

room it is, but you ask any one about there where Little Creases dwells, and they'll show you, sir. She lives with her granny. They're a rough lot down there, but they've some sort of a respect both for the old woman an' the little un, an' they won't insult you, sir, if they think you wants to do 'em a kindness. I'll go with you an' welcome, if you like, when I'm off; but they'll think more on ye, sir, if you don't go with one of us. No, sir, the force ain't popular, and yet it's only our duty that we try to do; and monkey's allowance we get for doin' on it. If you want to ketch the little un in and awake, you'd better go somewhere between six and seven in the evenin'. The little un has to tramp a weary way to sell her stuff, an' she's glad enough, I'll go bail, to go to her 'by-by,' as my littlest calls it, when she's had her grub. You know your way to the Rents, sir? Second turnin' to the left, arter you pass the Duke o' York. You can't mistake it, sir—the name's up just inside the archway."

On the following evening I found my way to Bateman's Rents. The archway was almost choked with gasping loungers, who looked at first very awfully at me; but when I inquired after Little Creases, and used the very term which the sergeant had taught me—much as a Moravian missionary might use his first conciliatory bit of Equimese—the loungers relaxed into a general grin. "She've just come in, sir," said a hulking rough, leaning against a post. "Jim, go and show the parson where Little Creases dwells," and at this repetition of the friends making pass-word there was another general grin.

Jim, the shock-headed youth, whose dress consisted of a one-sleeved shirt and a pair of trousers with a leg and a half, upheld by a single brace of greasy twine, speedily piloted me to the bottom of the Rents, and up a filthy, creaking staircase to the first-floor back of the last house. "Creases!" he shouted, as we stopped at the open door of a dark little dungeon of a room, "ere's a parson a-lockin' arter ye. Whatever 'as you been a-doin' on?"

The only window of the room gave on a high dead wall, within arm's-length of it; and though half of the window panes were broken, the room on that hot evening was very close as well as dark. It was very dirty also, and so was the parchment-skinned old woman who sat crouching, from the force of habit, over the little rusty, empty grate. Opposite her sat Little Creases, on the floor. The old woman's half backed arm-chair, and the low bedstead on which she and her granddaughter slept together, were almost all the furniture. The scantiness of the bed-clothes did not matter so much in that sultry weather; but, hot as it was, it almost made one shiver to think of lying under them in winter.

"Yes, sir," said the old woman when I had seated myself on the bed, and stated why I had come, "Bessie an' me 'as ad our tea. No, we don't light a fire this time o' year. It's heavy to git a potful o' bilin' water somewheres or other—our pot don't take much to fill it. It ain't much the neighbours can do for us, but what they can they will. I must say that. No, I don't think I could git any on 'em to clean up my room. They hain't got the time, an' if they 'ad they hain't got the water."

I was young then, and had a weakness for giving a "professional" turn to conversation; plumbing myself on my clerical cleverness when I had lugged in a text of Scripture, *apropos* of anything—more often, in fact, of nothing. I began to talk about the woman of Samaria and the water of life, in a way that I could not help feeling was hazy even to myself. The old woman listened to me for a time in sulkily patient silence, although plainly without the slightest comprehension of what I meant. I was having my say, she thought, and she would get hers by-and-bye, and would get all the more out of it, if she "behaved proper" whilst I was talking. She was full of complaints, when her turn came; especially at the hardship of her having to support a great girl like Bessie, although, so far as I could make out, Bessie contributed at least her full share of the cost of the old woman's room-keeping. Finding that I had small chance of hearing anything about Little Creases, except the amount of bread she ate, in her self-contained grandmother's presence, I proposed that Bessie should visit me at my lodgings next morning; and to this arrangement the grandmother grudgingly consented, when I had promised to make good the loss which the little girl would incur through giving up her work.

