madam," I said, looking up; "I never saw him act in this way before. It is quite unaccountable—"

"Not quite so unaccountable as you think," interrupted Slidder, who stood looking calmly on, with his hands in his pockets and a grin on his face.—"It's your own dog, miss."

"What do you mean, boy?" said the lady, a gaze of surprise chasing away the look of alarm which had covered her pretty face.

"I mean 'xactly what I says, miss. The dog's your own: I sold it to you long ago for five bob!"

The girl—for she was little more than sixteen—turned with a startled, doubting look to the dog.

"If you don't b'lieve it, miss, look at the vite spot on the bridge of 'is nose," said Slidder, with a self-satisfied nod to the lady and a supremely insolent wink to the footman.

"Pompey!" exclaimed the girl, holding out a pair of the prettiest little gloved hands imaginable.

My doggie broke from my grasp with a shriek of joy, and sprang into her arms. She buried her face in his shaggy neck and absolutely hugged him.

I stood aghast. The footman smiled in an imbecile manner.

"You'd better not squeeze quite so hard, miss, or he'll bust!" remarked the waif.

Recovering herself, and dropping the dog somewhat hurriedly, she turned to me with a flushed face and said—

"Excuse me, sir; this unexpected meeting with my dog—"

"*Your* dog!" I involuntarily exclaimed, while a sense of unmerited loss began to creep over me.

"Well, the dog was mine once, at all events—though I doubt not it is rightfully yours now," said the young lady, with a smile that at once disarmed me. "It was stolen from me a few months after I had bought it from this boy, who seems strangely altered since then. I'm glad, however, to see that the short time I had the dog was sufficient to prevent its forgetting me. But perhaps," she added, in a sad tone, "it would have been better if it *had* forgotten me."

My mind was made up.

"No, madam," said I, with decision; "it is well that the dog has not forgotten you. I would have been surprised, indeed, if it had. It is yours. I could not think of robbing you of it. I—I—am going to visit a sick woman and cannot delay; forgive me if I ask permission to leave the dog with you until I return in the afternoon to hand it formally over and bid it farewell."

This was said half in jest yet I felt very much in earnest, for the thought of parting from my doggie, even to such a fair mistress, cost me no small amount of pain—much to my surprise, for I had not imagined it possible that I could have formed so strong an attachment to a dumb animal in so short a time. But, you see, being a bachelor of an unsocial spirit, my doggie and I had been thrown much together in the evenings, and had made the most of our time.

The young lady half laughed, and hesitatingly thanked me as she went into the house, followed by Dumps, *alias* Punch, *alias* Pompey, who never so much as cast one parting glance on me as I turned to leave. A shout caused me to turn again and look back. I beheld an infant rolling down the drawing-room stairs like a small Alpine boulder. A little girl was vainly attempting to arrest the infant, and three boys, of various sizes, came bounding towards the young lady with shouts of welcome. In the midst of the din my doggie uttered a cry of pain, the Babel of children's voices was hushed by a bass growl, and the street door closed with a bang!

"Yell, that *is* a rum go!" exclaimed my little companion, as we walked slowly away. "Don't it seem to you, now, as if it wor all a dream?"

"It does, indeed," I replied, half inclined to laugh, yet with a feeling of sadness at my heart, for I knew that my doggie and I were parted for ever! Even if the young lady should insist on my keeping the dog, I felt that I could not agree to do so. No! I had committed myself, and the thing was done; for it was clear that, with the mutual affection existing between the lady and the dog, they would not willingly consent to be parted—it would be cruelty even to suggest a separation.

"Pshaw!" thought I, "why should the loss of a miserable dog—a mere mass of shapeless hair—affect me so much? Pooh! I will brush the subject away."

So I brushed it away, but back it came again in spite of all my brushing, and insisted on remaining to trouble me.

Short though our friendship had been, it had, I found, become very warm and strong. I recalled a good many pleasant evenings when, seated alone in my room with a favourite author, I had read and tickled Dumps under the chin and behind the ears to such an extent that I had thoroughly gained his heart; and as "love begets love," I had been drawn insensibly yet powerfully towards him. In short, Dumps and I understood each other.

While I was meditating on these things my companion, who had walked along in silence, suddenly said—

"You needn't take on so, sir, about Punch."

"How d'you know I'm taking on so?"

"'Cause you look so awful solemncholy. An' there's no occasion to do so. You can get the critter back again."

"I fear not Slidder, for I have already given it to the young lady, and you have seen how fond she is of it; and the dog evidently likes her better than it likes me."

"Yell, I ain't surprised at *that*. It on'y proves it to be a dog of good taste; but you can get it back for all that."

"How so?" I asked, much amused by the decision and self-sufficiency of the boy's manner.

"Vy, you've on'y got to go and marry the young lady, w'en, of course, all her property becomes yours, Punch included, don't you see?"

"True, Slidder; it had not occurred to me in that light," said I, laughing heartily, as much at the cool and quiet insolence of the waif's manner as at his suggestion. "But then, you see, there are difficulties in the way. Young ladies who dwell in fine mansions are not fond of marrying penniless doctors."

"Pooh!" replied the urchin; "that 'as nuffin' to do with it. You've on'y got to set up in a 'ouse close alongside, with a big gold mortar over the door an' a one-'oss broom, an' you'll 'ave 'er in six months—or eight if she's got contrairy parents. Then you'll want a tiger, of course, to 'old the 'oss; an' I knows a smart young feller whose name begins with a S, as would just suit. So, you see, you've nothing to do but to go in an win."

The precocious waif looked up in my face with such an expression of satisfaction as he finished this audacious speech, that I could not help gazing at him in blank amazement. What I should have replied I know not, for we arrived just then at the abode of old Mrs Willis.

The poor old lady was suffering from a severe attack of influenza, which, coupled with age and the depression caused by her heavy sorrow, had reduced her physical powers in an alarming degree. It was obvious that she urgently required good food and careful nursing. I never before felt so keenly my lack of money. My means barely sufficed to keep myself, educational expenses being heavy. I was a shy man, too, and had never made friends—at least among the rich—to whom I could apply on occasions like this.

"Dear granny," I said, "you would get along nicely if you would consent to go to a hospital."

"Never!" said the old lady, in a tone of decision that surprised me.

"I assure you, granny, that you would be much better cared for and fed there than you can be here, and it would not be necessary to give up your room. I would look after it until you are better."

Still the old lady shook her head, which was shaking badly enough from age as it was.

Going to the corner cupboard, in which Mrs Willis kept her little store of food and physic, I stood there pondering what I should do.

"Please, sir," said Slidder, sidling up to me, "if you wants mutton-chops, or steaks, or port wine, or anythink o' that sort, just say the word and I'll get 'em."

"You, boy—how?"

"Vy, ain't the shops full of 'em? I'd go an help myself, spite of all the bobbies that valks in blue."

"Oh, Slidder," said I, really grieved, for I saw by his earnest face that he meant it, "would you go and steal after all I have said to you about that sin?"

"Vell, sir, I wouldn't prig for myself—indeed I wouldn't—but I'd do it to make the old 'ooman better."

"That would not change stealing into a virtue. No, my boy, we must try to hit on some other way of providing for her wants."

"The Lord will provide," said Mrs Willis, from the bed.

She had overheard us. I hastened to her side.

"Yes, granny, He *will* provide. Meanwhile He has given me enough money to spare a little for your immediate wants. I will send some things, which your kind neighbour, Mrs Jones, will cook for you. I'll give her directions as I pass her door. Slidder will go home with me and fetch you the medicines you require. Now, try to sleep till Mrs Jones comes with the food. You must not speak to me. It will make you worse."

"I only want to ask, John, have you any—any news about—"

"No, not yet, granny; but don't be cast down. If you can trust God for food, surely you can trust Him for protection, not only to yourself, but to Edie. Remember the words, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He will bring it to pass.'"

"Thank you, John," replied the old woman, as she sank back on her pillow with a little sigh.

After leaving Mrs Willis I was detained so long with some of my patients that it was late before I could turn my steps westward. The night was very cold, with a keen December wind blowing, and heavy black clouds driving across the dark sky. It was after midnight as I drew near the neighbourhood of the house in which I had left Dumps so hurriedly that morning. In my haste I had neglected to ask the name of the young lady with whom I had left him, or to note the number of the house; but I recollected its position, and resolved to go round by it for the purpose of ascertaining the name on the door.

Chapter Five.

Conspiracy and Villainy, Innocence and Tragedy.

In one of the dirtiest of the dirty and disreputable dens of London, a man and a boy sat on that same dark December night engaged in earnest conversation.

Their seats were stools, their table was an empty flour-barrel, their apartment a cellar. A farthing candle stood awry in the neck of a pint bottle. A broken-lipped jug of gin-and-water hot, and two cracked tea-cups stood between them. The damp of the place was drawn out, rather than abated, by a small fire, which burned in a rusty grate, over which they sought to warm their hands as they conversed. The man was palpably a scoundrel. Not less so was the boy.

"Slogger," said the man, in a growling voice, "we must do it this wery night."

"Vell, Brassey, I'm game," replied the Slogger, draining his cup with a defiant air.

"If it hadn't bin for that old 'ooman as was care-taker all last summer," continued the man, as he pricked a refractory tobacco-pipe, "we'd 'ave found the job more difficult; but, you see, she went and lost the key o' the back door, and the doctor he 'ad to get another. So I goes an' gets round the old 'ooman, an' pumps her about the lost key, an' at last I finds it—d'ye see?"

"But," returned the Slogger, with a knowing frown, "seems to me as how you'd never get two keys into one lock—eh? The noo 'un wouldn't let the old 'un in, would it?"

"Ah, that's where it is," replied Mr Brassey, with a leer, as he raised his cup to his large ugly mouth and chuckled. "You see, the doctor's wife she's summat timmersome, an' looks arter the lockin' up every night herself—wery partikler. Then she 'as all the keys up into her own bedroom o' nights—so, you see, in consikence of her uncommon care, she keeps all the locks clear for you and me to work upon!"

The Slogger was so overcome by this instance of the result of excessive caution, that he laughed heartily for some minutes, and had to apply for relief to the hot gin-and-water.

"'Ow ever did you come for to find that hout?" asked the boy.

"Servants," replied the man.

"Ha!" exclaimed the boy, with a wink, which would have been knowing if the spirits had not by that time rendered it ridiculous.

"Yes, you see," continued the elder ruffian, blowing a heavy cloud of smoke like a cannon shot from his lips, "servants is wariable in character. Some is good, an' some is bad. I mostly take up wi' the bad 'uns. There's one in the doctor's 'ouse as is a prime favourite with me, an' knows all about the locks, she does. But there's a noo an' unexpected difficulty sprung up in the way this wery mornin'."

"Wot's that?" demanded the Slogger, with the air of a man prepared to defy all difficulties.

"They've bin an' got a dog—a little dog, too; the very wust kind for kickin' up a row. 'Owever, it ain't the fust time you an' I 'ave met an conkered such a difficulty. You'll take a bit of cat's meat in your pocket, you know."

"Hall right!" exclaimed the young housebreaker, with a reckless toss of his shaggy head, as he laid his hand on the jug: but the elder scoundrel laid his stronger hand upon it.

"Come, Slogger; no more o' that. You've 'ad too much already. You won't be fit for dooty if you take more."

"It's wery 'ard on a cove," growled the lad, sulkily.

Brassey looked narrowly into his face, then took up the forbidden jug, and himself drained it, after which he rose, grasped the boy by his collar, and forced him, struggling, towards a sink full of dirty water, into which he thrust his head, and shook it about roughly for a second or two.

"There, that'll sober you," said the man, releasing the boy, and sending him into the middle of the room with a kick. "Now, don't let your monkey rise, Slogger. It's all for your good. I'll be back in 'alf an hour. See that you have the tools ready."

So saying the man left the cellar, and the boy, who was much exasperated, though decidedly sobered, by his treatment, proceeded to dry himself with a jack-towel, and make preparations for the intended burglary.

The house in regard to which such interesting preparations were being made was buried, at the hour I write of, in profound repose. As its fate and its family have something to do with my tale, I shall describe it somewhat particularly. In the basement there was an offshoot, or scullery, which communicated with the kitchen. This scullery had been set apart that day as the bedroom of my little dog. (Of course I knew nothing of this, and what I am about to relate, at that time. I learned it all afterwards.) Dumps lay sound asleep on a flannel bed, made by loving hands, in the bottom of a soap-box. It lay under the shadow of a beer-cask—the servants' beer—a fresh cask—which, having arrived late that evening, had not been relegated to the cellar. The only other individual who slept on the basement was the footman.

That worthy, being elderly and feeble, though bold as a lion, had been doomed to the lower regions by his mistress, as a sure protection against burglars. He went to bed nightly with a poker and a pistol so disposed that he could clutch them both while in the act of springing from bed. This arrangement was made not to relieve his own fears, but by order of his mistress, with whom he could hold communication at night without rising, by means of a speaking-tube.

John—he chanced to bear my own name—had been so long subject to night alarms, partly from cats careering in the back yard, and his mistress demanding to know, through the tube, if he heard them; partly, also, from frequent ringing of the night-bell, by persons who urgently wanted "Dr McTougall," that he had become callous in his nervous system, and did much of his night-work as a semi-somnambulist.

The rooms on the first floor above, consisting of the dining-room, library, and consulting-room, etcetera, were left, as usual, tenantless and dark at night. On the drawing-room floor Mrs McTougall lay in her comfortable bed, sound asleep and dreamless. The poor lady had spent the first part of that night in considerable fear because of the restlessness of Dumps in his new and strange bedroom—her husband being absent because of a sudden call to a country patient. The speaking-tube had been pretty well worked, and John had been lively in consequence—though patient—but at last the drowsy god had calmed the good lady into a state of oblivion.

On the floor above, besides various bedrooms, there were the night nursery and the schoolroom. In one of the bedrooms slumbered the young lady who had robbed me of my doggie!

In the nursery were four cribs and a cradle. Dr McTougall's family had come in what I may style annual progression. Six years had he been married, and each year had contributed another annual to the army.

The children were now ranged round the walls with mathematical precision—one, two, three, four, and five. The doctor liked them all to be together, and the nursery, being unusually large, permitted of this arrangement. A tall, powerful, sunny-tempered woman of uncertain age officered the army by day and guarded it by night. Jack and Harry and Job and Jenny occupied the cribs, Dolly the cradle. Each of these creatures had been transfixed by sleep in the very midst of some desperate enterprise during the earlier watches of that night, and all had fallen down in more or less *dégagé* and reckless attitudes. Here a fat fist, doubled; there a fatter leg, protruded; elsewhere a spread eagle was represented, with the bedclothes in a heap on its stomach; or a complex knot was displayed, made up of legs, sheets, blankets, and arms. Subsequently the tall but faithful guardian had gone round, disentangled the knot, reduced the spread eagle, and straightened them all out. They now lay, stiff and motionless as mummies, roseate as the morn, deceptively innocent, with eyes tight shut and mouths wide open—save in the case of Dolly, whose natural appetite could only be appeased by the nightly sucking of two of her own fingers.

In the attics three domestics slumbered in peace. Still higher, a belated cat reposed in the lee of a chimney-stack.

It was a restful scene, which none but a heartless monster could have ventured to disturb. Even Brassey and the Slogger had no intention of disturbing it—on the contrary, it was their earnest hope that they might accomplish their designs on the doctor's plate with as little disturbance as possible. Their motto was a paraphrase, "Get the plate—quietly, if you can, but get the plate!"

In the midst of the universal stillness, when no sound was heard save the sighing of the night-wind or the solemn creaking of an unsuccessful smoke-curer, there came a voice of alarm down the tube—

"John, do you hear burglars?"

"Oh, dear! no, mum, I don't."

"I'm convinced I hear them at the back of the house!" tubed Mrs McTougall.

"Indeed it ain't, mum," tubed John in reply. "It's on'y that little dog as comed this morning and ain't got used to its noo 'ome yet. It's a-whinin', mum; that's wot it is."

"Oh! do get up, John, and put a light beside him; perhaps he's afraid of the dark."

"Very well, mum," said John, obedient but savage.

He arose, upset the poker and pistol with a hideous clatter, which was luckily too remote to smite horror into the heart of Mrs McTougall, and groped his way into the servants' hall. Lighting a paraffin lamp, he went to the scullery, using very unfair and harsh language towards my innocent dog.

"Pompey, you brute!"—the footman had already learned his name—"hold your noise. There!"

He set the lamp on the head of the beer cask and returned to bed.

It is believed that poor perplexed Dumps viewed the midnight apparition with silent surprise, and wagged his tail, being friendly; then gazed at the lamp after the apparition had retired, until obliged to give the subject up, like a difficult conundrum, and finally went to sleep—perchance to dream—of dogs, or me!

It was while Dumps was thus engaged that Brassey and the Slogger walked up to the front of the house and surveyed it in silence for a few minutes. They also took particular observations of both ends of the street.

"All serene," said Brassey; "now, you go round to the back and use your key quietly. Give 'im the bit o' meat quick. He won't give tongue arter 'e smells it, and one or two barks won't alarm the 'ouse. So, get along, Slogger. W'en you've got him snug, with a rope round 'is neck an' 'is head in the flannel bag, just caterwaul an' I'll come round. Bless the cats! they're a great help to gentlemen in our procession."

Thus admonished, the Slogger chuckled and melted into the darkness, while Brassey mingled himself with the shadow of a pillar.

The key—lost by the care-taker and found by the burglar—fitted into the empty lock even more perfectly than that which Mrs McTougall had conveyed to her mantelpiece some hours before. It was well oiled too, and went round in the wards of the lock without giving a chirp, so that the bolt flew back with one solitary shot. The report, however, was loud. It caused Dumps to return from Dogland and raise his head with a decided growl.

