

"RED DAVE";

Or, "What wilt Thou have me to do?"

(From the Family Friend.

CHAPTER I.

DAVIE.

"If you cannot cross the ocean,
And the heathen lands explore,
You can find the heathen nearer,
You can help them at your door;
If you cannot speak like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus—
You can say He died for all."

The prison gates swung slowly back, and the constable who held the keys lifted up his lantern for a moment amid the fog.

"Thick, ain't it, little chap?" said he, as a child stepped forth from the gaol; "which way are you going—into the town?"

"No, sir," was the answer, half-frightened, half defiant, as Davie shrank back from the portly officer.

"You won't make much of the country roads in this here mist my lad; you'll get dropping into some ditch, as sure as my name's John Gregson. Haven't you got nobody a-waiting for you outside? That's a pity! well, get back into Mereham, but take my advice and keep clear of the Jarvis lot, or you'll be lodging here again," and then the bull's-eye disappeared, the door was double-locked, and Dave found himself alone, outside the gates, in the midst of a dense December fog.

Very cold and hungry was little Dave, for his breakfast had been a spare one, and the rags he was wearing again after three weeks' prison uniform, were no protection against the damp, chilly mist; but it was almost a relief to him that the day of his release was not bright and fine. He slunk along close to the high, dark wall, feeling that the fog seemed somehow to agree with his own condition—which was truly about as miserable a one as a boy could know.

Three weeks ago, "Red Dave" (as they called him) was selling matches, sweeping crossings, holding horses, and fetching beer for the shoeblacks and stall-keepers in Mereham Market and High street; now the prison scissors have cropped the red tangled curls, and Dave feels that his shaven head must betray to all that he is a "gaol-bird" let loose—something worse than the street-boy who slept in arches and barrows, and even in unused sewer-pipes! He understood, as he crept along, that the fog was deeper than ever now—deeper even than on that night so long ago, when they carried him, a little frightened child, from his work-house crib, to "kiss mother good-bye."

He was not a prison-boy then; he had not stood in the dock, nor slept in the cell!

How could he now return to town? All the people in the market knew he had been taken up. The shoeblacks in the High

Street had seen him marched along, the policeman's hand above his elbow.

And Jarvis—Jarvis was free! As Dave remembered him, he burst out in the darkness into oaths and curses; all the wild passion of his nature vented itself in the dreadful words he had heard from the lips of drunkards and profane men in the prison.

"If I had him here in the fog, by this wall, I'd kill him; whenever I get a chance, I'll kill him."

The strong brown fists were mercilessly clenched, the blue eyes flashed like a furious beast's; Jarvis, with his greater strength of six more years of Arab life, must have suffered sorely had he crossed the boy's path then.

It was only an everyday story,

likewise the fascinating picture on the first page of the paper he was carrying. How Jarvis must have prospered since the day when he, too, ran bare-footed in the market, helping the farm-men to unload in the chill of the early morning, for the sake of a copper or a bunch of raw turnips!

Very condescending was Ben Jarvis that night; he read Dave portions of the histories of celebrated robbers and highwaymen and showed the excited child all the fascinating pictures that illustrated their wealth and daring but omitted to show the end of their career, which was ruin and disgrace, and the death of a criminal.

A second invitation found Dave quite ready for the novel at-

full in view, his angry face flushed and bleeding, his ragged sleeves turned up.

The constable bade him "be off out of this," and kept him in memory for any future occasion, as a patron of that "gaff," which was well known as a resort of young pick-pockets and burglars.

Jarvis continued to patronize Dave, who became exceedingly proud of the notice of such a young "swell."

One day Jarvis called for him in the market, saying that a great crowd was collecting in the High Street to see some of the Royal Family pass by. Dave had very exalted notions of the Royal Family, and with a vision of crowns and sceptres before his mind, he only waited to don an old pair of hobnailed boots in honor of such grandeur, and rushed out to join the throng.

The High Street was crowded; people pushed and jostled one another, and Dave found he could scarcely see anything at all, for the people's heads towered far above him. Impatiently he turned and twisted about to get a good place ere the carriages approached, till the surrounding spectators bade him angrily be still, and he turned to Jarvis with the exclamation, "Tain't no good staying here! I mean to climb a lamp-post."

Just then a gentleman seized hold of his arm, shaking him indignantly.

"Where is my purse, you young thief? Stop him! Stop thief!"

For Dave, frightened and bewildered, made a movement to escape.

A dozen hands caught hold of him at once, and a woman's voice shrieked out, "Police! Police!" In another instant a member of the police force had Dave down on the pavement turning out his solitary pocket. Within they found a rotten apple, a dirty string, and—a leather purse!

"I didn't take it—I didn't, sir," protested Dave; but the gentleman said sternly, "It is useless for you to tell falsehoods now; the purse was found upon you;" then, as he opened it, he discovered that it was empty.

"Search him again, policeman," said he; "my money is gone; there were four sovereigns and some shillings."

The policeman shook out his jacket again.

"I know the boy," he said; "he belongs to a bad lot—he is in with young Jarvis, who gives us the slip like an eel. This chap must have collared the money, and passed it on to one of his pals."

"I saw him shifting and wheedling about, a-slipping from side to side just now," said the shrill female voice that had called for a constable. "He tried to make off just as the gentleman missed his purse," said another.

"I hain't done nothing," said



"HALLOO, YOUNGSTER! LOST YOUR WAY, EH!"

though a tragedy to "Red Dave."

One evening, when Dave sat supperless in the market, within the warmth of a hot potato stall, Jarvis came sauntering in, and offered to treat him to the play. Now little Dave had never seen a play, and felt too cold and hungry to care to turn out in the street, so as Jarvis jingled the change in his pocket, the boy said eagerly he'd rather have "one of them there 'taters'."

Jarvis treated him to a couple on the spot, ordering the man to "pepper 'em well," and then sat down beside Dave, whilst the supper was hastily devoured. All the time he was eating, Dave noticed with wonder and respect his companion's brilliant scarf-pin and spotted tie, and shining boots;

tractions of the "penny gaff"; there Jarvis mixed with a number of boys about fifteen and sixteen, who were indulging freely in beer. They offered some to Dave, but he had tasted it before, and it had made his head so bad that the very sight of it seemed to bring back the sick pain again, and he would not touch it. The lights and the singing seemed, however, half to intoxicate him; he began to roar out the choruses so loudly that the crowd turned to "chaff" him, and when Jarvis launched into a fight with another lad, Dave distributed blows on his behalf right and left. There was a call for order from the stage, and a policeman appeared on the scene. Jarvis and his foe became invisible, but Dave stood