I was amused to see how I sank in the "social" estimation of my new acquaintances when they learnt that I was lodging at a baker's. "Wilson" was a very rich man in their opinion, and "made good bread, an' guv fairish weight—better than the English bakers, though he was a Scotchman;" but Bessie and Granny had at times bought bread of Mr. Wilson, and, therefore, looked upon themselves as his patronesses, and at me as a "kind o' make-believe sort o' gen'tleman" to be lodging on his first-floor. They evidently felt comforted when they heard that Little Creases was to knock at the private door.

I was looking out for her when she knocked. Had I not been, the "slavery" most likely would have ordered her off as "a humpidant match-gal as wouldn't take No."

Bessie was rather shy at first, but when she was asked what she would like to have, she suggested, "Wilson sells stunnin' brandy-snaps," with a glibness which showed that she had the answer ready on her tongue. Whilst she was munching her anticipated dainties, I got a little of her history out of her, which I will put together here, as nearly as I can in her own words:—

"My name's Bessie—ye called me so yerself. Some calls me Little Creases, an' some jist Creases—'cos I sells 'em. Yes, Bessie, I s'pose, is my Chris'n name. I don't know as I've got another name. Granny 'as Marther's 'er Chris'n name, an' sometimes folks calls 'er Missis Jude—sometimes they calls 'er Hold Winegar, but that ain't horfen. No, sir, they don't call 'er that to 'er face. Granny 'ud give it back to 'em if they did, an' they ain't a bad lot—not them as we lives with. No, I can't remember when I fust come to live with Granny—'ow could I! I was jist a babby, Granny says. Oh, Granny does whatever she can—she ain't a lie a bed. Sometimes she gets hout cheeria' now, but she ain't strong enough for that, an' the

work an' what she gits to drink makes her precious cross when she comes 'ome. Yes, I love Granny, though she do take hall I arns. She's a right to, I s'pose. She says so, anyways, 'cos she took me when father and mother died, an' father 'ad wexed 'er. No, I can't remember nuffink o' them an' I don't see as it matters much. There's kids in the Rents as 'as got fathors an' mothers as is wuss hoff than me. Well, I s'pose, when I grows up, I can spend what I gits accordin' to my own mind. But I 'on't forgit Granny. She may growl, but she never whipped me—an' some on 'em does get whipped. Yes, sir, I knows I ought to be thankful to Granny for takin' care on me afore I could git my hown livin'—didn't I say so? No, I can't read, an' I can't write. I never went to school. What's the good o' that to folks like me as 'as to arn their livin'! I know 'ow much I oughter give a 'and for my creases, an' then 'ow to split 'em up inter bunches, an' I'm pickin' up the prices o' hother thinx at the markets, an' that's hall a gal like me need know. Readin' an' writin' may be hall wery well for little gals as can't 'elp theirselves, but I don't see as it would be hany 'elp to me. Yes, I likes to look at pictures sometimes in the shops, but I can make out what they means—them as I cares about—w'out readin'. Where does I git my creases? Why, at the market. Where else should I git 'em? Yes, it is cold gittin' up in the dark, an' the creases feels shivery when you git a harmful, when the gas is a-burnin'. But what's the good o' growlin' when you've got to do it? An' the women as sells 'em is horfen kinder in the winter, though they looks half-perished theirselves, tuckin' their 'ands under their harms, wi' the frost on 'em. One on 'em last winter guv me a fair market—and when I 'adn't got no stock-money, an' the browns to git a cup o' cawfee an' a bread-and-butter. That did do me good, for it was hawful cold, an' no mistake. If it 'adn't been for the pain in 'em, my toes an' fingers seemed jist as if they didn't belong to me. But it's good fun this time o' year. We 'ave our larks when we're a-pumpin' on the creases, an' a-settin' on the steps tyin' 'em up. Rushes we ties 'em with. No, we 'avn't to pay for the rushes—they're gived us by them as sells the creases. Yes, I think I've seed rushes a-growin'—in 'Ackney Marshes—but there wasn't much in that, as I could see. I'd rather be where there was houses, if that's country. It's sloppier than the streets is. No, I don't go to church. Granny says that she used to go, but they never give her nuffink, so she dropped it. 'Sides, Sunday's when I sells most. Folks likes a relias a-Sundays for their breakfasts an' teases; an' when I ain't a-walkin' about, I likes to git a snooze. 'Sides, I hain't no clothes fit to go to church in. No, I don't go to theaytres an' that, nayther—I sh'd like to if I'd got the browns. I've 'eared say that it's as fine as the Queen a-hopenin' Parliament—the Forty Thieves at the Pawillion is.