Nobody heard the growl except the Slogger, who stood perfectly still for nearly a minute, with his hand on the door-handle. Then he opened the door slowly and softly—so slowly and softly that an alarm-bell attached to it did not ring.

A sharp bow! wow! wow! however, greeted him as he entered, but he was prompt. A small piece of meat fell directly under the nose of Dumps, as he stood bristling in front of his box; and, let me add, when Dumps bristled it was a sight to behold!

“Good dog—good do–o–og,” said the Slogger, in his softest and most insinuating tone.

Dumps reduced his bark to a growl.

The footman heard both bark and growl, but, attributing them to the influence of cats, turned on his other side and listened—not for burglars, innocent man, but for the tube.

It was silent! Evidently “tired nature” was, in Mrs McTougall’s case, lulled by the “sweet restorer.” Forthwith John betook himself again to the land of Nod.

“Have another bit?” said the Slogger in quite a friendly way, after the first bit had been devoured.

My too trusting favourite wagged his tail and innocently accepted the bribe.

It was good cat’s meat. Dumps liked it. The enormous supper with which he had lain down was by that time nearly assimilated, and appetite had begun to revive. Going down on his knee the young burglar held out a third morsel of temptation in his hand. Dumps meekly advanced and took the meat. It was a sad illustration of the ease with which even a dog descends from bad to worse.

While he was engaged with it the Slogger gently patted his head.

Suddenly Dumps found his muzzle grasped and held tight in a powerful hand. He tried to bark and yell, but could produce nothing better than a scarcely audible whine. His sides were at the same instant grasped by a pair of powerful knees, while a rope was twisted round his neck, and the process of strangulation began.

But strangulation was not the Slogger’s intention. He had been carefully warned not to kill.

“Mind, now, you don’t screw ’im up too tight,” Brassey had said, when giving the boy his instructions before starting. “Dogs is vurth munny. Just ’old ’im tight and quiet till you get the flannel bag on ’is head, and then stand by till I’ve sacked the swag.”

Accordingly, having effected the bagging of the dog's head, the young burglar went to the door, holding Dumps tight in his arms, and uttered a pretty loud and life-like caterwaul. Brassey heard it, emerged from the shade of his pillar, and was soon beside his comrade.

When Dumps smelt and heard the new-comer, he redoubled his efforts to free his head and yell, but the Slogger was too much for him.

Few words were wasted on this occasion. The couple understood their work. Brassey took up the lamp.

"Wery considerate of 'em to 'ave a light all ready for us," he muttered, as he lowered the flame a little, and glided into the kitchen, leaving the Slogger on guard in the scullery. Here he found a variety of gins and snares carefully placed for him—and such as he—by strict orders of Mrs McTougall. Besides a swing-bell on the window shutter—similar to that which had done so little service on the scullery door—there was a coal-scuttle with the kitchen tongs balanced against it and a tin slop-pail in company with the kitchen shovel, and a watering-pan, which—the poker being already engaged to John—was balanced on its own rose and handle, all ready to fail with a touch. These outworks being echelloned along the floor rendered it impossible for an intruder to cross the kitchen in the dark without overturning one or more of them. Thanks to the lamp, Brassey steered his way carefully and with a grim smile.

At John Waters's door he paused and listened. John's nose revealed his condition.

Gliding up the stairs on shoeless feet the burglar entered the dining-room, picked the locks of the sideboard with marvellous celerity, unfolded a canvas bag, and placed therein whatever valuables he could lay hands on. Proceeding next to the drawing-room floor, he began to examine and appropriate the articles of *vertu* that appeared to him most valuable.

Not being a perfect judge of such matters, Mr Brassey was naturally puzzled with some of them. One in particular caused him to regard it with frowning attention for nearly a minute before he came to the conclusion that it was "vurth munny." He placed the lamp on the small table near the window, from which he had lifted the ornament in question, and sat down on a crimson chair with gilded legs to examine it more critically.

Meanwhile the Slogger, left in the dark with the still fitfully struggling Dumps, employed his leisure in running over some of the salient events of his past career, and in trying to ascertain, by the very faint light that came from a distant street-lamp, what was the nature of his immediate surroundings. His nose told him that the cask at his elbow was beer. His exploring right hand told him that the tap was in it. His native intelligence suggested a tumbler on the head of the cask, and the exploring hand proved the idea to be correct.

"Brassey was wery 'ard on me to-night," he thought. "I'd like to have a swig."

But Dumps was sadly in the way. To remove his left hand even for an instant from the dog's muzzle was not to be thought of. In this dilemma he resolved to tie up the said muzzle, and the legs also, even at the risk of causing death. It would not take more than a minute to draw a tumblerful, and any dog worth a straw could hold his wind for a minute. He would try. He did try, and was yet in the act of drawing the beer when my doggie burst his bonds by a frantic effort to be free. Probably the hairy nature of his little body had rendered a firm bond impossible. At all events, he suddenly found his legs loose. Another effort,

more frantic than before, set free the muzzle, and then there arose on the still night air a yell so shrill, so loud, so indescribably horrible, that its conception must be left entirely to the reader's imagination.

At the same instant Dumps scurried into the kitchen. The scuttle and tongs went down, the slop-pail and shovel followed suit, also the watering-pan, into which latter Dumps went head foremost as it fell, and from its interior another yell issued with such resonant power that the first yell was a mere chirp by contrast. The Slogger fled from the scene like an evil spirit, while John Waters sprang up and grasped the pistol and poker.

The effect on Brassey in the drawing-room cannot be conceived, much less described. He shot, as it were, out of the crimson-gilded chair and overturned the lamp, which burst on the floor. Being half full of paraffin oil it instantly set fire to the gauze window-curtains. The burglar made straight for the stairs. John Waters, observing the light, dashed up the same, and the two met face to face on the landing, breathing hate and glaring defiance!

Chapter Six.

Relates a Stirring Innocent.

Now it was at this critical moment that I chanced to come upon the scene.

I had just ascertained from the brass plate on the door that Dr McTougall dwelt there, and was thinking what an ugly unromantic name that was for a pretty girl as I descended the steps, when Dumps's first yell broke upon my astonished ears. I recognised the voice at once, though I must confess that the second yell from the interior of the watering-pan perplexed me not a little, but the hideous clatter with which it was associated, and the sudden bursting out of flames in the drawing-room, drove all thoughts of Dumps instantly away.

My first impulse was to rush to the nearest fire-station; but a wild shouting in the lobby of the house arrested me. I rang the bell violently. At the same moment I heard the report of a pistol, and a savage curse, as a bullet came crashing through the door and went close past my head. Then I heard a blow, followed by a groan. This was succeeded by female shrieks overhead, and the violent undoing of the bolts, locks, and chains of the front door.

Thought is quick. Burglary flashed into my mind! A villainous-looking fellow leaped out as the door flew open. I recognised him instantly as the man who had sold Dumps to me. I put my foot in front of him. He went over it with a wild pitch, and descended the steps on his nose!

I was about to leap on him when a policeman came tearing round the corner, just in time to receive the stunned Brassey with open arms, as he rose and staggered forward.

"Just so. Don't give way too much to your feelings! I'll take care of you, my poor unfortunate fellow," said the policeman, as a brother in blue came to his assistance.

Already one of those ubiquitous creatures, a street-boy, had flown to the fire-station on the wings of hope and joy, and an engine came careering round the corner as I turned to rush up the stairs, which were already filled with smoke.

I dashed in the first door I came to. A lady, partially clothed, stood there pale as death, and motionless.

“Quick, madam! descend! the house is on fire!” I gasped in sharp sentences as I seized her. “Where is your—your (she looked young) *sister*?” I cried, as she resisted my efforts to lead her out.

“I’ve no sister!” she shrieked.

“Your daughter, then! Quick, direct me!”

“Oh! my darling!” she cried, wringing her hands.

“Where?” I shouted in desperation, for the smoke was thickening.

“Up-stairs,” she screamed, and rushed out, intending evidently to go up.

I caught her round the waist and forced her down the stairs, thrust her into the arms of an ascending fireman, and then ran up again, taking three steps at a time. The cry of a child attracted me. I made for a door opposite, and burst it open. The scene that presented itself was striking. Out of four cribs and a cradle arose five cones of bed-clothes, with a pretty little curly head surmounting each cone, and ten eyes blazing with amazement. A tall nurse stood erect in the middle of the floor with outstretched arms, glaring.

Instantly I grasped a cone in each arm and bore it from the room. Blinded with smoke, I ran like a thunderbolt into the arms of a gigantic fireman.

“Take it easy, sir. You’ll do far more work if you keep cool. Straight on to front room! Fire-escape’s there by this time.”

I understood, and darted into a front room, through the window of which the head of the fire-escape entered at the same moment, sending glass in splinters all over us. It was immediately drawn back a little, enabling me to throw up the window-sash and thrust the two children into the arms of another fireman, whose head suddenly emerged from the smoke that rose from the windows below. I could see that the fire was roaring out into the street, and lighting up hundreds of faces below, while the steady clank of engines told that the brigade was busily at work fighting the flames. But I had no time to look or think. Indeed, I felt as if I had no power of volition properly my own, but that I acted under the strong impulse of another spirit within me.

Darting back towards the nursery I met the first fireman dragging with his right hand the tall nurse, who seemed unreasonably to struggle against him, while in his left arm he carried two of the children, and the baby by its night-dress in his teeth.

I saw at a glance that he had emptied the nursery, and turned to search for another door. During the whole of this scene—which passed in a few minutes—a feeling of desperate anxiety possessed me as to the fate of the young lady to whom I had given up my doggie. I felt persuaded she slept on the same floor with the children, and groped about the passage in search of another door. By this time the smoke was so dense

that I was all but suffocated. A minute or two more and it would be too late. I could not see. Suddenly I felt a door and kicked it open. The black smoke entered with me, but it was still clear enough inside for me to perceive the form of a girl lying on the floor. It was she!

"Miss McTougall!" I shouted, endeavouring to rouse her; but she had fainted. Not a moment now to lose. A lurid tongue of flame came up the staircase. I rolled a blanket round the girl—head and all. She was very light. In the excitement of the moment I raised her as if she had been a child, and darted back towards the passage, but the few moments I had lost almost cost us our lives. I knew that to breathe the dense smoke would be certain suffocation, and went through it holding my breath like a diver. I felt as if the hot flames were playing round my head, and smelt the singeing of my own hair. Another moment and I had reached the window, where the grim but welcome head of the escape still rested. With a desperate bound I went head first into the shoot, taking my precious bundle along with me.

A fireman chanced to be going down the shoot at the time, carefully piloting one of the maids who had been rescued from the attics, and checking his speed with outspread legs. Against him I canonned with tremendous force, and sent him and his charge in a heap to the bottom.

This was fortunate, for the pace at which I must have otherwise come down would have probably broken my neck. As it was, I felt so stunned that I nearly lost consciousness. Still I retained my senses sufficiently to observe a stout elderly little man in full evening dress, with his coat slit up behind to his neck, his face half-blackened, and his shaggy hair flying wildly in all directions—chiefly upwards. Amid wild cheering from the crowd I confusedly heard the conversation that followed.

"They're all accounted for now, sir," said a policeman, who supported me.

The elderly gentleman had leaped forward with an exclamation of earnest thankfulness, and unrolled the blanket.

"Not hurt! No, thank God. Lift her carefully now. To the same house.—And who are you?" he added, turning and looking full at me as I leaned in a dazed condition on the fireman's shoulder. I heard the question and saw the speaker, but could not reply.

"This is the gen'leman as saved two o' the child'n an' the young lady," said the tall fireman, whom I recognised as the one into whose bosom I had plunged on the upper floor.

"Ay, an' he's the gen'leman," said another fireman, "who shoved your missus, sir, into my arms, w'en she was bent on runnin' up-stairs."

"Is this so?" said the little gentleman, stepping forward and grasping my hand.

Still I could not speak. I felt as if the whole affair were a dream, and looked on and listened with a vacant smile.

Just at that moment a long, melancholy wail rose above the roaring of the fire and clanking of the engines.

The cry restored me at once.

“Dumps! my doggie!” I exclaimed; and, bursting through the crowd, rushed towards the now furiously-burning house, but strong hands restrained me.

“What dog is it?” asked the elderly gentleman. A man, drenched, blackened, and bloodstained, whom I had not before observed, here said—

“A noo dog, sir, Dumps by name, come to us this wery day. We putt ’im in the scullery for the night.”

Again I made a desperate effort to return to the burning house, but was restrained as before.

“All right, sir,” whispered a fireman in a confidential tone, “I know the scullery. The fire ain’t got down there yet. Your dog can only have bin damaged by water as yet. I’ll save ’im sir, never fear.”

He went off with a quiet little nod that did much to comfort me. Meanwhile the elderly gentleman sought to induce me to leave the place and obtain refreshment in the house of a friendly neighbour, who had taken in his family.

“You need rest, my dear sir,” he said; “come, I must take you in hand. You have rendered me a service which I can never repay. What? Obstinate! Do you know that I am a doctor, sir, and must be obeyed?”

I smiled, but refused to move until the fate of Dumps was ascertained.

Presently the fireman returned with my doggie in his arms.

Poor Dumps! He was a pitiable sight. Tons of hot water had been pouring on his devoted head, and his shaggy, shapeless coat was so plastered to his long, little body, that he looked more like a drowned weazel than a terrier. He was trembling violently, and whined piteously, as they gave him to me; nevertheless, he attempted to wag his tail and lick my hands. In both attempts he failed. His tail was too wet to wag—but it wriggled.

“He’d have saved himself, sir,” said the man who brought him, “only there was a rope round his neck, which had caught on a coal-scuttle and held him. He’s not hurt, sir, though he do seem as if some one had bin tryin’ to choke him.”

“My poor doggie!” said I, fondling him.

“He won’t want washin’ for some time to come,” observed one of the bystanders.

There was a laugh at this.

“Come; now the dog is safe you have no reason for refusing to go with me,” said the elderly gentleman, who, I now understood, was the master of the burning house.

As we walked away he asked my name and profession, and I thought he smiled with peculiar satisfaction when I said I was a student of medicine.

"Oh, indeed!" he said; "well—we shall see. But here we are. This is the house of my good friend Dobson. City man—capital fellow, like all City men—ahem! He has put his house at my disposal at this very trying period of my existence."

"But are you sure, Dr McTougall, that *all* the household is saved?" I asked, becoming more thoroughly awake to the tremendous reality of the scene through which I had just passed.

"Sure! my good fellow, d'you think I'd be talking thus quietly to you if I were *not* sure? Yes, thanks to you and the firemen, under God, there's not a hair of their heads injured."

"Are you—I beg pardon—are you quite sure? Have you seen Miss McTougall since she—"

"Miss McTougall!" exclaimed the doctor, with a laugh. "D'you mean my little Jenny by that dignified title?"

"Well, of course, I did not know her name, and she is not *very* large; but I brought her down the shoot with such violence that—"

An explosion of laughter from the doctor stopped me as I entered a large library, the powerful lights of which at first dazzled me.

"Here, Dobson, let me introduce you to the man who has saved my whole family, and who has mistaken Miss Blythe for my Jenny!—Why, sir," he continued, turning to me, "the bundle you brought down so unceremoniously is only my governess. Ah! I'd give twenty thousand pounds down on the spot if she were only my daughter. My Jenny will be a lucky woman if she grows up to be like her."

"I congratulate you, Mr Mellon," said the City man, shaking me warmly by the hand.

"You have acted with admirable promptitude—which is most important at a fire—and they tell me that the header you took into the escape, with Miss Blythe in your arms, was the finest acrobatic feat that has been seen off the stage."

"I say, Dobson, where have you stowed my wife and the children? I want to introduce him to them."

"In the dining-room," returned the City man. "You see, I thought it would be more agreeable that they should be all together until their nerves are calmed, so I had mattresses, blankets, etcetera, brought down. Being a bachelor, as you know, I could do nothing more than place the wardrobes of my domestics at the disposal of the ladies. The things are not, indeed, a very good fit, but—this way, Mr Mellon."

The City man, who was tall and handsome, ushered his guests into what he styled his hospital, and there, ranged in a row along the wall, were five shakedowns, with a child on each. Seldom have I beheld a finer sight than the sparkling lustre of their ten still glaring eyes! Two pleasant young domestics were engaged in feeding the smaller ones with jam and pudding. We arrange the words advisedly, because the jam was, out of all proportion, too much for the pudding. The elder children were feeding themselves with the same materials, and in the same relative proportions. Mrs McTougall, in a blue cotton gown with white spots, which belonged to the housemaid, reclined on a sofa; she was deadly pale, and the expression of horror was not quite removed from her countenance.

Beside her, administering restoratives, sat Miss Blythe, in a chintz dress belonging to the cook, which was ridiculously too large for her. She was dishevelled and flushed, and looked so pleasantly anxious about Mrs McTougall that I almost forgave her having robbed me of my doggie.

“Miss Blythe, your deliverer!” cried the little doctor, who seemed to delight in blowing my trumpet with the loudest possible blast; “my dear, your preserver!”

I bowed in some confusion, and stammered something incoherently. Mrs McTougall said something else, languidly, and Miss Blythe rose and held out her hand with a pleasant smile.

“Well, if this isn’t one of the very jolliest larks I ever had!” exclaimed Master Harry from his corner, between two enormous spoonfuls.

“Hah!” exclaimed Master Jack.

He could say no more. He was too busy!

We all laughed, and, much to my relief, general attention was turned to the little ones.

“You young scamps!—the ‘lark’ will cost me some thousands of pounds,” said the doctor.

“Never mind, papa. Just go to the bank and they’ll give you as much as you want.”

“More pooding!” demanded Master Job. The pleasant-faced domestic hesitated.

“Oh! give it him. Act the banker on this occasion, and give him as much as he wants,” said the doctor.

“Good papa!” exclaimed the overjoyed Jenny; “how I wis’ we had a house on fire every night!”

