

little back room in a side street in Black-wall; and when he had had his breakfast, and had fetched his box from Kentish Town, he had the whole day before him, with nothing particular to do, and nowhere in particular to go.

It was not a very safe position for a young man of Oliver's age and bringing up; and if Mr. Wilmot, away there in the little village at home, had fully realised it, he would have worried himself even more than he was already doing. But he could have *done* nothing more than he had done already, in committing the wilful lad to the care of Love and Power greater than his own. And Oliver had not altogether forgotten to do that for himself; so that he went out into this strange new world not quite unprepared to meet its perils.

He began by telling his landlady what he wanted—at least so far as that he described the sailor to her—and asked her to inquire amongst her lodgers and their friends, who mostly 'followed the sea.' She was a pleasant, friendly woman enough, and was willing to do all she could to help him, perhaps guessing at some story beneath the surface, more sad and important than anything that he had told her.

And thus began a strange dream-like time in Oliver's life, that always seemed, in looking back upon it, far longer than it really was.

All day he wandered about the streets, using his own eyes chiefly, but asking questions of every one with whom he could get into conversation, and always with a feeling upon him that he ought to be doing something more, if only he knew what that something was.

He talked to policemen on their beat, to dock-men lounging by the closed dockyard gates, to sailors by the doors of the public-houses such as Jack ashore prefers. After a time he even went so far as to describe his father as well as the unknown sailor, and to mention his father's name; but never, anywhere, did he hear any tidings of the man he was looking for, or even his late companion.

More than once he heard that such a

pair were lodging or had been seen in such a neighbourhood, and traced them out, only to find himself on a false scent. Perhaps some of his advisers were making fun of him, and some honestly misunderstood him, but no one gave him any real help; and at times, when he half-realised what a hopeless task he had undertaken, he was almost ready to despair.

Plenty of wickedness the country-bred lad saw as he went in and out—some that he understood, and that surprised and shocked him, and some that passed him by and did not even surprise him, because he did not understand it.

But the more he realised the ways of this strange new world, the more he was haunted by the thought of his father turning from it all, and trying to get back to the quiet home he had left. Ay! and being driven away again, back to the swine's husks and the far country. The look in his father's eyes went with him night and day, and robbed his food of its taste and his sleep of its sweetness. While all was so new and strange to him, curiosity and excitement had made him sometimes forget; but after all, one street in a great town is apt to be very like another, and to Oliver they were soon all alike uninteresting, except those where he might hope to find his father.

One night, he hardly knew how, he had wandered down to one of the great bridges, and stood there, watching the dark flowing water, with the long lights quivering in it, and the boats going up and down. It was rather more than a month since he had left home; six weeks since that summer night when those two strange faces looked over the gate into the Rectory meadow at Staneslow, and changed Oliver's whole life for him. Six weeks! and it seemed longer than all his life before. So long a time, and yet he had done nothing!

A boat passed swiftly under the dark arch, and flashed into his sight for a moment, and was gone. There were two men in it. He could not see them clearly; there was nothing about them that even suggested his father and the sailor; and