"Yes, I've seed the Queen once. I was in the Park when she come along wi' them fine gen'tlemen on 'osback a-bangin' away at the drums an' that; I s'pose them was the Parliament. I never was so far afore, an' I ain't been since, an' I was wery tired, but I sq'eezed in among the folks. Some

on 'em was swolls, an' some on 'em was sich as me, an' some on 'em was sich as shopkeepers.

"One hold fellow says to me, says he, 'What do you want 'ere, my little gal!'

"I want to see the Queen, an' Prince Halbert, an' the Parli'ment gen'tlemen," says I.

"I'm a Parli'ment gen'loman," says he, 'but I ain't a-goin' down to-day.'

"I worn't a-goin' to let 'im think he could do me like that, for he worn't dressed nigh so smart as Wilson a-Sundays. 'You're chaffin',' says I; 'why hain't you got a 'oss, an' a goold coat, an' summat to blow!'

"Then he busted out larfin' fit to kill 'isself; and says he, 'Oh, you should 'ear me in Parli'ment a-blowin' my own trumpet, an' see me a-ridin' the 'igh 'oss there.'

"I think he was 'alf-silly, but he was wery good-natur'd—silly folks horfen is. He lifted me hup right over the people's 'eads, an' I see the Queen wi' my own eyes, as plain as I see you, sir, an' Prince Halbert, too, a-bowin' away like them himages in the grocers' winders. I thought it was huncommon queer to see the Queen a-bowin'. I'd 'spected that all on us would a-'ad to bob down as hif we was playin' 'oney-pots when she come by. But, there she was a-bowin' away to hoveybody, an' so was Prince Halbert. I know 'im from the pictures, though he didn't seem 'arf so smart as the gen'loman that druv the 'osses. What a nice-lookin' gen'loman, though, that Prince Halbert is! I do believe that himage in the barber's window in Bishopsgate, with the goold sheet on, ain't 'arf as 'ansome. Wisher may die hif he didn't bow to me! The queer hold cove I was a-settin' on, guv me 'is 'at to shake about like the other folks—law, 'ow they did shake their 'ats an' their 'ankerchers, an' beller as if they'd bust theirselves! An' Prince Halbert grinned at me kind-like; an' then he guv the Queen a nudge, an' she grinned, an' guv me a bow too, an' the folks all turned round to look at me, an' I felt as hif I was a swell. The hold cove was huncommon pleased, an' he guv me a 'arf-a-bull, so Granny said he was a real Parli'ment gen'loman arter all."

"And what did you do with the money, Bessie?" I asked.

"Guv it to Granny."

"But didn't you get any of it?"

"Oh, yes. Granny'd a blow out o' trotters, an' she guv me one, an' huncommon good it were."

A little girl who had sold water-creases for two years, with no more memorable treat than a trotter, could not be injured, I thought, by a little indulgence. If I confirmed Bessie in her opinion that, in the complimentary words she had already used in reference to me, I wasn't "sich a bad sort, arter all," I might be able to "get hold" of her, and eventually do her more good than giving her a little passing pleasure. Still I was at a loss how to carry out my plan of giving her a day's treat; so I asked her to choose her entertainment for herself.

"Well," she answered promptly, "I should like to 'ave some more to heat bimeby;" and then, after a minute's pause, "an' I should like to go up the Monument. I've horfen seed the folk at the top lik' rats in a cage; an' I should like to 'ave a lock down them railin's, too."