

have returned, he might even have got up to let her pass; he could not say instinct, would prompt him so far; but now the drowsy stupor of death seemed to be fast stealing over him. But not yet, little Tim; not yet, your time is not come, you have still a bright life and sunshine before you, if you did but comprehend it. The area door just below where he sat and half slept, was opened suddenly, angry voices fell on his ear, then a moment later a woman swept fiercely up the steps, dashed back the gate on the top, and then ran madly away down the street.

It roused Tim. He rubbed his eyes, and gazed after the retreating figure in a misty sort of way; he had recognised her, the woman who ran, to be the one who had been so kind to him in the morning. Trouble had come to her, he had no doubt whatever of the fact, and she had shown him such kindness as he had never known before. His wits had been keenly alive in the morning, and he had noted the longing looks of the woman at the smoking coffee; aye, even at the very moment when Jinks had been giving the cup into his (Tim's) hand. He, unlike many more favoured ones of earth, had taken the gift therefore at its true cost; and now, full of numbness as he was, he arose and tottered away in the direction the woman had taken. On, on, a weary way he went; away from the warmth of the more sheltered streets, on to the damp and mist of the river-side. Whether he indeed saw the woman going on before, or whether it was only *God* who led him in the right way, he never knew, still he gathered life and warmth as he went on, and by-and-by, as I have said, he stood upon the banks of the river. There were but few people there, and only one solitary policeman was in sight, yet Tim's eye took in her he sought, took her in plainly enough as she wandered aimlessly up and down by the water's edge. The numbness seemed to creep over him again as he stood; he did not go and speak to her, but merely crouched where he was, by a lamp-post out of the policeman's sight, and then he died and once more forgot everything.

The people had all gone away, save the policeman and one friend, and both together they paced backwards and forwards quite at ease; for they had not seen Tim, and the woman they had some little time before watched so carefully, was now gone away with the rest. Then, the policeman being cold, and seeing no need of such over strictness to his duty, turned aside at the suggestion of his friend, just to get a glass at the latter's house, and "a sniff of the fire too," as he himself said, gazing around upon the deserted scene of his watch—and so he went away. A minute later, and a piercing shriek rent the air. The woman, whom we will call for the time being, one utterly bereft of common-sense, had been only in hiding; and although for an hour past she had been meditating this act of self-destruction, still now, when the chill of the fearful water had touched her, she had as it were all unconsciously cried out for aid. It had been somewhat like the chill of death to her, the death she had sought; but we who know how weak human nature is, know of a surety that it is life, sweet life, we crave at the very last, no matter how desponding we have been before. Tim started up. Once more death was warded off him, once more the blood coursed weakly in his veins, once more he rubbed his poor, dim eyes with his half-frozen fingers; and then, as he discerned a black figure struggling in the water, he, without thought of any kind, threw himself in as well. Poor boy! it seemed about the only thing he could do to try and save her, and she had been so kind to him! Both would have gone down of course, but One who gave His life for ours, One who knew, too, that little Tim was, all unknown to himself, treading in His holy footsteps, was near at this Christmas-time to help His poor, helpless children. A barge came heavily up the river, the bargemen saw the two drowning ones, they were in time, and—thank God both were saved!

They brought them back to consciousness, and the poor woman wept her thanks. She was in her right mind now, and she feared death, although but a few brief minutes before she had deemed it about the best thing which could come to her. So the police heard naught of the matter, and when they reached a landing-place they were set ashore, warmed, dried, and fed, and, will you believe it, with just a faint glimmering of hope in both their hearts. They had been delivered from a dreadful fate, and when a danger is well over, although perhaps things are not in the least altered, we all feel the renewal of life, we all feel the more ready to grapple with difficulties, and often I believe, our efforts being more hearty and hopeful, we meet with the success which we

have all our lives been trying to obtain. It was Christmas-time, too, but I doubt if Tim new aught of the true meaning of the blessed season, the woman did, because of the grand houses in which she had worked, and because of the dim teachings of her youthful days. Still Christmas was nothing to her—nothing. The bells broke the early morning stillness, and they sounded merry and blithe; and once or twice the woman laughed softly, as she and Tim crept into doorways and dark corners to elude the police on their way, for hopeful as she was, she dreaded the police, dreaded to be questioned as to being found abroad at that unearthly hour.

At length the cellar was reached wherein the woman's children lay in the utter unconsciousness of slumber. It was a dank, unhealthy place, full of fearful smells, and rarely with light enough for the pursuance of ordinary household work. We will, however, say no more; but ask you instead to listen to the bells and their glad, glad tale—the same which the angels bore to the shepherds of old, on the sweet moonlit plains of Bethlehem. Tim and the woman heard it too, but the music could not in anywise make up for the wretchedness of the place. Hope died out of the latter's heart when she saw all as it was before, so that she sank upon the floor and shed bitter tears, almost wishing that she had been let die, and so have done with her misery for ever. Tim heard her sobs, but the bit of candle which the woman had lighted upon their going in was fast dying out, so that he could not see her face plainly; he, however, remembered the coffee; and creeping up to her side, put his poor, dirty hand in hers, in real love, pity, and sympathy. Then, from the utter fullness of her heart she told her tale, how that a brooch had been lost in the grand house, and she accused of the theft, there having been no one but she and the owner of the trinket, who had entered the room at all. She had got away, and escaped prison only by bursting from the woman who held her, till the police should come. "Not that I care for prison," she wailed forth. "I have kept them," and she pointed towards her sleeping children, "because I couldn't bear being parted from them I've worked and slaved, bringing home a good part of my own food for them, for a woman's money ain't much to keep four mouths going, and rent besides. Now they'll have to go to the work, and I as well, unless—" and her voice grew hollow and hard, "I'm a bit more lucky than I was last night."

Tim did not answer. Was he asleep, poor boy? Likely enough! By-and-by he roused himself wearily, and asked (for sleep was again coming to his poor, tired body), "What wor the thing like, missis? W'r it goolly and shmy like?"

"Yes, but that makes no odds, as I can see," and the woman seemed half angry, by her way of speaking, to think that he should have asked so silly a question.

"No, no, 'cause it don't," and yet the boy mused and mused, till sick and utterly worn out he slept, deeply, heavily, there on the damp floor as he was.

The sun, the Christmas sun, shone brightly in through the windows of a house in Eaton-square. The family had wished each other a merry Christmas all the way round, forgetful, utterly forgetful, I fear, of their poorer brethren hard by. If we have naught to give (and surely, surely when so much has been given, we can scarce one of us be so poor as that), we can at least bestow a prayer, a loving thought, upon this day of days. But in this household it was not wilful forgetfulness, it was but the forgetfulness of those who, having never known poverty, give not so much as one thought upon the matter. A servant entered the room, and the master of the house glanced inquiringly round.

"Please, sir, there's a boy at the door who says as he knows somethink of Missis's brooch, and he won't go, he says, till he's seen her."

A tall lady with a haughty bearing, the one who had passed Tim in the doorway the day before, rose from the table to leave the room. "Bring him into the hall, James," was all she said, and then stately as a judge, which she was soon to be, she swept on to where the boy was already waiting.

"Please ma'am, be you she as has lost summat goolly?" asked poor, trembling Tim, as he shivered up to the lady, all in a fright at her very grandeur.

"Yes—and I think I am to understand that you know something about it?"

"Yes, ma'am." He paused, and seemed as though intently examining her countenance, then once more he continued, "Yes, you be the one as I see'd go out o' this very door as I was a-settin' on the step to rest yesterday, and I see'd a summat goolly ashinin' in the ragged bits o' your shawl, and