Even Dolly crowed with delight at this, as if she really appreciated the idea, and continued her own supper with increased fervour.

Thus did that remarkable family spend the small hours of that morning, while their home was being burned to ashes.

Chapter Seven.

My Circumstances begin to Brighten.

“Robin,” said old Mrs Willis from her bed, in the wheeziest of voices.

“Who’s Robin, granny?” demanded young Slidder, in some surprise, looking over his shoulder as he stooped at the fire to stir a pan of gruel.

"You are Robin," returned the old lady following up the remark with a feeble sneeze. "I can't stand Slidder. It is such an ugly name. Besides, you ought to have a Christian name, child. Don't you like Robin?"

The boy chuckled a little as he stirred the gruel.

"Vell, I ain't had it long enough to 'ave made up my mind on the p'int, but you may call me wot you please, granny, s'long as you don't swear. I'll answer to Robin, or Bobin, or Dobin, or Nobin, or Flogin—no, by the way, I won't answer to Flogin. I don't like that. But why call me Robin?"

"Ah!" sighed the old woman, "because I once had a dear little son so named. He died when he was about your age, and your kindly ways are so like his that—"

"Hallo, granny!" interrupted Slidder, standing up with a look of intense surprise, "are you took bad?"

"No. Why?"

"'Cause you said suthin' about *my ways* that looks suspicious."

"Did I, Robin? I didn't mean to. But as I was saying, I'd like to call you Robin because it reminds me of my little darling who is now in heaven. Ah! Robin was so gentle, and loving, and tender, and true, and kind. He *was* a good boy!"

A wheezing, which culminated in another feeble sneeze, here silenced the poor old thing.

For some minutes after that Slidder devoted himself to vigorous stirring of the gruel, and to repressed laughter, which latter made him very red in the face, and caused his shoulders to heave convulsively. At last he sought relief in occasional mutterings.

"On'y think!" he said, quoting Mrs Willis's words, in a scarcely audible whisper, "'so gentle, an' lovin', an' tender, an' true, an' kind'—an' sitch a good boy too—an' *my* kindly ways is like *his*, are they? Well, well, Mrs W, it's quite clear that a loo-natic asylum must be your native 'ome arter this."

"What are you muttering about, Robin?"

"Nuffin' partikler, granny. On'y suthin' about your futur' prospec's. The gruel's ready, I think. Will you 'ave it now, or vait till you get it?"

"There—even in your little touches of humour you're so like him!" said the old woman, with a mingled smile and sneeze, as she slowly rose to a sitting posture, making a cone of the bedclothes with her knees, on which she laid her thin hands.

"Come now, old 'ooman," said Slidder seriously, "if you go on jokin' like that you'll make me larf and spill your gruel—p'raps let it fall bash on the floor. There! Don't let it tumble off your knees, now; I'd adwise you to lower 'em for the time bein'. Here's the spoon; it ain't as bright as I could wish, but you can't expect much of pewter; an' the napkin—that's your sort; an' the bit of bread—which it isn't too much for a 'ealthy happetite. Now then, granny, go in and win!"

"*So* like," murmured the old woman, as she gazed in Slidder's face. "And it is so good of you to give up your play and come to look after a helpless old creature like me."

"Yes, it *is* wery good of me," assented the boy, with an air of profound gravity; "I was used to sleep under a damp archway or in a wet cask, *now* I slumbers in a 'ouse by a fire, under a blankit. Vunce on a time I got wittles any'ow—sometimes didn't get 'em at all; *now* I 'ave 'em riglar, as well as good, an' 'ot. In wot poets call 'the days gone by'—an' nights too, let me tell you—I wos kicked an' cuffed by everybody, an' 'unted to death by bobbies. *Now* I'm—let alone! 'Eavenly condition—let *alone*! sometimes even complimented with such pleasant greetings as 'Go it, Ginger!' or 'Does your mother know you're out?' Oh yes, granny! I made great sacrifices, I did, w'en I come 'ere to look arter *you*!"

Mrs Willis smiled, sneezed, and began her gruel. Slidder, who looked at her with deep interest, was called away by a knock at the door. Opening it he beheld a tall footman, with a parcel in his hand.

"Does a Mrs Willis live here?" he asked.

"No," replied Slidder; "a Mrs Willis don't live here, but *the* Mrs Willis—the on'y one vurth speakin' of—does."

"Ah!" replied the man, with a smile—for he was an amiable footman—"and I suppose you are young Slidder?"

"I am *Mister* Slidder, sir! And I would 'ave you remember," said the urchin, with dignity, "that every Englishman's 'ouse is his castle, and that neither imperence nor flunkies 'as a right to enter."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the man, with affected surprise, "then I'm afraid this castle can't be a strong one, or it ain't well guarded, for 'Imperence' got into it somehow when *you* entered."

"Good, good!" returned the boy, with the air of a connoisseur; "that's worthy of the East End. You should 'ave bin one of us.—Now then, old six-foot! wot's your business?"

"To deliver this parcel."

"'And it over, then."

"But I am also to see Mrs Willis, and ask how she is."

"Walk in, then, an' wipe your feet. We ain't got a door-mat to-day. It's a-comin', like Christmas; but you may use the boards in the meantime."

The footman turned out to be a pleasant, gossipy man, and soon won the hearts of old Mrs Willis and her young guardian. He had been sent, he said, by a Dr McTougall with a parcel containing wine, tea, sugar, rice, and a few other articles of food, and with a message that the doctor would call and see Mrs Willis that afternoon.

"Deary me, that's very kind," said the old woman; "but I wonder why he sent such things to me, and who told him I was in want of 'em?"

"It was a young gentleman who rescued most of the doctor's family from a fire last night. His name, I believe, is Mellon—"

"Wot! Doctor John Mellon?" exclaimed Slidder, with widening eyes.

"Whether he's John or doctor I cannot tell. All I know is that he's *Mister* Mellon, and he's bin rather knocked up by— But, bless me, I forgot: I was to say nothing about the—the fire till Dr McTougall had seen you. How stoopid of me; but things *will* slip out!"

He stopped abruptly, and placed his brown paper parcel on the bed.

"Now, I say, look here, Mister Six-foot or wotever's your name," said Slidder, with intense eagerness. "It's of no use your tyin' up the mouth o' the bag now. The cat's got out an' can't be got in again by no manner o' means. Just make a clean breast of it, an' tell it all out like a man,—there's a good feller! If you don't, I'll tell Dr McTougall that you gave me an' the old lady a full, true, an' partikler account o' the whole affair, from the fust bustin' out o' the flames, an' the calling o' the *ingines*, to the last crash o' the fallin' roof, and the roastin' alive of the 'ousehold cat. I will, as sure as you're a six-foot flunkey!"

Thus adjured and threatened, the gossipy footman made a clean breast of it. He told them how that I had acted like a hero at the fire, and then, after giving, in minute detail, an account of all that the reader already knows, he went on to say that the whole family, except Dr McTougall, was laid up with colds; that the governess was in a high fever; that the maid-servants, having been rescued on the shoulders of firemen from the attics, were completely broken down in their nerves; and that I had received an injury to my right leg, which, although I had said nothing about it on the night of the fire, had become so much worse in the morning that I could scarcely walk across the room. In these circumstances, he added, Dr McTougall had agreed to visit my poor people for me until I should recover.

"You see," continued the footman, "I only heard a little of their conversation. Dr McTougall was saying when I come into the room: 'Well, Mr Mellon,' he said, 'you must of necessity remain where you are, and you could not, let me tell you, be in better quarters. I will look after your patients till you are able to go about again—which won't be long, I hope—and I'll make a particular note of your old woman, and send her some wine and things immediately.' I suppose he meant you, ma'am," added the footman, "but having to leave the room again owing to some of the children howling for jam and pudding, I heard no more."

Having thus delivered himself of his tale and parcel, the tall footman took his leave with many expressions of good-will.

"Now, granny," remarked young Slidder, as he untied the parcel, and spread its contents on the small deal table, "I've got a wague suspicion that the 'ouse w'ich 'as gone to hashes is the wery 'ouse in w'ich Dr Mellon put his little dog last night. 'Cause why? Ain't it the same identical street, an' the same side o' the street, and about the same part o' the street? An' didn't both him and me forgit to ask the name o' the people o' the 'ouse, or to look at the number—so took up was we with partin' from Punch? Wot more nat'ral than for him to go round on 'is way back to look at the 'ouse—supposin' he was too late to call? Then, didn't that six-footer say a terrier dog *was* reskooed from the lower premises? To be sure there's many a terrier dog in London, but then didn't he likewise say that the gov'ness o' the family is a pretty gal? Wot more likely than that she's *my* young lady? All that, you see, granny, is what the magistrates would call presumptuous evidence. But I'll go and inquire for myself this wery evenin' w'en you're all settled an comf'rable, an' w'en I've got Mrs Jones to look arter you."

That evening, accordingly, when Robin Slidder—as I shall now call him—was away making his inquiries, Dr McTougall called on Mrs Willis. She was very weak and low at the time. The memory of her lost Edie had been heavy upon her, and she felt strangely disinclined to talk. The kindly doctor did not disturb her more than was sufficient to fully investigate her case.

When about to depart he took Mrs Jones into the passage.

"Now, my good woman," he said, "I hope you will see the instructions you heard me give to Mrs Willis carried out. She is very low, but with good food and careful nursing may do well. Can you give her much of your time?"

"La, sir! yes. I'm a lone woman, sir, with nothin' to do but take care of myself; an' I'm that fond of Mrs Willis—she's like my own mother."

"Very good. And what of this boy who has come to live with her? D'you think he is steady—to be depended on?"

"Indeed I do, sir!" replied Mrs Jones, with much earnestness. "Though he did come from nowheres in partiklar, an' don't b'long to nobody, he's a good boy, is little Slidder, and a better nurse you'll not find in all the hospitals."

"I wish I had found him at home. Will you give him this card, and tell him to call on me to-morrow morning between eight and nine? Let him ask particularly for me—Dr McTougall. I'm not in my own house, but in a friend's at present; I was burnt out of my house last night."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Mrs Jones with a shocked expression.

"Yes; accidents will happen, you know, to the most careful among us, Mrs Jones," said the little doctor, with a smile, as he drew on his gloves. "Good evening. Take care of your patient now; I'm much interested in her case—because of the young doctor who visits her sometimes."

"Dr Mellon?" exclaimed the woman.

"Yes. You know him?"

"Know him! I should think I do! He has great consideration for the poor. Ah! he *is* a gentleman, is Mr Mellon!"

"He is more than a gentleman, Mrs Jones," said the little doctor with a kindly nod, as he turned and hurried away.

It may perhaps seem to savour of vanity and egotism my recording this conversation, but I do it chiefly for the purpose of showing how much of hearty gratitude there is for mere trifles among the poor, for the woman who was thus complimentary to me never received a farthing of money from my hands, and I am not aware of having ever taken any notice of her, except now and then wishing her a respectful good-evening, and making a few inquiries as to her health.

That night Dr McTougall came to me, on returning from his rounds, to report upon my district. I was in bed at the time, and suffering considerable pain from my bruised and swollen limb. Dumps was lying at my feet—dried, refreshed, and none the worse for his adventures. I may mention that I occupied a comfortable room in the house of the "City man," who insisted on my staying with him until I should be quite able to walk to my lodgings. As Dr McTougall had taken my district, a brief note to Mrs Miff, my landlady, relieved my mind of all anxieties, professional and domestic, so that my doggie and I could enjoy ourselves as well as the swollen leg would permit.

"My dear young friend," said the little doctor, as he entered, "your patients are all going on admirably, and as I mean to send my assistant to them regularly, you may make your mind quite easy. I've seen your old woman too, and she is charming. I don't wonder you lost your heart to her. Your young *protégé*, however, was absent—the scamp!—but he had provided a good nurse to take his place in the person of Mrs Jones."

"I know her—well," said I; "she is a capital nurse. Little Slidder has, I am told, been here in your absence, but unfortunately the maid who opened the door to him would not let him see me, as I happened to be asleep at the time. However, he'll be sure to call again. But you have not told me yet how Miss Blythe is."

"Well, I've not had time to tell you," replied the doctor, with a smile. "I'm sorry to say she is rather feverish; the excitement and exposure to the night air were a severe trial to her, for although she is naturally strong, it is not long since she recovered from a severe illness. Nothing, however, surprises me so much as the way in which my dear wife has come through it all. It seems to have given her quite a turn in the right direction. Why, she used to be as timid as a mouse! Now she scoffs at burglars. After what occurred last night she says she will fear nothing under the sun. Isn't it odd? As for the children, I'm afraid the event has roused all that is wild and savage in their natures! They were kicking up a horrible shindy when I passed the dining-room—the hospital, as Dobson calls it—so I opened the door and peeped in. There they were, all standing up on their beds, shouting 'Fire! fire! p'leece! p'leece!—engines! escapes! Come qui-i-i-ck!'

"'Silence!' I shouted.

"'Oh, papa!' they screamed, in delight, 'what *do* you think we've had for supper?'

"'Well, what?'

"'Pudding and jam-pudding and jam—nearly *all* jam!'

"Then they burst again into a chorus of yells for engines and fire-escapes, while little Dolly's voice rang high above the rest 'Pudding and dam!—*all* dam!—p'leece! p'leece! fire and feeves!' as I shut the door.

"But now, a word in your ear before I leave you for the night. Perhaps it may not surprise you to be told that I have an extensive practice. After getting into a new house, which I must do immediately, I shall want an assistant, who may in course of time, perhaps, become a partner. D'you understand? Are you open to a proposal?"

"My dear sir," said I, "your kindness is very great, but you know that I am not yet—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that. I merely wish to inject an idea into your brain, and leave it there to fructify. Go to sleep now, my dear young fellow, and let me wish you agreeable dreams."

With a warm squeeze of the hand, and a pleasant nod, my new friend said good-night, and left me to my meditations.

Chapter Eight.

Little Slidder Resists Temptation Successfully, and I Become Enslaved.

"Pompey," said I, one afternoon, while reclining on the sofa in Dobson's drawing-room, my leg being not yet sufficiently restored to admit of my going out— "Pompey, I've got news for you."

To my surprise my doggie would not answer to that name at all when I used it, though he did so when it was used by Miss Blythe.

"Dumps!" I said, in a somewhat injured tone.

Ears and tail at once replied.

"Come now, Punch," I said, rather sternly; "I'll call you what I please—Punch, Dumps, or Pompey—because you are *my* dog still, at least as long as your mistress and I live under the same roof; so, sir, if you take the Dumps when I call you Pompey, I'll punch your head for you."

Evidently the dog thought this a very flat jest, for he paid no attention to it whatever.

"Now, Dumps, come here and let's be friends. Who do you think is coming to stay with us—to stay altogether? You'll never guess. Your old friend and first master, little Slidder, no less. Think of that!"

Dumps wagged his tail vigorously; whether at the news, or because of pleasure at my brushing the hair off his soft brown eyes, and looking into them, I cannot tell.

"Yes," I continued, "it's quite true. This fire will apparently be the making of little Slidder, as well as you and me, for we are all going to live and work together. Isn't that nice? Evidently Dr McTougall is a trump, and so is his friend Dobson, who puts this fine mansion at his disposal until another home can be got ready for us."

I was interrupted at this point by an uproarious burst of laughter from the doctor himself, who had entered by the open door unobserved by me. I joined in the laugh against myself, but blushed, nevertheless, for man does not like, as a rule, to be caught talking earnestly either to himself or to a dumb creature.

"Why, Mellon," he said, sitting down beside me, and patting my dog, "I imagined from your tones, as I entered, that you were having some serious conversation with my wife."

"No; Mrs McTougall has not yet returned from her drive. I was merely having a chat with Dumps. I had of late, in my lodgings, got into a way of thinking aloud, as it were, while talking to my dog. I suppose it was with an unconscious desire to break the silence of my room."

"No doubt, no doubt," replied the doctor, with a touch of sympathy in his tone. "You must have been rather lonely in that attic of yours. And yet do you know, I sometimes sigh for the quiet of such an attic! Perhaps when you've been some months under the same roof with these miniature thunderstorms, Jack, Harry, Job, Jenny, and Dolly, you'll long to go back to the attic."

A tremendous thump on the floor overhead, followed by a wild uproar, sent the doctor upstairs—three steps at a stride. I sat prudently still till he returned, which he did in a few minutes, laughing.

"What d'you think it was?" he cried, panting. "Only my Dolly tumbling off the chest of drawers. My babes have many pleasant little games. Among others, cutting off the heads of dreadful traitors is a great favourite. They roll up a sheet into a ball for the head. Then each of them is led in turn to the scaffold, which is the top of a chest of drawers. One holds the ball against the criminal's shoulders, another cuts it off with a wooden knife, a basket receives it below, then one of them takes it out, and, holding it aloft shouts 'Behold the head of a traitor!' It seems that four criminals had been safely decapitated, and Dolly was being led to the fatal block, when she slipped her foot and fell to the ground, overturning Harry and a chair in her descent. That was all."

"Not hurt, I hope?"

"Oh no! They never get hurt—seriously hurt, I mean. As to black-and-blue shins, scratches, cuts, and bumps, they may be said to exist in a perpetually maimed condition."

"Strange!" said I musingly, "that they should like to play at such a disagreeable subject."

"Disagreeable!" exclaimed my friend, "pooh! that's nothing. You should see them playing at the horrors of the Inquisition. My poor wife sometimes shudders at the idea that we have been gifted with five monsters of cruelty, but any one can see with half an eye that it is a fine sense of the propriety of retributive justice that influences them."

"Any one who chooses to go and look at the five innocent faces when they are asleep," said I, laughing, "can see with a *quarter* of an eye that you and Mrs McTougall are to be congratulated on the nature of your little ones."

"Of course we are, my dear fellow," returned the doctor with enthusiasm. "But—to change the subject—has little Slidder been here to-day?"

