

## RAG AND TAG.

BY MRS. EDMUND WHITTAKER,

*(Author of "Hilda and Hildebrand," "The Return from India," "Little Nellie," &c.)*

## CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"I shall soon have another little sum to put in the bank, I see, and what is better, plenty to help these poor little orphans with. What a grand thing it is being teetotalers! Well, after all, it's only giving back to God what He has blessed us with," said honest John, as he took a sovereign from the gold and silver and returned the bag to its hiding-place.

"Good-bye, wife—I'll be back soon," and seizing his hat John was hurrying off, when Mrs. Burton stopped him.

"Not so fast, John dear—what art thou thinking of? Out into the cold air on a night like this, in your slippers only, and no great-coat! John, John, are you in your senses?" So saying, with a kindly smile and loving hands the good wife brought him his boots, helped him on with his coat, then with the aid of a footstool on which she stood, to bring her nearer to the height of her great, tall husband, half throttled him with a huge red comforter, which she twisted round his throat; then pushing him to the door desired him to be very quick home again. "This house is a palace when you are in it, John, but a dreary little place when you're out—so don't be too long."

"Trust me for that, my wife;" and through the doorway which she held open he quickly passed.

"Stay, John, stay!" she cried. "A couple of pair of good, coarse, strong blankets would be a good thing. I should not like quite," she said hesitatingly, "to give them those others—at all events not yet awhile." John nodded and strode away.

After she had closed the door, the kind good woman went and looked for some time at the two sleeping children; then turning hastily away, with the tears standing in her kind, motherly eyes, she looked long and lovingly at three little pictures on the wall—two dark-haired girls and a sturdy boy; then kneeling down, asked for a blessing on the little ones sent to them that day, and for guidance from above to bring them up aright. When she rose from her knees, Tag was sitting on the rug staring with all his large eyes, first at her, and then round the room.

"Where is the 'kind 'un,' has he gone an' left us here?"

"Who, my child?" she asked tenderly.

"Him as is kind to us. The 'kind 'un' we calls him."

"He will be back soon, don't be afraid; it won't be long before you see him again."

"Who was you a-speakin' to an' askin' so hard of? I was afeard

you were a-beggin' of one of the 'dreadfuls' who had com'd for us."

"No, dear, there are no 'dreadfuls' here, except me, and the pussy over there; and we are not 'dreadfuls,' are we?"

"Oh no, mam; but"—after a moment's pause—"please who wos you a-talkin' to?"

"To your Father in heaven, Tag," she replied gravely.

"To—my father—in heaven?" repeated Tag, very slowly. "To my father—in—heaven?" and he looked at Mrs. Burton wonderingly, and shook his head.

"Don't you know that God is your father, my poor boy? Where have you lived all your life?"

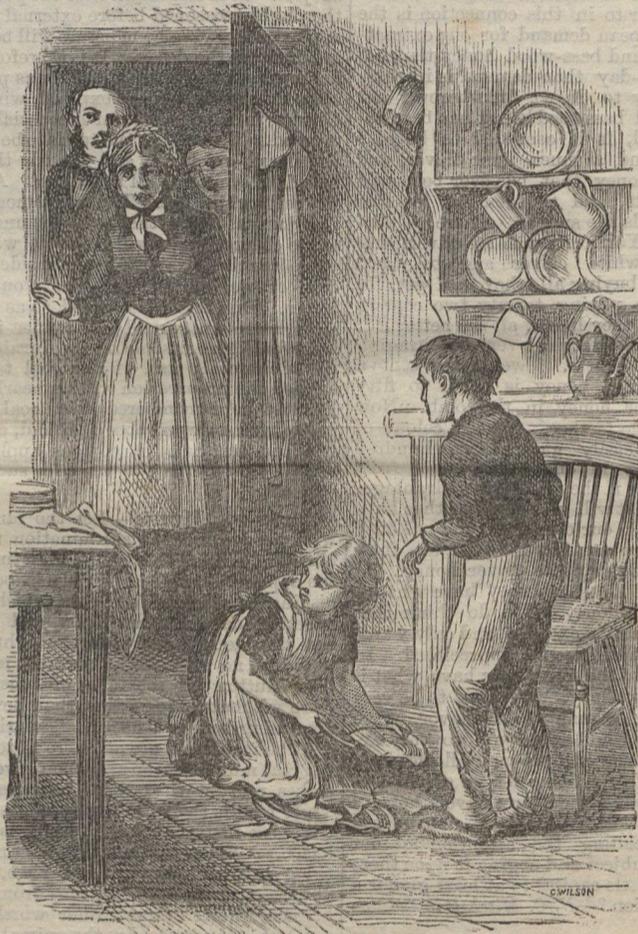
"Mother did use sometimes to talk of God in heaven, who'd take care o' Rag and me if we was good; but that was long, long

