

RAG AND TAG.

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CHAPTER II.—Continued.

Exactly at the end of the two hours the warehouseman returned. A look of satisfaction passed over his face when he saw how well the poor little waifs were doing the work he had given them.

"Well done, little ones, you've earned your breakfast; follow me."

Rag looked at Tag, and he looked at her; but it was evident they trusted their new friend, for after having given each other a knowing nod, they pattered down the long passage with their little bare feet after him, and soon arrived in a room almost as large as the one they had left, with gas-jets burning brightly on the walls, a great fire blazing, and a long narrow table covered with a clean white cloth, on which the remains of a breakfast stood. It was the room where those employed in the warehouse had their meals. The workpeople had finished their breakfast and gone back to their respective duties. So Tag and Rag were brought in by John Burton, the overseer of the place, to get some bread and butter and a hot cup of coffee. Poor little creatures! it was pitiful to see their great eyes stare and their thin hands clutch at the slices held out to them. After Tag had finished his first piece and swallowed half a cup of coffee, he astonished kind-hearted John by suddenly standing on his head, and walking towards him on his hands instead of his feet.

"Oh," said Rag, noticing his look of surprise, "Tag allus does like that when he's werry partickler 'appy; he'll turn 'ead over 'eels in another minit. He'll do it for nothin', sir; he'll not ask for a copper; it's all along o' yer good coffee. Oh, I wishes as I could do somethin' to let you see how comfor'ble I feels. I'm as warm as warm; my feet are quite a-burnin'."

"I'm right glad to hear it, my little girl; but Tag, lad, stop that work. I don't care to see it. You'll send all your breakfast into your head. Look sharp and finish, for I want you back at the boxes again."

"I'se ready now, sir."

"An' so is I," said Rag.

"Then back you go to your work, off with you, and I'll follow and turn the key again. I shall not come back for four

hours this time, so double the work should be done."

And double the work was done. Refreshed by their good breakfast, warmed by the gas, fire, and unwonted exercise, and cheered by the kindly voice of the warehouseman, they got on bravely. So busy were they, that they quite forgot to talk.

At last, after a silence of nearly half an hour, Rag broke it by saying, "Arter all, this is nicer than stealin'."

"It be, just," answered Tag, earnestly, and then they were silent again. It would have been a curious sight for any one passing to have seen the two miserable-looking, half-starved, less than half-clothed children

they niver giv us so much as we had this mornin' in a whole week. Isn't it prime, Tag?"

John Burton brushed his hand across his eyes; then in a gruffer voice than he had yet spoken in said, "There, that will do; don't talk, but get your dinner."

The dinner consisted of a large bowl of hot soup, with potatoes in it—almost every drop of which was finished by the children; indeed, so much did they like it, that seeing a little still left on the sides of the basin, they began, like two little hungry dogs, to lick it off.

"Stop that, stop that; you must not be rude and ill-mannered, or off you go. I am keeping you here to try and reform



MRS. BURTON'S FIRST SIGHT OF RAG AND TAG.

working away so busily, sorting out the boxes so as to place them according to their sizes, filling the different shelves with them, and doing all as deftly and neatly as though they had been accustomed to it all their lives. The four hours passed wonderfully quickly, and when John Burton came in again, Rag in her eagerness ran to him, and taking hold of his hand, quite pulled him along to see the progress they had made.

"Pretty well, pretty well. I am glad to see you've not been idling; you've earned your dinner—come along."

"More to eat!" and Rag burst into a little merry laugh. "Oh, what 'ud the 'dreadfuls' say;

you, and make you more like respectable children; eat and drink properly. Never do that again."

Rag and Tag colored. "We allus did it with the 'dreadfuls,' but we won't do it here," said Tag.

"No, I expect you won't—at all events not when I'm in the room; now back to your work. Are you tired of it?"

"Not a bit, sir; we want to finish yer job to-night afore we go; don't we, Rag?"

Great tears came into Rag's eyes, and she said nothing.

"Why, little Rag," said John Burton, rather sadly, "are you tired already of being here, and would you prefer going back to your old life?"

"No I wouldn't; no I wouldn't. I prefers the box life; it wor 'cos' Tag said all that about goin' away to-night as made me cry. I'd like to stay with you allus, allus, an' 'ave some shoes on—good 'uns, not gimcracks; that's what I should like; it's werry cold for feets this weather, werry cold; ain't it, Tag?"

"Werry," said Tag, shaking his head gravely; "but this floor is nothin' so cold as the 'dreadfuls' floor; an' I'd like to stay an' work for you too, please, sir, if you'd 'ave us."

"Well, children, I must think of it. I don't know what I could do with you at nights. I——"

"There's the barril, sir," interrupted Rag, eagerly. "Tag an' I ud' manage in that."

The warehouseman smiled. "Well, well, I'll see. To your work now."

Tag and Rag had now made up their minds that nothing could be happier than to work hard in the warm box room, with plenty to eat and drink, and be always together. So on they sped at their new employment like two little steam-engines; and when John Burton returned, just as the large clock outside was striking five, he was really pleased.

"I am very fairly pleased with you, Tag and Rag, very fairly. You may follow me now to your tea."

On entering the room where they had been before, Rag's curiosity was aroused, and after she had possessed herself of the large bowl of hot tea and thick piece of bread and butter given to her by the warehouseman, she asked, pointing to the empty places,

"Please, sir, are there any more lill' boys an' gels like Tag an' me here?"

"Some little boys and girls there are here, but none like you and Tag."

The children's great eyes so clearly asked "Why?" that John Burton continued—"They are not like you and your brother, for they are all decently clothed and have good warm shoes and stockings on."

"Then if we stay here"—and Rag clapped her hands, whilst Tag stood on his head at the very idea—"we too shall have decen' clothes, an' shoes an' stockin's. My! we'd not know ourselves—should we, Tag?"

"But, little Rag"—and the warehouseman looked very grave—"I never promised that I would keep you here; in the first place, where would you live?"