"Not that I know of."

"Ah! there he is" said the doctor, as, at that instant, the door-bell rang; "there is insolence in the very tone of his ring. He has pulled the visitor's bell, too, and there goes the knocker! Of all the imps that walk, a London street-boy is—" The sentence was cut short by the opening of the door and the entrance of my little *protégé*. He had evidently got himself up for the occasion, for his shoeblack uniform had been well brushed, his hands and face severely washed, and his hair plastered well down with soap-and-water.

"Come in, Slidder—that's your name, isn't it?" said the doctor.

"It is, sir—Robin Slidder, at your sarvice," replied the urchin, giving me a familiar nod. "'Ope your leg ain't so cranky as it wos, sir. Gittin' all square, eh?"

I repressed a smile with difficulty as I replied— “It is much better, thank you. Attend to what Dr McTougall has to say to you.”

“Hall serene,” he replied, looking with cool urbanity in the doctor’s face, “fire away!”

“You’re a shoeblack, I see,” said the doctor.

“That’s my purfession.”

“Do you like it?”

“Vell, w’en it’s dirty weather, with lots o’ mud, an’ coppers goin’, I does. W’en it’s all sunshine an’ starwation, I doesn’t.”

“My friend Mr Mellon tells me that you’re a very good boy.”

Little Slidder looked at me with a solemn, reproachful air.

“Oh! *what* a wopper!” he said.

We both laughed at this.

“Come, Slidder,” said I, “you must learn to treat us with more respect, else I shall have to change my opinion of you.”

“Wery good, sir, that’s *your* business, not mine. I wos inwited here, an’ here I am. Now, wot ’ave you got to say to me?—that’s the p’int.”

“Can you read and write?” resumed the doctor.

“Cern’ly not,” replied the boy, with the air of one who had been insulted; “wot d’you take me for? D’you think I’m a genius as can read an’ write without ’avin’ bin taught or d’you think I’m a monster as wos born readin’ an’ writin’? I’ve ’ad no school to go to nor nobody to putt me there.”

“I thought the School Board looked after such as you.”

“So they does, sir; but I’ve been too many for the school-boarders.”

“Then it’s your own fault that you’ve not been taught?” said the doctor, somewhat severely.

“Not at all,” returned the urchin, with quiet assurance. “It’s the dooty o’ the school-boarders to ketch me, an’ they can’t ketch me. That’s not my fault. It’s my superiority.”

My friend looked at the little creature before him with much surprise. After a few seconds’ contemplation and thought, he continued— “Well, Slidder, as my friend here says you are a good sort of boy, I am bound to believe him, though appearances are somewhat against you. Now, I am in want of a smart boy at present, to attend to the hall-door, show patients into my consulting-room, run messages—in short, make himself generally useful about the house. How would such a situation suit you?”

"W'y, doctor," said the boy, ignoring the question, "how could any boy attend on your 'all-door w'en it's burnt to hashes?"

"We will manage to have another door," replied Dr McTougall, with a forbearing smile; "meanwhile you could practise on the door of this house.—But that is not answering my question, boy. How would you like the place? You'd have light work, a good salary, pleasant society below stairs, and a blue uniform. In short, I'd make a page-in-buttons of you."

"Wot about the wittles?" demanded this remarkable boy.

"Of course you'd fare as well as the other servants," returned the doctor, rather testily, for his opinion of my little friend was rapidly falling; I could see that, to my regret.

"Now give me an answer at once," he continued sharply. "Would you like to come?"

"Not by no manner of means," replied Slidder promptly.

We both looked at him in amazement.

"Why, Slidder, you stupid fellow!" said I, "what possesses you to refuse so good an offer?"

"Dr Mellon," he replied, turning on me with a flush of unwonted earnestness, "d'you think I'd be so shabby, so low, so mean, as to go an' forsake Granny Willis for all the light work an' good salaries and pleasant society an' blue-uniforms-with-buttons in London? Who'd make 'er gruel? Who'd polish 'er shoes every mornin' till you could see to shave in 'em, though she don't never put 'em on? Who'd make 'er bed an' light 'er fires an' fetch 'er odd bits o' coal? An' who'd read the noos to 'er, an'—"

"Why, Slidder," interrupted Dr McTougall, "you said just now that you could not read."

"No more I can, sir but I takes in a old newspaper to 'er every morning', an' sets myself down by the fire with it before me an' pretends to read. I inwents the noos as I goes along; an you should see that old lady's face, an' the way 'er eyes opens we'n I'm a tapin' off the murders an' the 'ighway robberies, an' the burglaries an' the fires at 'ome, an' the wars an' earthquakes an' other scrimmages abroad. It do cheer 'er up most wonderful. Of course, I stick in any hodd bits o' real noos I 'appens to git hold of, but I ain't partickler."

"Apparently not," said the doctor, laughing. "Well, I see it's of no use tempting you to forsake your present position—indeed, I would not wish you to leave it. Some day I may find means to have old Mrs Willis taken better care of, and then—well, we shall see. Meanwhile, I respect your feelings. Good-bye, and give my regards to granny. Say I'll be over to see her soon."

"Stay," said I, as the boy turned to leave, "you never told me that one of your names was Robin."

"'Cause it wasn't w'en I saw you last; I only got it a few days ago."

"Indeed! From whom?"

"From Granny Willis. She gave me the name, an' I likes it, an' mean to stick by it—Good arternoon, gen'lemen. Ta, ta, Punch."

At the word my doggie bounced from under my hand and began to leap joyfully round the boy.

"I say," said Robin, pausing at the door and looking back, "*she's* all right I 'ope. Gittin' better?"

"Who do you mean?"

"W'y, the guv'ness, in course—my young lady."

"Oh, yes! I am happy to say she is better," said the doctor, much amused by the anxious look of the face, which had hitherto been the quintessence of cool self-possession. "But she has had a great shake, and will have to be sent to the country for change of air when we can venture to move her."

I confess that I was much surprised, but not a little gratified, by the very decided manner in which Slidder avowed his determination to stand fast by the poor old woman in whom I had been led to take so strong an interest. Hitherto I had felt some uncertainty as to how far I could depend on the boy's affection for Mrs Willis, and his steadiness of purpose; now I felt quite sure of him.

Dr McTougall felt as I did in the matter, and so did his friend the City man. I had half expected that Dobson would have laughed at us for what he sometimes styled our softness, because he had so much to do with sharpers and sharp practice, but I was mistaken. He quite agreed with us in our opinion of my little waif, and spoke admiringly of those who sought, through evil and good report, to rescue our "City Arabs" from destruction. And Dobson did more than speak: he gave liberally out of his ample fortune to the good cause.

That evening, just after the gas was lighted, while I was lying on the sofa thinking of these things, and toying with Dumps's ears, the door opened and Mrs McTougall entered, with Miss Blythe leaning on her arm. It was the first time she had come down to the drawing-room since her illness. She was thin, and pale, but to my mind more beautiful than ever, for her brown eyes seemed to grow larger and more lustrous as they beamed upon me.

I leaped up, sending an agonising shoot of pain through my leg, and hastened to meet her. Dumps, as if jealous of me, sprang wildly on before, and danced round his mistress in a whirlwind of delight.

"I am so glad to see you, Miss Blythe," I stammered; "I had feared the consequences of that terrible night—that rude descent. You—you—are better, I—"

"Thank you; *very* much better," she replied, with a sweet smile; "and how shall I ever express my debt of gratitude to you, Mr Mellon?"

She extended her delicate hand. I grasped it; she shook mine heartily.

That shake fixed my fate. No doubt it was the simple and natural expression of a grateful heart for a really important service; but I cared nothing about that. She blushed as I looked at her, and stooped to pat the jealous and impatient Dumps.

"Sit here, darling, on this easy-chair," said Mrs McTougall; "you know the doctor allows you only half an hour—or an hour at most—to-night; you may be up longer to-morrow. There; and you are not to speak much, remember.—Mr Mellon, you must address yourself to me. Lilly is only allowed to listen.

"Yes, as you truly said, Mr Mellon," continued the good lady, who was somewhat garrulous, "her descent was rough, and indeed, so was mine. Oh! I shall never forget that rough monster into whose arms you thrust me that awful night; but he was a brave and strong monster too. He just gathered me up like a bundle of clothes, and went crashing down the blazing stair, through fire and smoke—and through bricks and mortar too, it seemed to me, from the noise and shocks. But we came out safe, thank God, and I had not a scratch, though I noticed that my monster's hair and beard were on fire, and his face was cut and bleeding. I can't think how he carried me so safely."

"Ah! the firemen have a knack of doing that sort of thing," said I, speaking to Mrs McTougall, but looking at Lilly Blythe.

"So I have heard. The brave, noble men," said Lilly, speaking to Mrs McTougall, but looking at me.

I know not what we conversed about during the remainder of that hour. Whether I talked sense or nonsense I cannot tell. The only thing I am quite sure of is that I talked incessantly, enthusiastically, to Mrs McTougall, but kept my eyes fixed on Lilly Blythe all the time; and I know that Lilly blushed a good deal, and bent her pretty head frequently over her "darling Pompey," and fondled him to his heart's content.

That night my leg violently resented the treatment it had received. When I slept I dreamed that I was on the rack, and that Miss Blythe, strange to say, was the chief tormentor, while Dumps quietly looked on and laughed—yes, deliberately laughed—at my sufferings.

Chapter Nine.

On the Scent, but Puzzled.

It was a considerable time after the fire before my leg permitted me to resume my studies and my duties among the poor. Meanwhile I had become a regularly-established inmate of Mr Dobson's house, and was half-jocularly styled "Dr McTougall's assistant."

I confess that I had some hesitation at first in accepting such generous hospitality, but, feeling that I could not help myself till my leg should recover, I became reconciled to it. Then, as time advanced, the doctor—who was an experimental chemist, as well as a Jack-of-all-trades—found me so useful to him in his laboratory, that I felt I was really earning my board and lodging. Meanwhile Lilly Blythe had been sent to visit an aunt of Dr McTougall's in Kent for the benefit of her health.

This was well. I felt it to be so. I knew that her presence would have a disturbing influence on my studies, which were by that time nearly completed. I felt, also, that it was madness in me to fall in love with a girl whom I could not hope to marry for years, even if she were willing to have me at all, which I very much doubted.

I therefore resolved to put the subject away from me, and devote myself heartily to my profession, in the spirit of that Word which tells us that whatsoever our hands find to do we should do it with our might.

Success attended my efforts. I passed all my examinations with credit, and became not only a fixture in the doctor's family, but as he earnestly assured me, a very great help to him.

Of course I did not mention the state of my feelings towards Lilly Blythe to any one—not being in the habit of having confidants—except indeed, to Dumps. In the snug little room just over the front door, which had been given to me as a study, I was wont to pour out many of my secret thoughts to my doggie, as he sat before me with cocked ears and demonstrative tail.

"You've been the making of me, Dumps," said I, one evening, not long after I had reached the first round of the ladder of my profession. "It was you who introduced me to Lilly Blythe, and through her to Dr McTougall, and you may be sure I shall never forget that! Nay, you must not be too demonstrative. When your mistress left you under my care she said, half-jocularly, no doubt that I was not to steal your heart from her. Wasn't that absurd, eh? As if any heart could be stolen from *her*! Of course I cannot regain your heart, Dumps, and I will not even attempt it—'Honour bright,' as Robin Slidder says. By the way, that reminds me that I promised to go down to see old Mrs Willis this very night, so I'll leave you to the tender mercies of the little McTougalls."

As I walked down the Strand my last remark to Dumps recurred to me, and I could not help smiling as I thought of the "tender mercies" to which I had referred. The reader already knows that the juvenile McTougalls were somewhat bloodthirsty in their notions of play. When Dumps was introduced to their nursery—by that time transferred from Dobson's dining-room to an upper floor—they at once adopted him with open arms. Dumps seemed to be willing, and, fortunately, turned out to be a dog of exceptionally good-nature. He was also tough. No amount of squeezing, bruising, pulling of the ears or tail, or falling upon him, either accidentally or on purpose, could induce him to bite. He did, indeed, yell hideously at times, when much hurt, and he snarled, barked, yelped, growled, and showed his teeth continually, but it was all in play, for he was dearly fond of romps.

Fortunately, the tall nurse had been born without nerves. She was wont to sit serene in a corner, darning innumerable socks, while a tornado was going on around her. Dumps became a sort of continual sacrifice. On all occasions when a criminal was to be decapitated, a burglar hanged, or a martyr burned, Dumps was the victim; and many a time was he rescued from impending and real death by the watchful nurse, who was too well aware of the innocent ignorance of her ferocious charges to leave Dumps entirely to their tender mercies.

On reaching Mrs Willis's little dwelling, I found young Slidder officiating at the tea-table. I could not resist watching him a moment through a crack in the door before entering.

"Now then," said he, "'ere you are! Set to work, old Sneezer, with a will!"

The boy had got into a facetious way of calling Mrs Willis by any term of endearment that suggested itself at the moment, which would have been highly improper and disrespectful if it had not been the outflow of pure affection.

The crack in the door was not large enough to permit of my seeing Mrs Willis herself as she sat in her accustomed window with the spout-and-chimney-pot view. I could only see the withered old hand held

tremblingly out for the smoking cup of tea, which the boy handed to her with a benignant smile, and I could hear the soft voice say— "Thank you, Robin—dear boy—so like!"

"I tell you what it is, granny," returned Slidder, with a frown, "I'll give you up an' 'and you over to the p'leece if you go on comparin' me to other people in that way.—Now, then, 'ave some muffins. They're all 'ot and soaked in butter, old Gummy, just the wery thing for your teeth. Fire away, now! Wot's the use o' me an' Dr McTougall fetchin' you nice things if you won't eat 'em?"

"But I *will* eat 'em, Robin, thankfully."

"That ain't the way, old 'ooman," returned the boy, helping himself largely to the viands which he so freely dispensed; "it's not thankfully, but heartily, you ought to eat 'em."

"Both, Robin, both."

"Not at all, granny. We asked a blessin' fust, now, didn't we? Vell, then, wot we've to do next is to go in and win heartily. Arter that it's time enough to be thankful."

"What a boy it is!" responded Mrs Willis.

I saw the withered old hand disappear with a muffin in it in the direction of the old mouth, and at this point I entered.

"The wery man I wanted to see," exclaimed Slidder, jumping up with what I thought unusual animation, even for him.

"Come along, doctor, just in time for grub. Mrs W hain't eat up all the muffins yet. Fresh cup an' saucer; clean plate; ditto knife; no need for a fork; now then, sit down."

Accepting this hearty invitation, I was soon busy with a muffin, while Mrs Willis gave a slow, elaborate, and graphic account of the sayings and doings of Master Slidder, which account, I need hardly say, was much in his favour, and I am bound to add that he listened to it with pleased solemnity.

"Now then, old flatterer, w'en you've quite done, p'raps you'll tell the doctor that I wants a veek's leave of absence, an' then, p'raps you'll listen to what him an' me's got to say on that p'int. Just keep a stuffin' of yourself with muffins, an' don't speak."

The old lady nodded pleasantly, and began to eat with apparently renewed appetite, while I turned in some surprise.

"A week's leave of absence?" said I.

"Just so—a veek's leave of absence—furlow if you prefers to call it so. The truth is, I wants a 'oliday wery bad. Granny says so, an' I thinks she's right. D'you think my constitootion's made o' brass, or cast-iron, or bell-metal, that I should be able to york on an' on for ever, black, black, blackin' boots an' shoes, without a 'oliday? W'y, lawyers, merchants, bankers—even doctors—needs a 'oliday now an' then; 'ow much more shoeblacks!"

"Well," said I, with a laugh, "there is no reason why shoeblacks should not require and desire a holiday as much as other people, only it's unusual—because they cannot afford it, I suppose."

"Ah! 'that's just w'ere the shoe pinches'—as a old gen'leman shouted to me t'other day, with a whack of his umbreller, w'en I scrubbed 'is corns too hard. 'Right you are, old stumps,' says I, 'but you'll have to pay tuppence farden hextra for that there whack, or be took up for assault an' battery.' D'you know that gen'leman larfed, he did, like a 'iaena, an' paid the tuppence down like a man. I let 'im off the farden in consideration that he 'adn't got one, an' I had no change.—Vell, to return to the p'int—vich was wot the old toper remarked to his wife every night—I've bin savin' up of late."

"Saving up, have you?"

"Yes, them penny banks 'as done it. W'y, it ain't a wirtue to be savin' now-a-days, or good, or that sort o' thing. What between city missionaries, an' Sunday-schools, an' penny banks, an cheap wittles, and grannies like this here old sneezer, it's hardly possible for a young feller to go wrong, even if he was to try. Yes, I've bin an' saved enough to give me a veek's 'oliday, so I'm goin' to 'ave my 'oliday in the north. My 'ealth requires it."

Saying this, young Slidder began to eat another muffin with a degree of zest that seemed to give the lie direct to his assertion, so that I could not refrain from observing that he did not seem to be particularly ill.

"Ain't I though?" he remarked, elongating his round rosy face as much as possible. "That's 'cause you judge too much by appearances. It ain't my body that's wrong—it's my spirit. That's wot's the matter with *me*. If you only saw the inside o' my mind you'd be astonished."

"I thoroughly believe you," said I, laughing. "And do you really advise him to go, granny?"

"Yes, my dear, I do," replied Mrs Willis, in her sweet, though feeble tones. "You've no idea how he's been slaving and working about me. I have strongly advised him to go, and, you know, good Mrs Jones will take his place. She's as kind to me as a daughter."

The mention of the word *daughter* set the poor creature meditating on her great loss. She sighed deeply, and turned her poor old eyes on me with a yearning, inquiring look. I was accustomed to the look by this time, and having no good news to give her, had latterly got into a way of taking no notice of it. That night, however, my heart felt so sore for her that I could not refrain from speaking.

