

LONDON RAGAMUFFINS.

(By Mrs. Henry M. Stanley in Youth's Companion.)



HAVE BEEN asked to tell American boys and girls something about English boys and girls. So I will speak of the London ragamuffin—an old friend of mine, more interesting to me in his sooty rags than the prosperous, well-cared-for children who play decorously in our fashionable

parks and squares. Are there any Boston ragamuffins? Any New York gamins? I had no opportunity of meeting them. They must in many respects differ considerably from their English cousins; their language, their view of life, the very "cut" of their rags must be different.

Perhaps our little Londoner is less "cute," for although our poorest children commence early the struggle for life, suffering from the outset deprivations of every kind, they nevertheless retain, and often to a surprising degree, a certain childishness of body and mind. There is no country in the world where children of every class are so long children as in England.

It is quite a mistake to think that because a little girl has to play the mother to small brothers and sisters that it is necessary that her small mind shall be oppressed with anxiety, that she shall think of tomorrow's dinner, or be troubled as to next week's rent.

The expression of care and melancholy we sometimes see need not be the effect of want or suffering; the joyless, anxious little face may belong to a contented, happy child who wears on its countenance the shadows of a past it has never known, the stamp of an inherited expression.

"What makes you most happy? What do you like best? Tell me Samuel Jones." Samuel Jones screws up his eyes reflectively, and of course replies, "Dunno," to gain time.

"But think," I persist. "Well! the theayter—and fried fish—and, and—father and mother," he adds, hastily; because Samuel has a general notion of saying the right thing.

This particular boy confessed to having been three times to see a certain popular play. He described the most thrilling scenes; he marched up and down my studio, now assuming the hoarse tones of the villain, now the indignant protests of the hero, quite unconscious of his droll appearance in ragged coat and trousers and a still more ragged shirt, his lint-white hair cropped short and bristling up on his pink head.

Yes, the theatre and fried fish come before father and mother.

"Is it really nice, fried fish? The fried fish you get?" I asked doubtfully.

"Nice! Just you get a bit and see.



Why, it's nicer nor anythink. But I'll bring you some, I will."

"No, Samuel Jones; now that you can earn money, you should put it carefully by. Save all your halfpence."

But Samuel only shook his head. He was determined to treat me; and sure

enough, the next morning, before he had unbuttoned his ample overcoat—Mr. Jones senior's coat with very slight adaptations—I could perceive the unsavory offering.

"Wait a bit," said Samuel, with grave importance; and diving his hands into the depths of his pocket, he produced an oily parcel.

"Wait a bit." And he unfolded the Star newspaper, revealing a peculiar-looking fish.

"I ato the head and tail as I comed



along," he explained: "they aint no good, yer know."

It was generously meant, and I had to accept the gift. "But I cannot eat it now, I must keep it for dinner," I added, hypocritically; and the ragamuffin dainty was removed.

I was now afraid Samuel Jones would propose taking me to see his favorite play, so I hastened to assure him that I could accept no more gifts from him, as I was able to give myself all I wanted. But Samuel was incredulous.

"All you want! Git along! Why, could you have a horse and cart? And heaps of clothes—new clothes—and pudden every day and—and—" here Samuel fairly lost himself in vague imaginings of infinite possibilities.

And yet there was something which only my ragamuffins could give me—their rags!

I possess a really unique collection, most carefully selected: trousers in every stage of dilapidation—torn, patched, worn, looped up, stained, with rough ends of strings for braces; little shirts with apertures for shoulders; coats of every description, from the elaborately braided jacket which has come down in the world till its faded gentility gave way to tattered elbows and gaping seams, to the sturdy coat of the big brother which has become the trailing overcoat of the little one.

Most of my "ole cloes" have one tone of color. If you examine them closely you detect something of the original hue; but wear and weather tinge them all a greenish brown or a brownish green.

I have also an assortment of little girls' garments—frocks with ragged flounces, and never a hook or button.

"Please, m'n, I've brought you my old polnaze!"

"My mother says you can have my worn-out dolman!"

The girls, you see, are very particular about the names of their garments.

I then have them spread out before me; and if they are characteristically ragged or worn I effect an exchange. The ragamuffin becomes the possessor of some more serviceable garment, from a store of them which I have in reserve, and his rags are mine.

Of course I have to pass them through a very necessary purifying process. They have to be baked, fumigated and hung out in the air till they are "safe," after which they are carefully packed away in camphor and pepper.

The advantage to an artist of having these "raggety" clothes is obvious. In a twinkling my too tidy model is transformed into the regular ragamuffin. There is much laughing and sneezing when the rags come out of the cupboard. "Well now! if I

aint got on boy Vincent's coat," or "Here's Billy Sullivan's trousers, and one of his marbles in the pocket." Then a run, a somersault, and our too respectable boy has shaken down into the merry, impudent street-arab.

But the girls return more reluctantly to the old dress. There is much pouting of lips and shaking of shoulders before the contemptuous little maiden condescends to put on what was perhaps her own old frock.