lavender in which they lay, drew out, one by one, clothes sufficient for little Rag; then turning back to the chest, took out some more little bundles, and selecting from each, soon had such a suit for Tag as he, poor child, had never possessed before.

It was an effort indeed to poor Mrs. Burton, for they were the clothes of the children she had so dearly loved, and whose likenesses were on the walls downstairs; and none but One ever knew what it cost her to make up her mind to bring out these treasures of the past, for the poor little waifs and strays now under her roof.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

For some time John Burton



THE BROKEN PLATE.

ago, an' I'd a'most forgotten; and we've been so bad He'll have forgotten us. But, please, mam, I'm too sleepy to talk. I am glad it ain't the 'dreadfuls' com'd for her and me"—and with a deep sigh of relief Tag lay down again and was soon as fast asleep as before. Seeing this, Mrs. Burton left the room, and went upstairs into a little room with a sloping roof. For fully five minutes she stood in front of a large chest; then slowly opening it, sat on a chair, as though what she wished to do was almost too great an effort for her. Presently rousing herself, she bent down and took out hurriedly several parcels; selecting one, she carefully unfastened the fine white handkerchief wrapped around it, and from amongst the dried bunches of

kept a very strict watch over the children; without their knowing it, he always had his eye upon them. After their early training and bringing up, he felt and knew it was impossible in a day, a week, or even months, to eradicate all the evil they had been taught, and taught to think so lightly of. Rag he left under his wife's care—and very useful and hardy she was; but Tag he kept beside him in the large warehouse, and taught him how to do up parcels neatly and quickly, and to stow them neatly away until wanted, also to go messages for him from one room to the other, help in loading and unloading the drays, &c. Tag enjoyed his new life very much—more than Rag did hers. At first the novelty of everything, the nice clothes, the cleanliness,

good food, and comfortable house over her head, made her feel very happy, and quite aware of her good fortune in getting into such quarters; but after a time the sameness of her life wearied her. Mrs. Burton not being strong seldom went out, and when she did, as a rule she locked the door on the child and left her alone in the house. In the evening John Burton was too tired to do more than sometimes read to the children, ask them questions, or in some quiet way endeavor to amuse them. At one time he tried to teach them to read, and Mrs. Burton bought two copy-books and pens, and did all she could to help them to write; but neither of them being very good scholars and their pupils not very apt, this soon fell through; instead the large family Bible was brought out, and the half-hour before the children's bed-time was spent in John and his wife reading by turns straight through the Gospel of St. Luke, and now and then singing hymns; the hymns were what the children most enjoyed. Four weeks had passed away, and a great change had been made in that time in Rag and Tag's appearance. Their cheeks had filled out, the bruises had almost entirely disappeared from their poor little bodies; and with their hair tidy, and clean, and their warm, comfortable clothing, you would with difficulty have recognized them for our little Rag and Tag of the cellar. Every Sunday the children had seen John and his wife appear in their best clothes and go off to church; they had heard the lock turn in the door, seen from the window John put the key in his pocket, watched them with longing eyes turn out of the little court into the street, and then sat down at the table before the comfortable fire to look at the large book of pictures, which Mr. and Mrs. Burton only allowed them to see on this day. It was Kitto's Pictorial Bible—and Rag and Tag are not the first children who have spent several happy hours on Sundays in looking over the interesting pictures therein.

I think myself it was a mistake of good John and his wife, not letting the children go with them to church; but they were people who had their own ideas on particular subjects, and held very strongly to them. They both thought Rag and Tag would take far more interest and pleasure in going to the House of God if it was promised that after a certain time they should go, when they had proved and trusted them, and had seen what manner of children they were growing. Not only did they think that by this promise they were encouraging Rag and Tag to become better children, but, if the truth must be told, Mrs. Burton hoped that time would, as it passed on, put some of their naughty tricks out