"Ah! dear granny," said I, laying my hand gently on her wrist, "would that I had any news to give you, but I have none—at least not at present. But you must not despair. I have failed up to this time, it is true, although my inquiries have been frequent, and carefully conducted; but you know, such a search takes a long time, and—and London is a large place."

The unfinished muffin dropped from the old woman's hand, and she turned with a deep sigh to the window, where the blank prospect was a not inapt reflection of her own blank despair.

"Never more!" she said, "never more!"

"Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him, who is the health of thy countenance, and thy God," was all that I could say in reply. Then I turned to the boy, who sat with his eyes cast down as if in deep

thought, and engaged him in conversation on other subjects, by way of diverting the old woman's mind from the painful theme.

When I rose to go, Slidder said he would call Mrs Jones to mount guard, and give me a convoy home.

No sooner were we in the street than he seized my hand, and, in a voice of unusual earnestness, said—

"I've got on 'er tracks!"

"Whose tracks? What do you mean?"

"On Edie's, to be sure—Edie Willis."

Talking eagerly and fast, as we walked along, little Slidder told me how he had first been put on the scent by his old friend and fellow-waif, the Slogger. That juvenile burglar, chancing to meet with Slidder, entertained him with a relation of some of his adventures. Among others, he mentioned having, many months before, been out one afternoon with a certain Mr Brassey, rambling about the streets with an eye to any chance business that might turn up, when they observed a young and very pretty girl looking in at various shop windows. She was obviously a lady, but her dress showed that she was very poor. Her manner and colour seemed to imply that she was fresh from the country. The two thieves at once resolved to fleece her. Brassey advised the Slogger "to come the soft dodge over her," and entice her, if possible, into a neighbouring court. The Slogger, agreeing, immediately ran and placed himself on a doorstep which the girl was about to pass. Then he covered his face with his hands, and began to groan dismally, while Mr Brassey, with native politeness, retired from the scene. The girl, having an unsuspicious nature, and a tender heart, believed the tale of woe which the boy unfolded, and went with him to see "his poor mother," who had just fallen down in a fit, and was dying at that moment for want of physic and some one to attend to her. She suggested, indeed, that the Slogger should run to the nearest chemist, but the Slogger said it would be of no use, and might be too late. Would she just run round an' see her? The girl acted on the spur of the moment. In her exuberant sympathy she hurried down an alley, round a corner, under an archway, and walked straight into the lion's den!

There Mr Brassey, the lion, promptly introduced himself, and requested the loan of her purse and watch! The poor girl at once understood her position, and turned to fly, but a powerful hand on her arm prevented her. Then she tried to shriek, but a powerful hand on her mouth prevented that also. Then she fainted. Not wishing to be found in an awkward position, Mr Brassey and the Slogger searched her pockets hastily, and, finding nothing therein, retired precipitately from the scene, taking her little dog with them. As they did so the young girl recovered, sprang wildly up, and rushing back through the court and alley, dashed into the main thoroughfare. The two thieves saw her attempt to cross, saw a cab-horse knock her down, saw a crowd rush to the spot and then saw no more, owing to pressing engagements requiring their immediate presence elsewhere.

"There—that's wot the Slogger told me," said little Slidder, with flushed cheeks and excited looks, "an' I made him give me an exact description o' the gal, which was a facsimilar o' the pictur' painted o' Miss Edie Willis by her own grandmother—as like as two black cats."

"This is interesting, *very* interesting, my boy," said I, stopping and looking at the pavement; "but I fear that it leaves us no clew with which to prosecute the search."

"Of course it don't," rejoined Robin, with one of his knowing looks; "but do you think I'd go an aggrawate myself about the thing if I 'adn't more to say than that?"

"Well, what more have you to say?"

"Just this, that ever since my talk wi' the Slogger I've bin making wery partikler inquiries at all the chemists and hospitals round about where he said the accident happened, an' I've diskivered one hospital where I 'appens to know the porter, an' I got him to inwestigate, an' he found there was a case of a young gal run over on the wery day this happened. She got feverish, he says, an' didn't know what she was sayin' for months, an' nobody come to inquire arter her, an when she began to git well she sent to Vitechapel to inquire for 'er grandmother, but 'er grandmother was gone, nobody knowed where. Then the young gal got wuss, then she got better, and then she left, sayin' she'd go back to 'er old 'ome in York, for she was sure the old lady must have returned there. So *that's* the reason w'y I'm goin' to recruit my 'ealth in the north, d'ye see? But before I go wouldn't it be better that you should make some inwestigations at the hospital?"

I heartily agreed to this, and went without delay to the hospital, where, however, no new light was thrown on the subject. On the contrary, I found, what Slidder had neglected to ascertain, that the name of the girl in question was *not* Edie Willis, but Eva Bright, a circumstance which troubled me much, and inclined me to believe that we had got on a false scent; but when I reflected on the other circumstances of the case I still felt hopeful. The day of Edie's disappearance tallied exactly with the date of the robbing of the girl by Brassey and the Slogger. Her personal appearance, too, as described by the Slogger, corresponded exactly with the description given of her granddaughter by Mrs Willis; and, above all, the sending of a messenger from the hospital by the girl to inquire for her "grandmother, Mrs Willis," were proofs too strong to be set aside by the mystery of the name.

In these circumstances I also resolved to take a holiday, and join Robin Slidder in his trip to York.

Chapter Ten.

A Disappointment, an Accident, and a Perplexing Return.

But the trip to York produced no fruit! Some of the tradespeople did, indeed, remember old Mrs Willis and her granddaughter, but had neither seen nor heard of them since they left. They knew very little about them personally, and nothing whatever of their previous history, as they had stayed only a short time in the town, and had been remarkably shy and uncommunicative—the result, it was thought, of their having "come down" in life.

Much disappointed, Slidder and I returned to London.

"It is fortunate that we did not tell granny the object of our trip, so that she will be spared the disappointment that we have met with," said I, as the train neared the metropolis.

My companion made no reply; he had evidently taken the matter much to heart.

We were passing rapidly through the gradually thickening groups of streets and houses which besprinkle the circumference of the great city, and sat gazing contemplatively on back yards, chimney cans, unfinished suburban residences, pieces of waste ground, back windows, internal domestic arrangements, etcetera, as they flew past in rapid succession.

“Robin,” said I, breaking silence again, and using the name which had by that time grown familiar, “have you made up your mind yet about taking service with Dr McTougall? Now that we have got Mrs Jones engaged and paid to look after granny, she will be able to get on pretty well without you, and you shall have time to run over and see her frequently.”

“H’m! I don’t quite see my way,” returned the boy, with a solemn look. “You see, sir, if it was a page-in-buttons I was to be, to attend on *my* young lady the guv’ness, I might take it into consideration; but to go into buttons an’ blue merely to open a door an’ do the purlite to wisitors, an’ mix up things with bad smells by way of a change—why, d’ee see, the prospec’ ain’t temptin’. Besides, I hate blue. The buttons is all well enough, but blue reminds me so of the bobbies that I don’t think I could surwive it long—indeed I don’t!”

“Robin,” said I reproachfully, “I’m grieved at your indifference to friendship.”

“’Ow so, sir?”

“Have you not mentioned merely your objections and the disadvantages, without once weighing against them the advantages?”

“Vich is—?”

“Which are,” said I, “being under the same roof with *me* and with Punch, to say nothing of your young lady!”

“Ah, to be sure! Vell, but I did think of all that, only, don’t you see, I’ll come to be under the same roof with you all in course o’ time w’en you’ve got spliced an’ set up for—”

“Slidder,” said I sternly, and losing patience under the boy’s presumption, “you must never again dare to speak of such a thing. You know very well that it is quite out of the question, and—and—you’ll get into a careless way of referring to such a possibility among servants or—”

“No; honour bright!” exclaimed Slidder, with, for the first time, a somewhat abashed look in his face; “I wouldn’t for the wealth of the Injies say a word to nobody wotsomever. It’s only atween ourselves that I wentur’s to—”

“Well, well; enough,” said I; “don’t in future venture to do it even between ourselves, if you care to retain my friendship. Now. Robin,” I added, as the train slowed, “of course you’ll not let a hint of our reason for going north pass your lips to poor granny or any one; and give her the old message, that I’ll be along to see her soon.”

It was pleasant to return to such a hearty reception as I met with from the doctor’s family. Although my absence had been but for a few days, the children came crowding and clinging round me, declaring that it

seemed like weeks since I left them. The doctor himself was, as usual, exuberant, and his wife extremely kind. Miss Blythe, I found, had not yet returned, and was not expected for some time.

But the reception accorded me by the doctor and his family was as nothing to the wild welcome lavished upon me by Dumps. That loving creature came more nearly to the bursting-point than I had ever seen him before. His spirit was obviously much too large for his body. He was romping with the McTougall baby when I entered. The instant he heard my voice in the hall he uttered a squeal—almost a yell—of delight, and came down the two flights of stairs in a wriggling heap, his legs taking comparatively little part in the movement. His paws, when first applied to the wax-cloth of the nursery floor, slipped as if on ice, without communicating motion. On the stairs, his ears, tail, head, hair, heart, and tongue conspired to convulse him. Only when he had fairly reached me did the hind-legs do their duty, as he bounced and wriggled high into air. Powers of description are futile; vision alone is of any avail in such a case. Are dogs mortal? Is such overflowing wealth of affection extinguished at death? Pshaw! thought I, the man who thinks so shows that he is utterly void of the merest rudiments of common sense!

I did not mention the object of my visit to York to the doctor or his wife. Indeed, that natural shyness and reticence which I have found it impossible to shake off—except when writing to you, good reader—would in any case have prevented my communicating much of my private affairs to them, but particularly in a case like this, which seemed to be assuming the aspect of a wildly romantic hunt after a lost young girl, more like the plot of a sensational novel than an occurrence in every-day life.

It may be remarked here that the doctor had indeed understood from Mrs Willis that she had somehow lost a granddaughter; but being rather fussy in his desires and efforts to comfort people in distress, he had failed to rouse the sympathy which would have drawn out details from the old woman. I therefore merely gave him to understand that the business which had called me to the north of England had been unsuccessful, and then changed the subject.

Meanwhile Dumps returned to the nursery to resume the game of romps which I had interrupted.

After a general “scrimmage,” in which the five chips of the elder McTougall had joined, without regard to any concerted plan, Dolly suddenly shouted “’Top!”

“What are we to stop for?” demanded Harry, whose powers of self-restraint were not strong.

“Want a ’est!” said Dolly, sitting down on a stool with a resolute plump.

“Rest quick, then, and let’s go on again,” said Harry, throwing himself into a small chair, while Job and Jenny sprawled on an ottoman in the window.

Seeing that her troops appeared to be exhausted, and that a period of repose had set in, the tall nurse thought this a fitting opportunity to retire for a short recreative talk with the servants in the kitchen.

“Now be good, child’n,” she said, in passing out, “and don’t ’urt poor little Dumps.”

“Oh no,” chorused the five, while, with faces of intense and real solemnity, they assured nurse that they would not hurt Dumps for the world.

“We’ll be *so* dood!” remarked Dolly, as the door closed—and she really meant it.

"What'll we do to him now?" asked Harry, whose patience was exhausted.

"Tut off him's head," cried Dolly, clapping her fat little hands.

"No, burn him for a witch," said Jenny.

"Oh no! ve'll skeese him flat till he's bu'sted," suggested Job.

But Jenny thought that would be too cruel, and Harry said it would be too tame.

It must not be supposed that these and several other appalling tortures were meant to be really attempted. As Job afterwards said, it was only play.

"Oh! I'll tell you what we'll do," said Jack, who was considerably in advance of the others in regard to education, "we'll turn him into Joan of Arc."

"What's Joan of Arc?" asked Job.

"It isn't a what—it's a who," cried Jack, laughing.

"Is it like Noah's Ark?" inquired Dolly.

"No, no; it's a lady who lived in France, an' thought she was sent to deliver her country from—from—I don't know all what, an' put on men's clo'es an' armour, an' went out to battle, an' was burnt."

"Bu'nt!" shouted Dolly, with sparkling eyes; "oh, what fun!—We're goin' to bu'n you, Pompey." They called him by Lilly Blythe's name.

Dumps, who sat in a confused heap in a corner, panting, seemed regardless of the fate that awaited him.

"But where shall we find armour?" said Harry.

"*I* know," exclaimed Job, going to the fireplace, and seizing the lid of a saucepan which stood on the hearth near enough to the tall fender to be within reach, "here's somethin'."

"Capital—a breastplate! Just the thing!" cried Jack, seizing it, and whistling to Dumps.

"And here's a first-rate helmet," said Harry, producing a toy drum with the heads out.

The strong contrast between my doggie's conditions of grigginess and humiliation has already been referred to. Aware that something unusual was pending, he crawled towards Jack with every hair trailing in lowly submission. Poor Joan of Arc might have had a happier fate if she had been influenced by a similar spirit!

"Now, sir, stand up on your hind-legs."

The already well-trained and obedient creature obeyed.

"There," he said, tying the lid to his hairy bosom; "and there," he continued, thrusting the drum on his meek head, which it fitted exactly; "now, Madame Joan, come away—the fagots are ready."

With Harry's aid, and to the ineffable joy of Jenny, Job, and Dolly, the little dog was carefully bound to the leg of a small table, and bits of broken toys—of which there were heaps—were piled round it for fagots.

"Don't be c'uel," said Dolly tenderly.

"Oh no, we won't be cruel," said Jack, who was really anxious to accomplish the whole execution without giving pain to the victim. The better to arrange some of the fastenings he clambered on the table. Dolly, always anxious to observe what was being done, attempted to do the same. Jenny, trying to prevent her, pulled at her skirts, and among them they pulled the table over on themselves. It fell with a dire crash.

Of course there were cries and shouts from the children, but these were overtopped and quickly silenced by the hideous yellings of Dumps. Full many a time had the poor dog given yelp and yell in that nursery when accidentally hurt, and as often had it wagged its forgiving tail and licked the patting hands of sympathy; but now the yells were loud and continuous, the patting hands were snapped at, and Dumps refused to be comforted. His piercing cries reached my study. I sprang up-stairs and dashed into the nursery, where the eccentric five were standing in a group, with looks of self-condemning horror in their ten round eyes, and almost equally expressive round mouths.

The reason was soon discovered—poor Dumps had got a hind-leg broken!

Having ascertained the fact, alleviated the pain as well as I could, and bandaged the limb, I laid my doggie tenderly in the toy bed belonging to Jenny's largest doll, which was quickly and heartily given up for the occasion, the dispossessed doll being callously laid on a shelf in the meantime.

It was really quite interesting to observe the effect of this accident on the tender-hearted five. They wept over Dumps most genuine tears. They begged his pardon—implored his forgiveness—in the most earnest tones and touching terms. They took turn about in watching by his sick-bed. They held lint and lotion with superhuman solemnity while I dressed his wounded limb, and they fed him with the most tender solicitude. In short, they came out quite in a new and sympathetic light, and soon began to play at sick-nursing with each other. This involved a good deal of pretended sickness, and for a long time after that it was no uncommon thing for visitors to the nursery to find three of the five down with measles, whooping-cough, or fever, while the fourth acted doctor, and the fifth nurse.

The event however, gave them a lesson in gentleness to dumb animals which they never afterwards forgot, and which some of my boy readers would do well to remember. With a laudable effort to improve the occasion, Mrs McTougall carefully printed in huge letters, and elaborately illuminated the sentence, "Be kind to Doggie," and hung it up in the nursery. Thereupon cardboard, pencils, paints, and scissors were in immediate demand, and soon after there appeared on the walls in hideously bad but highly ornamental letters, the words "Be kind to Cattie." This was followed by "Be kind to Polly," which instantly suggested "Be kind to Dolly." And so, by one means or another, the lesson of kindness was driven home.

Soon after this event Dr McTougall moved into a new house in the same street; I became regularly established as his partner, and Robin Slidder entered on his duties as page in buttons. It is right to observe here that, in deference to his prejudices, the material of his garments was not blue, but dark grey.

It was distinctly arranged, however, that Robin was to go home, as he called it, to be with Mrs Willis at nights. On no other condition would he agree to enter the doctor's service; and I found, on talking over the subject with Mrs Willis herself, that she had become so fond of the boy that it would have been sheer cruelty to part them. In short, it was a case of mutual love at first sight! No two individuals seemed more unlikely to draw together than the meek, gentle old lady and the dashing, harum-scarum boy. Yet so it was.

"My dear,"—she always spoke to me now as if I had been her son—"this 'waif,' as people would call him, has clearly been sent to me as a comfort in the midst of all but overwhelming sorrow; and I believe, too, that I have been sent to draw the dear boy to Jesus. You should hear what long and pleasant talks we have about Him, and the Bible, and the 'better land' sometimes."

"Indeed! I am glad to hear you say so, granny, and also surprised, because, although I believe the boy to be well disposed, I have seldom been able to get him to open his lips to me on religious subjects."

"Ah! but he opens his dear lips to me, doctor, and reads to me many a long chapter out of the blessed Word!"

"Reads! Can he read?"

"Ay can he!—not so badly, considering that I only began to teach him two or three months ago. But he knew his letters when we began, and could spell out a few words. He's very quick, you see, and a dear boy!"

Soon afterwards we made this arrangement with Robin more convenient for all parties, by bringing Mrs Willis over to a better lodging in one of the small back streets not far from the doctor's new residence.

I now began to devote much of my time to the study of chemistry, not only because it suited Dr McTougall that I should do so, but because I had conceived a great liking for that science, and entertained some thoughts of devoting myself to it almost exclusively.

