

"I never insult my poor friends with a display of magnificence."

Then giving his arm to Rose, he carefully threaded his way through the moving crowds of the vast metropolis, until they reached a narrow alley running back from the broad thoroughfare of Oxford street. Enclosed on either side with high dingy-looking houses, the rays of the broad sun scarcely found their way into the depths of the gloomy close alley, which seemed to rest in deep shadow, as if anxious to conceal the misery congregated in these abodes of filth and wretchedness.

"What a dark, frightful place," said Rosamond, clinging to her protector. "How different from the gay, open squares, we have just left."

"Aye, as different as the fortunes of the possessors. Night and day are not more opposite than the abodes of wealth and poverty. Yet do these noisome dens contain many a noble and faithful heart, sore wounded by the world, yet daring to be poor, and submitting with heroic resignation to the bitter lot assigned to them by the Divine Ruler."

As he ceased speaking, he entered an open door, and ascending several flights of decayed and rickety steps, gently rapped at another door, and was requested in a female voice to walk in.

The cousins entered a wide and desolate apartment, feebly lighted by two or three broken panes of glass, all that remained unstopped of two casements of the usual dimensions, and these in admitting the light, gave free passage to the rain and wind whenever they chose to blow and beat in through the open space. An old worm-eaten table occupied the centre of the dusty floor, at which a woman of thirty years of age, or thereabouts, was seated, plying her needle with a precision that looked like mechanism. She had been pretty at an earlier period of life, but her high brow was furrowed with care, and sallow with confinement and disease. A young girl was lying upon an old mat at her feet, asleep, and a little girl of five years of age was winding thread diligently upon a piece of paste-board; a boy of nine years of age was kneeling beside the window for the benefit of the light, arranging quills from a pile upon the floor, and tying them into bundles. Two beds occupied the far corners of the room; both were upon the floor, and were merely straw mattresses, with a blanket very old and worn, thrown over them. On one of these beds a man was sleeping, but from his swollen features and perpetual tossings, and the crimson glow that burnt upon his cheek, he appeared the victim of fever, while his thin hands and haggard features, told a tale of woe and starvation.

The woman rose from the bench upon which she was seated, and dusting it with the work she held in her hand, begged the lady to sit down. Rose said that she preferred standing, and Arthur asked if the shirts he had sent to her the preceding week were made.

"Yes, Sir, they are ready for you," returned she, and lifting the lid of an old trunk, she produced two linen shirts very neatly folded, and placed them on the table.

"My little Ned would have run up with them this evening, but the poor fellow slipped last night upon the stones and sprained his ankle, and Annie was too young to trust in the street; but if your honor will just have patience, I will carry them up myself after dark."

"I will spare you the trouble, Mrs. Carey, and take them myself," said Arthur, putting them into the pocket of his overcoat as he spoke. "How is the baby?"

"He is better, thank you kindly, Sir, and I am glad of it, as his cries would sorely have annoyed the poor sick creature yonder."

"Who is this person?" said Arthur, approaching the bed, and looking earnestly upon the sleeper; "is he relation or friend?"

"He is a stranger to me," returned the woman. "I do not know him even by name. Three nights ago, I found him lying upon the door step in a weak and feeble condition. He asked me, for God's sake, to give him something to eat, as he had just returned from America after an absence of many years, and had been shipwrecked and lost all his money. At first, I doubted his tale, but there was something so piteous in his accents, and so truthful in his manner, that poor as I am, I could not refuse to shelter him. Thanks to your honor's goodness, I had been able to earn bread for my little family, and how could I prove my gratitude to one who had helped me, I thought, in a better manner, than by helping one worse off than myself? I bade him come up stairs with me, but he was so ill and weak that I had to lead him up the stairs like a child. I gave him some bread and a cup of tea, and he has lain there ever since. He was very bad last night; but the fever took a favorable turn, and he has been sleeping for the last hour."

"He is still very ill," said Arthur, laying his hand upon the sick man's pulse. "Medical aid will be necessary. I will send my young friend Ritson to look at him, as I return; in the meanwhile, Mrs. Carey, do not let him, want for any comfort that money can procure," and he put three sovereigns into her hand. "This will purchase necessaries, and pay you for the trouble of nursing him, until I see you again."