On the whole, boys are much pleasanter to work with. I would far sooner the baby to be painted were brought by the brother than by the sister. As a rule, the boys are more gentle and motherly with the "little un." The sisters are given to slapping and "setting up" the baby with, "Now, then, aint yer ashamed of yerself? Well, I never! You are a naughty boy, Arthur John. See if I don't tell yer mother!" And Arthur John is shaken till the roar is shaken down his wide-open mouth, and for some seconds he seems in imminent danger of suffocation.

But the brother, he is more disposed to soothe and quiet "his baby," or "baiby," as he pronounces it. Assiduously he wipes away the tears, and by cunning wiles and tricks coaxes back the half-ashamed, reluctant smile.

"Our baiby" is a favorite theme. Wonderful stories are told of the little one at home. "She's jist as sharp as a needle," says one; and another admiringly exclaims, "She pulls my 'air out by the 'andfulls, she do!"

"Is your little sister good-looking? Is she pretty?" I ask, seeing a possible model for a picture I am painting.

"I rather think she is—just! Pretty! Why, there aint a prettier nowhere."

"But tell me—what is she like?"

Descriptions of personal appearance, however, are not the ragamuffin forte.

"Oh, she's just as nice looking as she can be," he says, vaguely. "She's a round, big face,—oh, ever so big,—and hard,—oh, ever so hard,—and my! aint she got red cheeks, all shiny, too, and nice little eyes, like mouse's eyes, bright as nails; and mother does oil her hair beautiful of Sundays, coconut oil; you can smell it all the way after her."



Now I am going to tell you about the cleverest, naughtiest boy I ever knew. He was so naughty that I was always determined I would never see him again; and yet he was so clever that he always contrived to "get around me." I felt I was weak, and what was still more humiliating, that the boy knew it and took advantage of it.

I do not think I ought to give his real name, because he is, perhaps, trying to become better; so, as he was an Irish boy, I will call him Patrick Mahoney.

Now Pat had a very useful face to paint, because he could look very good or very naughty, just as my subject required. He could keep a merry expression, or drop his mouth and look so sorrowful that it would have melted your heart to see him.

Pat assured me he could laugh on one side of his face and cry on the other at the same time, though I never actually saw him do that.

Pat also had a very pliable, wiry little body, which could fall into almost any attitude; and what is more important for a painter, he could keep it. And with this he had a most suggestive mind. More

than once he found good subjects for drawings, and he was often an intelligent critic. Patrick Mahoney, but for his serious faults, would really have been a treasure.

The worst thing about him was his untruthfulness. He seldom spoke the truth but by chance; and I am sorry to say, he never hesitated to pocket any unconsidered trifle which took his fancy.

Pat was introduced to me by a very quiet well-behaved little boy who sat to me three days a week. The new boy was to sit the other three days.

Pat soon won me by his wit and power of adaptation. I little guessed then the depths of naughtiness in the heart which beat behind that tattered shirt.

"What does boy Taffy do for you, laidy?" asked Pat, one morning. I showed him the sketch I was making of his well-behaved friend.

"Ah," sighed Pat, "pity boy Taffy's a cadger!"

"A what?"

"A cadger. A boy wot takes things away—sneaks things off. See here; he took some of your paints home yesterday and squeaged them all over hisself. He wanted to give some to me, but I guessed he'd faked 'em, so I wouldn't have none of 'em."

All this sounded circumstantial enough, and as I had lately missed several tubes of color, I was ready to believe perfidious Pat.

"I wouldn't have boy Taffy again, laidy," he continued. "Hes wears awful. Mother's afraid as I'll catch it from him."

I was really surprised to hear this; Taffy seemed to me such an excellent little boy.

"Are you sure you are speaking the truth?" I asked, still doubtful.

"Speaking the truth am I?" cried Pat, with beautiful indignation. "See here!" Bounding off the stand, he ran up to me and spat violently into the palm of his left hand. "Is that wet?" he asked, solemnly; then rubbing his left hand vigorously on his cord trousers, he again presented the upturned palm. "Is that dry? Cut my throat if I tell a lie!" And he passed his hand significantly across his throat.

After such a fearful asseveration, what could I do but believe? So poor Taffy's services were dispensed with, and Patrick reigned supreme.

It would take too long were I to enumerate Pat's misdeeds, or to recount the long series of deceptions he practised on me. I think his fertile imagination found peculiar satisfaction in describing harrowing scenes at home, and the many wonderful things he had seen and done. The air of truthfulness that he assumed was simply marvellous.

Sometimes he betrayed himself, as for instance, in the case of the exciting adventure at Brighton one bank holiday. He told how they went to sea from Brighton pier, going aboard a great ship with many sails. Then a fierce storm arose, and they would all have been lost but for the timely arrival of the life-boat; and as though shipwreck were not enough for one day, that very afternoon he and a companion had plucked a few rosy-cheeked apples which hung temptingly from a tree—at the end of March!—when the owner let loose "a pack of bloodhounds." Pat, of course, escaped, but his unfortunate companion was almost torn to pieces. He even went so far as to say that he had seen several monkeys in the trees, but he "wouldn't swear to it."

Had he confined himself to word-painting I might have endured it. When, however, it came to re-touching one of my pictures—putting moustaches to my portrait of a pretty flower-girl—I felt that it was time for me to be angry in earnest.

Another day he invited in my name ten boys and girls to bring their baby brothers or sisters to be painted. He told them all to come at the same hour, and in they