In the various experiments connected therewith I was most ably, and, I may add, delightedly, assisted by Robin Slidder. I was also greatly amused by, and induced to philosophise not a little on the peculiar cast of the boy's mind. The pleasure obviously afforded to him by the uncertainty as to results in experiments was very great. The probability of a miscarriage created in him intense interest—I will not say hope! The ignorance of what was coming kept him in a constant flutter of subdued excitement, and the astounding results (even sometimes to myself) of some of my combinations, kept him in a perpetual simmer of expectation. But after long observation, I have come to the deliberate conclusion that nothing whatever gave Robin such ineffable joy as an explosion! A crash, a burst, a general reduction of anything to instantaneous and elemental ruin, was so dear to him that I verily believe he would have taken his chance, and stood by, if I had proposed to blow the roof off Dr McTougall's mansion. Nay, I almost think that if that remarkable waif had been set on a bombshell and blown to atoms, he would have retired from this life in a state of supreme satisfaction.

While my mind was thus agreeably concentrated on the pursuit of science, it received a rude, but pleasing, yet particularly distracting shock, by the return of Lilly Blythe. The extent to which this governess was worshipped by the whole household was wonderful—almost idolatrous. Need I say that I joined in the worship, and that Dumps and Robin followed suit? I think not. And yet—there was something strange,

something peculiar, something unaccountable, about Miss Blythe's manner which I could by no means understand.

Chapter Eleven.

Relates Generally to the Doings and Sayings of Robin Slidder.

"My dear," said Mrs McTougall one evening to the doctor, "since that little boy Slidder came to stay with us things have become worse and worse; in fact, the house is almost unbearable."

"My dear," responded Dr McTougall, "you amaze me; surely the boy has not dared to be rude—insolent to you?"

"Oh no, it's not that; but he must really be forbidden to enter the nursery. Our darlings, you know, were dreadful enough before he came, but since then they have become absolute maniacs."

"You don't mean to say that the little rascal has been teaching them bad words or manners, I hope?" returned the doctor, with a frown.

"Dear me, no, papa; don't get angry," answered the anxious lady—"far from it. On the contrary, I really believe that our darlings have greatly improved his language and manners by *their* example; but Robin's exuberant spirits are far too much for them. It is like putting fire to gunpowder, and they are *so* fond of him. That's the difficulty. The boy does not presume, I must say that for him, and he is very respectful to nurse; but the children are constantly asking him to come and play with them, which he seems quite pleased to do, and then his mind is so eccentric, so inventive. The new games he devises are very ingenious, but so exceedingly dangerous and destructive that it is absolutely necessary to check him, and I want you to do it, dear."

"I must know something about the nature of the mischief before I can check it," said the doctor.

"Oh, it's indescribable," returned the lady; "the smell that he makes in the nursery with his chemical experiments is awful; and then poor Pompey, or Dumps, or whatever they call him—for they seem very undecided about his name—has not the life of—I was going to say—a dog with them. Only last night, when you were out, the ridiculous boy proposed the storming of an ogre's castle. Nurse was down-stairs at the time, or it could never have happened. Well, of course, Robin was the ogre, darling Dolly was a princess whom he had stolen away, Jack was a prince who was to deliver her, and the others were the prince's retainers. A castle was built in one corner of all the tables and chairs in the room piled on each other, with one particular chair so ingeniously arranged that the pulling of it out would bring the castle in ruins to the ground. The plan of attack, as far as I could make out, was that the prince should ring our dinner-bell at the castle gates and fiercely demand admittance, the demand to be followed by a burst from the trumpets, drums, and gongs of his soldiers. The ogre, seated on the castle top with the princess, after a few preliminary yells and howls, was to say, in a gruff voice, that he was too much engaged just then with his dinner—that three roast babies were being dished. When they were disposed of, the princess would be killed, and served up as a sort of light pudding, after which he would open the castle gate. A horrible smell was to be created at this point to represent the roasting of the babies. This was to be the signal for a burst of indignation from the prince and his troops, who were to make a furious assault on the door—one of our

largest tea-trays—and after a little the prince was to pull away the particular chair, and rush back with his men to avoid the falling ruin, while the ogre and princess were to find shelter under the nursery table, and then, when the fall was over, they were to be found dead among the ruins. I am not sure whether the princess was to be revived, or she was to have a grand funeral, but the play never got that length. I was sitting here, listening to the various sounds overhead, wondering what they could be about, when I heard a loud ringing—that was the castle bell. It was soon followed by a burst of toy trumpets and drums. A most disgusting smell began to permeate the house at the same time, for it seems that the ogre set fire to his chemicals too soon.

"Then I heard roaring and yelling, which really alarmed me—it was so gruff. When it stopped, there was a woeful howl—that was the burst of indignation. The assault came off next, and as the shouting of the troops was mingled with the hammering of the large tea-tray, the ringing of the dinner-bell, and the beating of the gong, you may fancy what the noise was. In the midst of it there was a hideous crash, accompanied by screams of alarm that were too genuine to be mistaken. I rushed up, and found the furniture lying scattered over the room, with darling Dolly in the midst, the others standing in solemn silence around, and Robin Slidder sitting on the ground ruefully rubbing his head.

"The truth was that the particular chair had been pulled away before the proper time, and the castle had come down in ruins while the ogre and princess were still on the top of it. Fortunately Robin saved Dolly, at the expense of his own head and shoulder, by throwing his arms round her and falling undermost; but it was a narrow escape, and you really must put a stop to such reckless ongoings."

The doctor promised to do so.

"I have to send Robin a message this forenoon, and will administer a rebuke before sending him," he said; but it was plain, from the smile on the doctor's face, that the rebuke would not be severe.

"Robin," he said, with much solemnity, when the culprit stood before him, "take this bottle of medicine to Mr Williams; you know—the old place—and say I want to know how he is, and that I will call to-morrow afternoon."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, taking the bottle with an unusually subdued air.

"And Robin—stop," continued the doctor. "I am told that the children were visited by an ogre last night."

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, with an uncertain glance at his questioner's grave face.

"Well, Robin, you know where that ogre lives. Just call and tell him from me that if he or any of his relations ever come here again I'll cause them to undergo extraction of the spinal marrow, d'you understand?"

At first little Slidder felt inclined to laugh, but the doctor's face was so unusually stern that he thought better of it, and went away much impressed.

Now Robin Slidder was no loiterer on his errands, nevertheless he did not deem it a breach of fidelity to cast an occasional glance into a picture-shop window, or to pause a few seconds now and then to chaff a facetious cabby, or make a politely sarcastic remark to a bobby. His connection with what he termed "'igh

life" had softened him down considerably, and given a certain degree of polish to his wit, but it had in no degree repressed his exuberant spirits.

The distance he had to go being considerable, he travelled the latter part of the way by omnibus. Chancing to be in a meditative frame of mind that day, he climbed to the roof of the 'bus, and sat down with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his eyes deep into futurity. Whether he saw much there I cannot tell, but after wandering for some time in that unknown region, his eyes returned to surrounding things, and, among other objects, alighted on the 'bus conductor, whose head was within a few inches of his toe. It was the head of the Slogger!

That eccentric individual, having sprung up in a few months from the condition of a big boy to that of an exceedingly young man, had obtained a situation as conductor to a 'bus. He was so busy with his fares when Robin mounted the 'bus that he failed to observe him until the moment when the latter returned from futurity. Their eyes met simultaneously, and opened to such an extent that if size had counted for numbers they might have done for four boys.

"Hallo, Buttons!" was the Slogger's exclamation.

"Hallo, Slogger!" was that of Robin.

"Well, now, this *is* a pleasure! who'd a thought it?" said the conductor, reaching up his hand.

"Is that for your fare or a shake, Slogger?" demanded Robin.

"A shake, of course, old feller," replied the other, as Robin grasped the proffered hand;—"but I say," he added in a lower key, "there's no Slogger now in this 'ere world; he's dead an' buried long ago. My name is Villum Bowls—no connection wotever with Slogger. Oh no! we never mention 'im;—but, I say, w'en did you go into the genteel line? eh, Slidder?"

"Robin—Robin is my name *now,* Villum Bowls. I've changed it since we met last, though I hain't cut old friends like you. Robin an' Slidder 'ave been united, an' a pretty pair they make, don't they?"

"Middlin'. 'Old on till I get that ancient stout party shoved in. Looks like as if he was a goin' in the opposite direction, but it don't matter so long as we can get 'im in.—Now, then, sir, mind the step. All right? I say, Slid— Robin, I mean—"

"Vell, Slog— Villum, I mean; why don't you say wot you mean, eh?"

"'Ow d'you like grey tights an' buttons?" said the Slogger, with a bland smile.

"So—so," replied Robin, with a careless air; "the grey is sober enough—quite suitable to my character—an' I confess I'm fond o' the buttons."

"There's enough of 'em to form a goodish overcoat a'most," said the Slogger with a critical grin, "but I should 'ave thought 'em not sufficiently waterproof in wet weather."

"Vell, they ain't much use for that, Slog—eh, Villum; but you should see the dazzling display they makes in sunshine. W'y, you can see me half a mile off w'en I chance to be walking in Regent Street or drivin' in the Park. But I value them chiefly because of the frequent and pleasant talks they get me with the ladies."

"You don't mean for to say, Robin, that the ladies ever holds you by the button-'oles?"

"No, I don't; but I holds *them* wi' the buttons. This is the way of it. W'en I chance to see a wery pretty lady—not one o' your beauties, you know; I don't care a dump for them stuck-up creatures! but one o' your sweet, amiable sort, with souls above buttons, an' faces one likes to look at and to kiss w'en you've a right to; vell, w'en I sees one o' these I brushes up again' 'er, an' 'ooks on with my buttons to some of 'er togs.

"If she takes it ill, looks cross, and 'alf inclined to use strong language, I makes a 'umble apology, an' gets undone as fast as possible, but if she larfs, and says, 'Stoopid boy; w'y don't you look before you?' or suthin o' that sort, I just 'ooks on another tag to another button w'en we're a fumblin' at the first one, and so goes on till we get to be quite sociable over it—I might almost say confidential. Once or twice I've been the victim of misjudgment, and got a heavy slap on the face from angelic hands that ought to 'ave known better, but on the 'ole I'm willin' to take my chance."

"Not a bad notion," remarked the Slogger; "especially for a pretty little chap like you, Robin."

"Right you are," replied the other, "but you needn't try on the dodge yourself, for it would never pay with a big ugly grampus like you, Villum."

Having thus run into a pleasant little chat, the two waifs proceeded to compare notes, in the course of which comparison the Slogger gave an outline of his recent history. He had been engaged in several successful burglaries, but had been caught in the act of pocket-picking, for which offence he had spent some weeks in prison. While there a visitor had spoken to him very earnestly, and advised him to try an honest life, as being, to say the least of it, easier work than thieving. He had made the attempt. Through the influence of the same prison-visitor he had obtained a situation, from which he had been advanced to the responsible position which he then held.

"And, d'you know, Robin," said the Slogger, "I find that honesty pays pretty well, and I means to stick to it."

"An' I suppose," said Robin, "if it didn't pay pretty well you'd cut it?"

"Of course I would," returned the Slogger, with a look of surprise; "wot's the use o' stickin' to a thing that don't pay?"

"Vell, if them's your principles you ain't got much to 'old on by, my tulip," said Robin.

"An' wot principles may *you* 'old on by, my turnip?" asked the Slogger.

"It would puzzle me, rather, to tell that," returned Robin, "'specially talkin' down to the level of my own toes on the top of a 'bus; but I'll tell you what, Villum, if you'll come to Number 6 Grovelly Street, Shadwell Square, just back of Hoboy Crescent, w'ere my master lives, on Sunday next at seven in the evenin', you'll hear an' see somethin' as'll open your eyes."

"Ah! a meetin'-'ouse'?" said the Slogger, with a slight smile of contempt.

"Music-'alls and publics is meetin'-'ouses, ain't they?"

"Ah, but they ain't prayer-meetin' 'ouses," rejoined the Slogger.

"Not so sure o' that Villum. There's a deal o' prayer in such places sometimes, an' it's well for the wisitors that their prayers ain't always answered. But *our* meetin'-'ouse is for more than prayer—a deal more; and there's my young missus—a *real* angel—comes in, and 'olds forth there every Sunday evening to young fellers like you an' me. You just come an' judge for yourself."

"No thankee," returned the Slogger.

As he spoke a lady with a lap-dog made powerful demonstrations with her umbrella. The 'bus stopped, and the conductor attended to his duties, while Robin, who really felt a strong desire to bring his old comrade under an influence which he knew was working a wonderful change in himself, sat meditating sadly on the obstinacy of human nature.

"I say, Robin," said the Slogger, on resuming his perch, "d'you know I've found traces o' that young gal as you took such a interest in, as runned away from the old 'ooman, an' was robbed by Brassey an' me?"

"You don't mean that!" exclaimed Robin eagerly.

"Yes I do. She's in London, I believe, but I can't exactly say where. I heard of her through Sal—you know Sal, who 'angs out at the vest end o' Potter's Lane. I expect to see Sal in 'alf an hour, so if you're comin' back this way, I'll be at the Black Bull by two o'clock, and tell you all I can pump out of 'er."

"I'll be there sharp," said Robin promptly; "an now pull up, for I must take to my legs here."

"But I say, Robin, if we do find that gal, you won't split on me, eh? You won't tell 'er who I am or where I is? You won't wictimise your old friend?"

"D'you take me for a informer?" demanded Robin, with an offended look.

"Hall right," cried the Slogger, giving the signal to drive on.

Robin sped quickly away, executed his mission, and returned to the Black Bull in a state of considerable excitement and strong hope.

Slidder was doomed to disappointment. He reached the Black Bull at two o'clock precisely.

"Vell, my fair one," he said, addressing a waiting-maid who met him in the passage, "it's good for sore eyes to see the likes o' you in cloudy weather. D'you 'appen to know a young man of the name of Sl— I mean Villum Bowls?"

"Yes I do, Mr Imp'rence," answered the girl.

"You couldn't introdooce me to him, could you, Miss Sunshine?"

"No, I couldn't, because he isn't here, and won't likely be back for two hours."

This reply took all the humour out of Robin's tone and manner. He resolved, however, to wait for half an hour, and went out to saunter in front of the hotel.

Half an hour passed, then another, then another, and the boy was fain to leave the spot in despair.

Poor Slidder's temperament was sanguine. Slight encouragement raised his hopes very high. Failure depressed him proportionally and woefully low, but, to do him justice, he never sorrowed long. In the present instance, he left the Black Bull grinding his teeth. Then he took to clanking his heels as he walked along in a way that drew forth the comments of several street-boys, to whom, in a spirit of liberality, he returned considerably more than he received. Then he began to mutter between his teeth his private opinion as to faithless persons in general, and faithless Villum, *alias* the Slogger, in particular, whose character he painted to himself in extremely sombre colours. After that, a heavy thunder-shower having fallen and drenched him, he walked recklessly and violently through every puddle in his path. This seemed to relieve his spirit, for when he reached Hoboy Crescent he had recovered much of his wonted equanimity.

The Slogger was not however, so faithless as his old friend imagined. He had been at the Black Bull before two o'clock, but had been sent off by his employer with a note to a house at a considerable distance in such urgent haste that he had not time even to think of leaving a message for his friend.

In these circumstances, he resolved to clear his character by paying a visit on the following Sunday to Number 6 Grovelly Street, Shadwell Square.

Chapter Twelve.

Begins with Love, Hope, and Joy, and ends Peculiarly.

It may not perhaps surprise the reader to learn that after Lilly Blythe's return to town, I did not prosecute my studies with as much enthusiasm as before. In fact I divided my attentions pretty equally between Lilly and chemistry.

Now, I am not prone to become sentimentally talkative about my own affairs, but as courtship, and love, and that sort of thing are undoubted and important elements in the chemistry of human affairs, and as they influenced me and those around me to some extent, I cannot avoid making reference to them, but I promise the reader to do so only as far as appears necessary for the elucidation of my story.

First, then, although I knew that my prospects of success as a partner of Dr McTougall were most encouraging, I felt that it would be foolish to think of marriage until my position was well established and my income adequate. I therefore strove with all my might to check the flow of my thoughts towards Miss Blythe. As well might I have striven to restrain the flow of Niagara. True love cannot be stemmed! In my case, however, the proverb was utterly falsified, for my true love *did* "run smooth." More than that, it ran fast—very fast indeed, so much so that I was carried, as it were, on the summit of a rushing flood-tide into the placid harbour of Engagement. The anchorage in that harbour is with many people uncertain. With Lilly and me it was not so. The ground-tackle was good; it had caught hold of a rock and held on.

It happened thus. After many weeks of struggling on my part to keep out of Miss Blythe's way, and to prevent the state of my feelings from being observed by her—struggles which I afterwards found to my confusion had been quite obvious to her—I found myself standing alone, one Sunday afternoon, in the doctor's drawing-room, meditating on the joys of childhood, as exemplified by thunderous blows on the floor above and piercing shouts of laughter. The children had been to church and were working off the steam accumulated there. Suddenly there was a dead silence, which I knew to be the result of a meal. The meal was, I may add, the union of a late dinner with an early tea. It was characteristic of Sundays in the McTougall nursery.

The thought of this union turned my mind into another channel. Just then Miss Blythe entered. She looked so radiant that I forgot myself, forgot my former struggles, my good resolutions—everything except herself—and proposed on the spot!

I was rejected—of course! More than that, I was stunned! Hope had told me many flattering tales. Indeed, I had felt so sure, from many little symptoms, that Lilly had a strong regard for me—to say the least—that I was overwhelmed, not only by my rejection, but by the thought of my foolish self-assurance.

"I don't wonder that you look upon me as a presumptuous, vain, contemptible fellow," said I, in the bitterness of my soul.

"But I do not regard you in that light," said Lilly, with a faint smile, and then, hesitatingly, she looked down at the carpet.

"In what light do you regard me, Miss Blythe?" said I, recovering a little hope, and speaking vehemently.

"Really, Dr Mellon, you take me by surprise; your manner—so abrupt—so—"

"Oh! never mind manner, dear Miss Blythe," said I, seizing her hand, and forcibly detaining it. "You are the soul of truth; tell me, is there any hope for me?—*can* you care for me?"

"Dr Mellon," she said, drawing her hand firmly away, "I cannot, should not reply. You do not know all the—the circumstances of my life—my poverty, my solitary condition in the world—my—my—"

"Miss Blythe," I exclaimed, in desperation, "if you were as poor as a—a—church rat, as solitary as—as—Adam before the advent of Eve, I would count it my chief joy, and—"

"Hallo! Mellon, hi! I say! where are you?" shouted the voice of the doctor at that moment from below stairs. "Here's Dumps been in the laboratory, and capsized some of the chemicals!"

"Coming, sir!" I shouted; then tenderly, though hurriedly, to Miss Blythe, "You will let me resume this subject at—"

"Hallo! look sharp!" from below.

"Yes, yes, I'll be down directly!—Dear Miss Blythe, if you only knew—"

"Why, the dog's burning all over—help me!" roared the doctor.

Miss Blythe blushed and laughed. How could she help it? I hastily kissed her hand, and fled from the room.

That was the whole affair. There was not enough, strictly speaking, to form a ground of hope; but somehow I knew that it was all right. In the laboratory I found Dumps smoking, and the doctor pouring water from the tap on his dishevelled body. He was not hurt, and little damage was done; but as I sat in my room talking to him that evening, I could not help reproaching him with having been the means of breaking off one of the most important interviews of my life.

"However, Dumps," I continued, "your good services far outweigh your wicked deeds, and whatever you may do in the future, I will never forget that you were the means of introducing me to that angel, Lilly Blythe."

The angel in question went that Sunday evening at seven o'clock, as was her wont, to a Bible class which she had started for the instruction of some of the poor neglected boys and lads who idled about in the dreary back streets of our aristocratic neighbourhood. The boys had become so fond of her that they were eager to attend, and usually assembled round the door of the class-room before the hour.

My *protégé*, Robin Slidder, was of course one of her warmest adherents. He was standing that night apart from the other boys, contemplating the proceedings of two combative sparrows which quarrelled over a crumb of bread on the pavement, and had just come to the conclusion that men and sparrows had some qualities in common, when he was attracted by a low whistle, and, looking up, beheld the Slogger peeping round a neighbouring corner.

"Hallo! Slog—Villum I mean; how are you? Come along. Vell, I *am* glad to see you, for, d'you know, arter you failed me that day at the Black Bull, I have bin givin' you a pretty bad character, an' callin' you no end o' bad names."

"Is that what your 'angel' teaches you, Robin?"

"Vell, not exactly, but you'll hear wot she teaches for yourself to-night, I 'ope. Come, I'm right glad to see you, Villum. What was it that prevented you that day, eh?"

When the Slogger had explained and cleared his character, Robin asked him eagerly if he had ascertained anything further about the girl whom he and Brassey had robbed.

"Of course I have," said the Slogger, "and it's a curious suckumstance that 'er place of abode—so Sally says—is in the Vest End, not wery far from here. She gave me the street and the name, but wasn't quite sure of the number."

"Vell, come along, let's hear all about it," said Robin impatiently.

"Wy, wot's all your 'urry?" returned the Slogger slowly; "I ain't goin' away till I've heerd wot your angel's got to say, you know. Besides, I must go arter your meeting's over an watch the 'ouse till I see the gal an' make sure that it's her, for Sally may have bin mistook, you know."

"You don't know her name, do you?" asked Robin; "it wasn't Edie Willis, now, was it?"

"'Ow should *I* know 'er name?" answered the Slogger. "D'you think I stopped to inquire w'en I 'elped to relieve 'er of 'er propity?"

"Ah, I suppose not. Vell, I suppose you've no objection to my goin' to watch along wi' you."

"None wotsomever; on'y remember, if it do turn out to be 'er, you won't betray me. Honour bright! She may be revengeful, you know, an' might 'ave me took up if she got 'old of me."

Robin Slidder faithfully and earnestly pledged himself. While he was speaking there was a general movement among the lads and boys towards the class-room, for Miss Blythe was seen coming towards them. The two friends moved with the rest. Just as he was about to enter the door, Robin missed his companion, and, looking back, saw him bending down, and holding his sides as if in pain.

"Wot's wrong now?" he inquired, returning to him.

"Oh! I'm took so bad," said the Slogger, looking very red, and rubbing himself; "a old complaint as I thought I was cured of. Oh, dear! you'll 'ave to excuge me, Robin. I'll go an' take a turn, an' come in if I gits better. If not, I'll meet you round the corner arter it's over."

So saying, the Slogger, turning round, walked quickly away, and his little friend entered the class-room in a state of mind pendulating between disgust and despair, for he had no expectation of seeing the slippery Slogger again that night.

When the meeting was over, Miss Blythe returned home. I saw her enter the library. No one else was there, I knew. The gas had not yet been lighted, and only a faint flicker from the fire illumined the room. Unable to bear the state of uncertainty under which my mind still laboured, I resolved to make assurance doubly sure, or quit the house—and England—for ever!

I spare the reader the details. Suffice it to say that after much entreaty, I got her to admit that she loved me, but she refused to accept me until she had told me her whole history.

"Then I'm sure of you now," said I, in triumph; "for, be your history what it may, I'll never give you up, dearest Lilly—"

"Don't call me Lilly," she said in a low, quiet tone; "it is only a pet name which the little ones here gave me on my first coming to them. Call me Edith."

"I will," said I, with enthusiasm, "a far more beautiful name. I'll—"

"Hallo! hi! Mellon, are you there?"

For the second time that day Dr McTougall interrupted me, but I was proof against annoyance now.

"Yes, I am here," I shouted, running downstairs. "Surely Dumps is not burning himself again—eh?"

"Oh no," returned my friend, with a laugh—"only a telegram. However, it's important enough to require prompt attention. The Gordons in Bingley Manor—you know them—telegraph me to run down immediately; old lady ill. Now, it unfortunately happens that I have an engagement this evening which

positively cannot be put off, so I must send you. Besides, I know well enough what it is. They're easily alarmed, and I'm convinced it is just the old story. However, the summons must be obeyed. You will go for me. The train starts in half an hour. You will have plenty of time to catch it, if you make haste. You'll have to stay all night. No return train till to-morrow, being an out-of-the-way place. There, off with you. Put the telegram in your pocket for the address."

So saying, the doctor put on his hat and left the house.

Summoning Robin Slidder, I bade him pack a few things into my travelling-bag while I wrote a note. When he had finished he told me of his interview with the Slogger. I was greatly interested, and asked if he had gone to see his friend after the meeting.

"No, sir, I didn't. I meant to, but Miss Blythe wanted me to walk 'ome with 'er, it was so dark, an' w'en I went back he had gone."

"Pity, Robin—a great pity," said I, hastily strapping up my bag, "but no doubt he'll come here again to see you.—Now, don't forget to take over that parcel of tea and sugar, etcetera, to Mrs Willis. Go as soon as you can." Saying this, I left the house.

The new residence of the old woman being now so near to Hoboy Crescent the parcel was soon delivered, and Robin officiated at the opening of it, also at the preparing and consuming of some of its contents. Of course he chatted vigorously, as was his wont, but was particularly careful to make not the most distant allusion to the Slogger or his reports, being anxious not to arouse her hopes until he should have some evidence that they were on a true scent. Indeed, he was so fearful of letting slip some word or remark on the subject and thereby awakening suspicion and giving needless pain, that he abstained from all reference to the meeting of that evening, and launched out instead into wonderful and puzzling theological speculations, of which he was very fond.

Meanwhile I was carried swiftly into the country. The lamp in my carriage was too dim to permit of reading; I therefore wrapped myself in my rug and indulged in pleasant meditations.

It was past midnight when I arrived at the station for Bingley Manor, where I found a gig awaiting me. A sharp drive of half an hour and I was at the mansion door.

Dr McTougall was right. There was little the matter with old Mrs Gordon, but the family were nervous, and rich—hence my visit. I did what was necessary for the patient, comforted the rest by my presence, had a sound night's rest, an early breakfast, a pleasant drive in the fresh frosty air, and a brief wait of five minutes, when the punctual train came up.

There is something inexpressibly delightful in a ride, on a sharp frosty morning, in an express train. I have always felt a wild bounding sensation of joy in rapid motion. The pace at which we went that morning was exceptionally charming. Had I known that the engine-driver was intoxicated perhaps it might not have been quite so exhilarating, but I did not know that. I sat comfortably in my corner thinking of Edith, and gazing with placid benignity at the frosted trees and bushes which sparkled in the red wintry sun.

Yes, it was a glorious ride! I never had a better. The part of the country through which we passed was lovely. One can always gaze comfortably at the *distant* landscape from a railway carriage, however great the speed. As for the immediate foreground, it reminded me of a race—houses, trees, farms, towns,

villages, hamlets, horses, sheep, cattle, poultry, hayricks, brickfields, were among the competitors in that race. They rushed in mad confusion to the rear. I exulted in the pace. Not so a stout elderly gentleman in the opposite corner, who evidently disliked it—so true is it that "one man's meat is another's poison."

"There is no reason to fear, sir," said I, with a smile, by way of reassuring him. "This is a most excellently managed line—one never hears of accidents on it."

"Too fast just now, anyhow," returned the elderly gentleman testily.

Just then the whistle was heard sounding violently.

"That is a sign of safety," said I; "shows that they are on the alert."

A severe application of the brakes caused me to stop abruptly, and the elderly man to seize the arms of his seat with a convulsive grasp.

Suddenly there was a mighty crash. The sensations in my mind that followed were suggestive of cannons, rockets, bombs, fireworks, serpents, shooting-stars, and tumbling *débris*. Then—all was dark and silent as the grave!

Chapter Thirteen.

A Wonderful Discovery.

Slowly recovering consciousness, I found myself lying on the floor of a waiting-room, with a gentleman bending over me. Instantly recollecting what had occurred, I endeavoured to start up, but was obliged to fall back again.

"You must lie quiet sir," said the gentleman. "You're not much hurt. We will send you on, if you choose, by the train that is expected in a few minutes."

"Is the elderly gentleman safe?" I asked eagerly.

"Which elderly gentleman? There were several in the train, but none are injured, I believe, though some are much shaken. Nobody has been killed. It has been quite a miraculous escape."

"Merciful—call it merciful, my dear sir," said I, looking upwards and thanking God with all my heart for sparing my life.

Two days after that I lay on the drawing-room sofa in Hoboy Crescent. Mr and Mrs McTougall had gone out. So had the children, the forenoon being fine. Edith had remained at home, for reasons which she did not see fit to divulge. She sat beside me with one of her hands in mine. It was all arranged between us by that time.

"Edith," said I after a short pause in our conversation, "I have long wanted to tell you about a dear little old lady with whom Robin Slidder and I have had much to do. She's one of my poor patients, whom I

have not mentioned to you before, but I've heard something about her lately which makes me wish to ask your advice—perhaps your aid—in a rather curious search which I've been engaged in for a long time past."

"I will go for my work, John, and you shall tell me all about it," she replied, rising. "I shall be five or ten minutes in preparing it. Can you wait patiently?"

"Well, I'll try, though of course it will be like a separation of five or ten years, but Dumps and I will solace each other in your absence.—By the way, touch the bell as you pass. I should like to see Robin, not having had a talk with him since the accident."

When Robin appeared I asked him if he had seen the Slogger.

"No, sir, I 'aven't," replied Robin, with a somewhat cross look. "That there Slogger has played me false these two times. Leastwise, though he couldn't 'elp it the fust time, he's got to clear 'isself about the second."

"You know where the Slogger lives, don't you?" I asked.

"Oh yes, but it's a long, long way off, an' I durstn't go without leave, an' since you was blowed up i' the train I've scarce 'ad a word with the doctor—he's bin that busy through 'avin' your patients on 'is 'ands as well as is own."

"Well, Robin, I give you leave to go. Be off within this very hour, and see that you bring me back some good news. Now that we have reason to believe the poor girl is in London, perhaps near us, I cannot rest until we find her—or prove the scent to have been a false one. Away with you!"

As the boy went out, Edith came back with her work basket.

"I've been thinking," said I, as she sat down on a stool beside me, "that before beginning my story, it would be well that you should unburden your dear little heart of that family secret of yours which you thought at first was a sufficient bar to our union. But before you begin, let me solemnly assure you that your revelations, whatever they are, will utterly fail to move me. Though you should declare yourself to be the daughter of a thief, a costermonger, or a chimpanzee monkey—though you should profess yourself to have been a charwoman, a foundling, a Billingsgate fish-woman, or a female mountebank—my feelings and resolves will remain the same. Sufficient for me to know that you are *you*, and that you are *mine*!—There, go on."

"Truly, then, if such be your feelings, there is no need of my going on, or even beginning," she replied, with a smile, and yet with a touch of sadness in her tone which made me grasp her hand.

"Ah, Edith! I did not mean to hurt you by my jesting, and yet the spirit of what I say is true—absolutely true."

"You did not hurt me, John; you merely brought to my remembrance my great sorrow and—"

"Your great sorrow!" I exclaimed in surprise, gazing at her smooth young face.

"Yes, my great sorrow, and I was going to add, my loss. But you shall hear. I have no family mystery to unfold. All that I wished you to know on that head was that I am without family altogether. All are dead. I have no relation on earth—not one."

She said this with such deep pathos, while tears filled her eyes, that I could not have uttered a word of comfort to save my life.

"And," she continued, "I am absolutely penniless. These two points at first made me repel you—at least, until I had explained them to you. Now that you look upon them as such trifles I need say no more. But the loss to which I have referred is, I fear, irreparable. You won't think me selfish or tiresome if I go back to an early period of my history?"

"Selfish! tiresome!" I repeated, "oh, Edith!"

"Well, then, many years ago my father and mother lived by the seashore not far from Yarmouth. They were poor. My father gave lessons in French, my mother taught music. But they earned sufficient to support themselves and my grandmother and me in comfort. We were a *very* happy family, for we all loved God and tried to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. I gave them, indeed, a great deal of trouble at first, but He overcame my stubborn heart at last, and then there was nothing to mar the happiness of our lives. But sickness came. My father died. My mother tried to struggle on for a time, but could not earn enough; I tried to help her by teaching, but had myself need of being taught. At last we changed our residence, in hopes of getting more remunerative employment, but in this we failed. Then my mother fell sick and died."

She stopped at this point.

"Oh, Edith! this makes you doubly dear," said I, drawing her nearer to me.

In a few minutes she continued—

"Being left alone now with my grandmother, I resolved to go to London and try to find employment in the great city. We had not been long here, and I had not yet obtained employment when an extraordinary event occurred which has ever since embittered my life. I went out for a walk one day, and was robbed."

"How strange!" I exclaimed, half rising from the sofa. "What a curious coincidence!"

"What! How? What do you mean?" she asked, looking at me in surprise.

"Never mind just now. When I come to tell you *my* story you will understand. There is a robbery of a young girl in it too.—Go on.—"

"Well, then, as I said, I was robbed by a man and a boy. I had dear little Pompey with me at the time, and that is the way I came to lose him. But the terrible thing was that an accident befell me just after I was robbed, and I never saw my darling grandmother again—"

"Coincidence!" I exclaimed, starting up, as a sudden thought was forced upon my mind, and my heart began to beat violently, "this is *more* than a coincidence; and yet—it cannot be—pooh! impossible! ridiculous! My mind is wandering."

I sank back somewhat exhausted, for I had been considerably weakened by my accident. Edith was greatly alarmed at my words and looks, and blamed herself for having talked too much to me in my comparatively weak condition.

“No, you have not talked too much to me. You cannot do that, dear *Edie*,” I said.

It was now her turn to look bewildered.

“*Edie*!” she echoed. “Why—why do you call me Edie?”

I covered my eyes with my hand, that she might not see their expression.

“There can be no doubt *now*,” I thought; “but why that name of Blythe?” Then aloud:

“It is a pretty contraction for Edith, is it not? Don’t you like it?”

“Like it? Yes. Oh, how much! But—but—”

“Well, Edie,” I said, laying powerful restraint on myself, and looking her calmly in the face, “you must bear with me to-night. You know that weakness sometimes causes men to act unaccountably. Forgive me for interrupting you. I won’t do it again, as the naughty boys say.—Go on, dear, with your story.”

I once more covered my eyes with my hand, as if to shade them from the light, and listened, though I could scarcely conceal my agitation.

“The name of Edie,” she continued, “is that by which my darling granny always called me, and it sounded so familiar—yet so strange—coming from your lips. But, after all, it is a natural abbreviation. Well, as I said, an accident befell me. I had burst away from the thieves in a state of wild horror, and was attempting to rush across a crowded thoroughfare, when a cab knocked me down. I felt a sharp pang of pain, heard a loud shout and then all was dark.

“On recovering I found myself lying in one of the beds of a hospital. My collar-bone had been broken, and I was very feverish—scarcely understood where I was, and felt a dull sense of oppression on my brain. They spoke to me, and asked my name. I don’t remember distinctly how I pronounced it, but I recollect being somewhat amused at their misunderstanding what I said, and calling me Miss Eva Bright! I felt too ill to correct them at the time, and afterwards became so accustomed to Eva—for I was a very long time there—that I did not think it worth while to correct the mistake. This was very foolish and unfortunate, for long afterwards, when I began to get well enough to think coherently, and sent them to let granny know where I was, they of course went with the name of Eva Bright. It was very stupid, no doubt, but I was so weak and listless after my long and severe illness that this never once occurred to me. As it turned out, however, there would have been no difference in the result, for my darling had left her lodging and gone no one knew where. This terrible news brought on a relapse, and for many weeks, I believe, my life hung on a thread. But that thread was in the hand of God, and I had no fear.”

“What is the name, Edie, of the grandmother you have lost?” I asked, in a low, tremulous voice.

“Willis—but—why do you start so? Now I am quite *sure* you have been more severely hurt than you imagine, and that my talking so much is not good for you.”

"No—Edie—no. Go on," I said firmly.

"I have little more to tell," she continued. "Dear Dr McTougall had attended me in the hospital, and took a fancy to me. When I was well enough to leave, he took me home to be governess to his children. But my situation has been an absolute sinecure as yet, for he says I am not strong enough to work, and won't let me do anything. It was not till after I had left the hospital that I told my kind friend the mistake that had been made about my name, and about my lost grandmother. He has been very kind about that, and assisted me greatly at first in my search for her. But there are so many—so many people of the name of Willis in London—old ladies too! We called together on so many that he got tired of it at last. Of course I wrote to various people at York, and to the place where we had lived before going there, but nothing came of it, and now—my hopes have long ago died out—that is to say, almost—but I still continue to make inquiries."

She paused here for some time, and I did not move or speak, being so stunned by my discovery that I knew not what to say, and feared to reveal the truth to Edith too suddenly. Then I knew by the gentle way in which she moved that she thought I had fallen asleep. I was glad of this, and remained quietly thinking.

There was no doubt now in my mind that Edie Blythe was this lost granddaughter of old Mrs Willis, but the name still remained an insoluble mystery.

"Edie," said I abruptly, "*is* your name Blythe?"

"Of course it is," she said, in startled surprise, "why should you doubt it?"

"I *don't* doubt it," said I, "but I'm sorely puzzled. Why is it not Willis?"

"Why?" exclaimed Edie, with a little laugh, "because I am the daughter of Granny Willis's daughter—not of her son. My father's name was Blythe!"

The simplicity of this explanation, and my gross stupidity in quietly assuming from the beginning, as a matter of course, that the lost Edie's name was the same as her grandmother's, burst upon me in its full force. The delusion had been naturally perpetuated by Mrs Willis never speaking of her lost darling except by her Christian name. For a few seconds I was silent, then I exploded in almost an hysterical fit of laughter, in the midst of which I was interrupted by the sudden entrance of my doggie, who had returned from a walk with Robin, and began to gambol round his mistress as if he had not seen her for years.

"Oh, sir! I say! I've diskivered all about—"

Little Slidder had rushed excitedly into the room, but stopped abruptly on observing Miss Blythe, who was looking from him to me with intense surprise.

Before another word could be said, a servant entered:—

"Please, Miss Blythe, Doctor McTougall wishes to see you in his study."

She left us at once.

"Now, Robin," said I, with emphasis, "sit down on that chair, opposite me, and let's hear all about it."

The excited boy obeyed, and Dumps, leaping on another chair beside him, sat down to listen, with ears erect, as if he knew what was coming.

"Oh, sir! you never—such a go!" began Robin, rubbing his hands together slowly as he spoke. "The Slogger! he twigged 'er at once. You'll open your eyes so wide that you'll never git 'em shut again, w'en you hears. No, I never *did* see such a lark! Edie's found! I've seen her! She ain't the Queen—oh no; nor yet one o' the Queen's darters—by no means; nor yet a duchess—oh dear no, though she's like one. Who d'ye think she is? But you'll never guess."

"I'll try," said I, with a quiet smile, for I had subdued myself by that time.

"Try away then—who?"

"Miss Edith Blythe!"

On hearing this, little Slidder's eyes began to open and glisten till they outshone his own buttons.

"Why—how—ever—did you come to guess it?" gasped the boy, on recovering himself.

"I did not guess it, I found it out. Do you suppose that nobody can find out things except Sloggers and pages in buttons?"

"Oh, sir, *do* tell!" entreated the boy.

I did tell, and after we had each told all that we knew, we mentally hugged ourselves, and grew so facetious over it that we began to address Dumps personally, to that intelligent creature's intense satisfaction.

"Now, Robin," said I, "we must break this *very* cautiously to the old lady and Miss Blythe."

"Oh, in course—we-r-y cautiously," assented the urchin, with inconceivable earnestness.

"Well, then, off you go and fetch my greatcoat. We'll go visit Mrs Willis at once."

"At vunce," echoed Robin, as he ran out of the room, with blazing cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Lilly," said Dr McTougall, as Edith entered his consulting-room. "I'm just off to see a patient who is very ill, and there is another who is not quite so ill, but who also wants to see me. I'll send you to the latter as my female assistant, if you will go. Her complaint is chiefly mental. In fact, she needs comfort more than physic, and I know of no one who is comparable to you in that line. Can you go?"

"Certainly, with pleasure. I'll go at once."

"Her name," said the doctor, "is Willis.—By the way, that reminds me of your loss, dear girl," he continued in a lower tone, as he gently took her hand, "but I would not again arouse your hopes. You know how many old women of this name we have seen without finding her."

"Yes, I know too well," returned poor Edith, while the tears gathered in her eyes. "I have long ago given up all hope."

But notwithstanding her statement Edith had not quite given way to despair. In spite of herself her heart fluttered a little as she sped on this mission to the abode of *another* old Mrs Willis.

Chapter Fourteen.

The Last.

When Robin and I reached the abode of our old friend—in a state, let me add, of almost irrepressible excitement—we found her seated in the old arm-chair by the window, gazing sadly out on the prospect.

It was not now the prospect of red brick and water-spout, with a remote distance of chimney—cans and cats, which had crushed the old lady's spirit in other days—by no means. There was a picturesque little court, with an old pump in the centre to awaken the fancy, and frequent visits from more or less diabolical street-boys, to excite the imagination. Beyond that there was the mews, in which a lively scene of variance between horses and men was enacted from morning till night—a scene which derived much additional charm from the fact that Mrs Willis, being short-sighted, formed fearfully incorrect estimates of men, and beasts, and things in general.

"Well, granny, how are you?" said I, seating myself on a stool beside her, and thinking how I should begin.

"Pretty griggy—eh?" inquired little Slidder.

"Ah! there you are, my dear boys," said the old lady, who had latterly got to look upon me and my *protégé* as brothers. "You are always sure to come, whoever fails me."

"Has any one failed you to-day, granny?" I asked.

"Yes, Dr McTougall has," she replied as petulantly as it was possible for her to speak. "I've been feeling very low and weak to-day, and sent for him; but I suppose he thinks it's only imagination. Well, well, perhaps it is," she added, after a pause, and with a little sigh. "I'm very foolish, no doubt."

"No, granny," said I, "you're not foolish,"—("Contrariwise, wery much the reverse," interrupted Slidder)—"and I'm glad that I chanced to come in, because, perhaps, I may be able to prescribe for you as well as he."

"Better, dear boy, better"—("That's it, cheer up!" from Slidder)—"and it always does me a world of good to see your handsome face."

"Well, granny," said I, with a flutter at my heart, as I looked up at her thin careworn face, and began to break the ice with caution, "I've come—I—there's a little piece of—of—"

"Now then, dig in the spurs, doctor, an' go at it—neck or nuffin'," murmured my impatient companion.

"What are you saying, Robin?" asked Mrs Willis, with a slightly anxious look. "There's nothing wrong, I hope?"

"No, no; nothing wrong, granny," said I, hastening to the point; "very much the reverse. But—but—you heard of my accident, of course?" I said, suddenly losing heart and beating about the bush.

"Stuck again!" murmured Slidder, in a tone of disgust.

"Yes, yes; I heard of it. You don't mean to say that you're getting worse?" said the old lady, with increasing anxiety.

"Oh no! I'm better—much better. Indeed, I don't think I ever felt so well in my life; and I've just heard a piece of good news, which, I'm quite sure, will make you very glad—very glad indeed!"

"Go it, sir! Another burst like that and you'll be clear out o' the wood," murmured Slidder.

"In fact," said I, as a sudden thought struck, "I'm going to be married!"

"Whew! you never told *me* that!" exclaimed Slidder, with widening eyes.

"*Will* you be quiet, Robin?" said I, rather sternly; "how can I get over this very difficult matter if you go on interrupting me so?"

"Mum's the word!" returned the boy, folding his hands, and assuming a look of ridiculous solemnity.

At that moment we heard a noise of pattering feet on the landing outside. The door, which had not been properly closed, burst open, and my doggie came into the room all of a heap. After a brief moment lost in apparently searching for his hind-legs, he began to dance and frisk about the room as if all his limbs were whalebone and his spirit quicksilver.

"Oh, there's that dog again! Put it out! put it out!" cried Mrs Willis, gathering her old skirts around her feet.

"Get out, Dumps! how dare you come here, sir, without leave?"

"*I* gave him leave," said a sweet voice in the passage.

Next moment a sweeter face was smiling upon me, as Edith entered the room.

There was a feeble cry at the window. I observed that the sweet smile vanished, and a deadly pallor overspread Edith's face, while her eyes gazed with eager surprise at the old lady for a few seconds. Mrs Willis sat with answering gaze and outstretched arms.

"Edie!"

"Granny!" was all that either could gasp, but there was no need for more—the lost ones were mutually found! With an indescribable cry of joy Edith sprang forward, fell on her knees, and enfolded granny in her arms.

"'Ere you are, doctor," whispered Robin, touching me on the elbow and presenting a tumbler of water.

"How? What?"

"She'll need it, doctor. I knows her well, an' it's the on'y thing as does her good w'en she's took bad."

Slidder was right. The shock of joy was almost too much for the old lady. She leaned heavily on her granddaughter's neck, and if I had not caught her, both must have fallen to the ground. We lifted her gently into bed, and in a few minutes she recovered.

For some time she lay perfectly still. Edith, reclining on the lowly couch, rested her fair young cheek on the withered old one.

Presently Mrs Willis moved, and Edith sat up.

"John," said the former to me, looking at the latter, "this is my Edie, thanks be to the Lord."

"Yes, granny, I know it, and she's my Edie too!"

A surprised and troubled look came on her old face. She evidently was pained to think that I could jest at such a moment. I hastened to relieve her.

"It is the plain and happy truth that I tell you, granny. Edith is engaged to marry me.—Is it not so?"

I turned towards the dear girl, who silently put one of her hands in mine.

Old Mrs Willis spoke no word, but I could see that her soul was full of joy. I chanced to glance at Robin, and observed that that waif had retired to the window, and was absolutely wiping his eyes, while Dumps sat observant in the middle of the room, evidently much surprised at, but not much pleased with, the sudden calm which had succeeded the outburst.

"Come, Robin," said I, rising, "I think that you and I will leave them—Good-bye, granny and Edie; I shall soon see you again."

I paused at the door and looked back.

"Come, Dumps, come."

My doggie wagged his scrumpy tail, cocked his expressive ears, and glanced from me to his mistress, but did not rise.

"Pompey prefers to remain with me," said Edie; "let him stay."

"Punch is a wise dog," observed Robin, as we descended the stairs together; "but you don't ought to let your spirits go down, sir," he added, with a profoundly sagacious glance, "'cause, of course, he can't 'elp 'isself now. He'll 'ave to stick to you wotever 'appens—an' to me too!"

I understood the meaning of his last words, and could not help smiling at the presumptuous certainty with which he assumed that he was going to follow my fortunes.

Is it needful to say that when I mentioned what had occurred to Dr McTougall that amiable little man opened his eyes to their widest?

“You young dog!” he exclaimed, “was it grateful in you to repay all my kindness by robbing me in this sly manner of my governess—nay, I may say, of my daughter, for I have long ago considered her such, and adopted her in my heart?”

“It was not done slily, I assure you,” said I; “indeed, I fought against the catastrophe with all my might—but I—I could not help it at last; it came upon me, as it were, unexpectedly—took me by surprise.”

“Humph!” ejaculated the doctor.

“Besides,” I added, “you can scarcely call it robbery, for are not you and I united as partners, so that instead of robbing you, I have, in reality, created another bond of union between you and Edie?”

“H’m!” said the doctor.

“Moreover,” I continued, “it happens most opportunely just now that the house opposite this one is to let. It is a much smaller and lower-rented house than this, and admirably suited for a very small family, so that if I secure it we will scarcely, I may say, have to quit your roof.”

“Ah! to be sure,” returned the doctor, falling in with my humour, “we will have the pleasure of overlooking and criticising each other and our respective households. We may sit at the windows and converse across the street in fine weather, or flatten our noses on the glass, and make faces at each other when the weather is bad. Besides, we can have a tunnel cut under the street and thus have subterranean communication at any time of the day or night—and what a charming place that would be for the children to romp in! Of course, we would require to have it made of bricks or cast-iron to prevent the rats connecting it with the sewers, but—”

A breeze of pattering feet overhead induced the doctor to pause. It increased to a gale on the staircase, to a tempest in the lobby. The door was burst open, and Jack, and Harry, and Job, and Jenny, and Dolly, with blazing cheeks and eyes, tumbled tumultuously into the room.

“Oh papa!” screamed Harry, “Lilly’s been out an’ found her mother!”

“No, it’s not—it’s her gan-muver,” shrieked Dolly.

“Yes, an’ Dr Mellon’s going to marry her,” cried Jenny.

“Who?—the grandmother?” asked the doctor, with a surprised look.

“No—Lilly,” they all cried, with a shout of laughter, which Jack checked by stoutly asserting that it was her great-grandmother that Lilly had found. This drew an emphatic, “No, it’s not,” from Job, and a firmly reiterated assertion that it was “only her gan-muver” from Dolly.

"But Robin said so," cried Jack.

"No, he *didn't*," said Job.

"Yes, he *did*," cried Harry.

"Robin said she's found 'er *gan-muver*," said Dolly.

"I'll go an' ask him," cried Jenny, and turning round, she rushed out of the room. The others faced about, as one child, and the tempest swept back into the lobby, moderated to a gale on the staircase, and was reduced to a breeze—afterwards to a temporary calm—overhead.

Before it burst forth again the doctor and I had put on our hats and left the house.

From that date forward, for many weeks, the number of lost grandmothers that were found in the McTougall nursery surpasses belief. They were discovered in all sorts of places, and in all imaginable circumstances—under beds, tables, upturned baths, and basin-stands; in closets, trunks, and cupboards, and always in a condition of woeful weakness and melancholy destitution. The part of grandmother was invariably assigned to Dolly, because, although the youngest of the group, that little creature possessed a power of acting and of self-control which none of the others could equal. At first they were careful to keep as close to the original event as possible; but after a time, thirsting for variety, they became lax, and the grandmothers were found not only by granddaughters, but by daughters, and cousins, and nieces, and nephews; but the play never varied in the points of extreme poverty and woe, because Dolly refused, with invincible determination, to change or modify her part.

After a time they varied the performance with a wedding, in which innumerable Dr Mellons were united to endless Lilly Blythes; but after the real wedding took place, and the cake had been utterly consumed, they returned to their first love—Lost and Found, as they termed it or, the Gan-muver's Play.

So, in course of time, the house over the way was actually taken and furnished. Edie was installed therein as empress; I as her devoted slave—when not otherwise engaged. And, to say truth, even when I *was* otherwise engaged I always managed to leave my heart at home. Anatomists may, perhaps, be puzzled by this statement. If so—let them be puzzled! Gan-muver was also installed as queen-dowager, in a suite of apartments consisting of one room and a closet.

It was not in Dr McTougall's nursery alone that the game of Lost and Found was played.

In a little schoolroom, not far distant from our abode, that game was played by Edie—assisted by Robin Slidder and myself—with considerable success.

Robin crossed the street to me—came over, as it were—with Edith the conqueror and our doggie, and afterwards became a most valuable ally in searching for, drawing forth, tempting out and gathering in the lost. He and I sought for them in some of the lowest slums of London. Robin's knowledge of their haunts and ways, and, his persuasive voice, had influence where none but himself—or some one like him—could have made any impression. We tempted them to our little hall with occasional feasts, in which buns, oranges, raisins, gingerbread, and tea played prominent parts, and when we had gathered them in, Edith came to them, like an angel of light and preached to them the gospel of Jesus, at once by example, tone, look, and word.

Among others who came to our little social meetings was the Slogger. That unpunished criminal not only launched with, apparently, heart and soul into the good cause, but he was the means of inducing many others to come, and when, in after years, his old comrade, Mr Brassey, returned from his enforced residence in foreign parts, the Slogger sought for and found him, and stuck to him with the pertinacity of his bulldog nature until he fairly brought him in.

Thus that good work went on with us. Thus it is going on at the present time in many, many parts of our favoured land, and thus it will go on, with God's blessing, until His people shall all be gathered into the fold of the Good Shepherd—until that day when the puzzlements and bewilderments of this incomprehensible life shall be cleared up; when we shall be enabled to understand *why* man has been so long permitted to dwell in the midst of conflicting good and evil, and why he has been required to live on earth by faith and not by sight, trusting in the unquestionable goodness and wisdom of Him who is our Life and our Light.

In all our work, whether temporal or spiritual, we had the help and powerful sympathy of our friend Dr McTougall and his family; also of *his* friend Dobson, the City man, who was a strong man in more ways than one, and a zealous champion of righteousness—or "rightness," as he was fond of calling it, in contradistinction to wrongness.

I meant to let fall the curtain at this point but something which I cannot explain induces me to keep it up a few minutes longer, in order to tell you that the little McTougalls grew up to be splendid men and women; that dear old granny is still alive and well, insomuch that she bids fair to become a serene centenarian; that my sweet Edie is now "fair, fat, and forty;" that I am grey and hearty; that Dumps is greyer, and so fat, as well as stiff, that he wags his ridiculous tail with the utmost difficulty; that Brassey and the Slogger have gone into partnership in the green-grocery line round the corner; and that Robin Slidder is no longer a boy, but has become a man and a butler. He is still in our service, and declares that he will never leave it. My firm conviction is that he will keep his word as long as he can.

So now, amiable reader, with regret and the best of wishes, we make our final bow-"wow"—and:

Bid you good-bye,

My doggie and I.