

culating crowd, chiefly consisting of women and children, though there were a few men, wearing the dress of fishermen.

In their midst stood a boy, the object of these vituperations.

It was a French seaport—a quaint, old world place. The houses, though so ancient, looked solid, and likely enough to stand as many more centuries as they had already stood, defying wind and weather.

The narrow streets, opening on the quay, were close and full of smells, more unsavoury even than bad fish. But the air was clear and fresh, and the sun shone brilliantly in a sky of the deepest blue. It was getting fast into the west just now, and quite a flood of golden light was poured over the tranquil sea which lay all around. It glorified the rugged cliffs, and the old wooden houses with the nets stretched over their fronts to dry.

The angry little crowd was a picture in its way—the women with their white caps and gay striped skirts, and the red and blue head gear and jerseys of the men and boys.

But the western light, tranquil as it was, failed to tranquilise the faces so full of contempt and anger, exorable as a French crowd never fails to be.

"Poor Sophie! That she should have nourished such a thing!"

"Eh! well for her that she is gone. It would have surely killed her else to see this day the baby she reared!"

"And to call him Dieudonné!"

"Thou hast no right to dress as a boy. Wear a girl's dress, rather!"

And the girl who spoke flung a little ragged shawl up on the shoulders of the victim.

"Ah, Fichu!" laughed an old woman, and "Fichu" was bandied about jeeringly from mouth to mouth.

I may here explain, for the benefit of any not aware of the fact, that *fichu* signifies both a "tippet," or small shawl, and "pitiful" or "mean."

Then with a sudden movement the group, by a common impulse, turned into their various homes and slammed to the doors, leaving the object of their scorn alone, and miserable enough certainly, though their taunts had failed to bring forth a tear, or to move a muscle of his small thin face.

He wore a ragged blouse, faded and discoloured, but clean; his wooden shoes were very old, he had no head covering, and his black hair was cut so close that what was left stood up like bristles in a very poor brush, or like stubble in a cornfield after harvest. His dark eyes had a look in them like saying, "Please don't be hard upon me!" and his mouth was very grave. So grave that it surely never whistled, and seldom smiled.

Small cause it ever had for smiling, and as for whistling, "My Lodging is on the Cold Ground," or "Hard Times," would have come most naturally to his lips. As for "Home, Sweet Home," never having known the place, he would not be likely to be tuneful in that direction.

He had been found, a small infant, one wet morning, after a stormy night, rolled away in a big, broken basket, at the foot of the great wooden cross on the quay. And since then the quay had been his world. He had just lived from hand to hand, from house to house. A bit here, a sup there, a kind word from one, a blow or a shove from another. Fair fortune or foul, good temper or bad, he was used to a share of it all. He took it all, too, as he did the sunshine and the rains—warmed himself in the one, shrank away from the other.

Sophie was the name of the woman who had found him. Her husband was a fisherman. She had been praying for his safety through that stormy night, and as

the dawn rose she had crept out half in fear, half hope. Then a glad sight met her eyes, her husband's boat safely coming in. As she uttered a thanksgiving a child's cry fell on her ears, and there at her foot lay the old basket with the infant.

She had babies of her own; she was poor enough, but she kept the little waif, and in memory of that morning's gratitude she called him "Dieudonné" (God-send).

Where he came from they only surmised. A vessel had sailed from the port the evening before, and there had been such a baby on board.

Sophie did her duty by her little foundling while she lived, but she died in less than two years of a fever, as did her two children. Her husband went away in a sailing-vessel which was lost, and the poor boy became common property. They all did their best for him, and he fared as the rest did, not badly, but roughly, through his childish days.

Then he passed out of the women's hands, and among the men he would soon have been first favourite. A handy, willing lad, and one, moreover, who had no mother to make a moan over him. There were plenty ready to take him, but, alas! there was an obstacle unforeseen, undreamt of, but insurmountable—the boy was *afraid of the sea!*

This in a community of seafaring folk, where the only capital was sailing craft, the riches fishing-nets, where the very girls and women could handle an oar or a tiller with the best, at a pinch.

Afraid of the sea! Public indignation ran almost as high when the object of it was no longer visible.

"Ah, bah!" said one man; "this is what comes of fostering the offspring of one knows not whom. Better have let him perish and done with it!"

"Ah! But no, my friend!" cried a woman, "do not say one word against that dear angel Sophie, who is dead and gone."

"He's afraid of being drowned, I suppose," put in another.

"Oh, he will never be drowned, no fear! a coward like him is more likely to be hanged!"

"Not that either, surely!" put in a girl who had been as loud as the rest in her scorn. "He is not bad, you know, in heart; he stood up for the cripple Johannot when big Paul would have beat him."

"And he saved my white rabbit from the fierce-hunting dog," said a younger child. "You shall not have him hanged, poor Dondon!"

So they kept it up, railing and excusing alternately. But, on the whole, it seemed to be the opinion that a lad who was afraid of the sea was to be utterly sent to Coventry, awaiting some much more terrible and inevitable doom.

Meanwhile the sun had set, and twilight was rapidly fading. The stars gave so little light that it was almost dark on the quay and around the harbour.

Out beyond, the sea rose and fell gently in phosphorescent wavelets, with a soft, measured cadence. To the accustomed eyes of the little lad there seemed no need of light to find what he sought. To him it was no hardship to remain out of doors all night at this season of the year. Many a time he had slept under a heap of sail cloths, or in the shadow of a boat, and never missed his pillow.

That was not troubling him now; he had never moved while all the abuse was going on, but so soon as the doors were shut, as it seemed, against him for ever, he slowly made his way out of the neighbourhood of the houses to where the cliff rose up, white and gleaming and towered far above all.

Here and there were nooks and fissures where the stone had crumbled away. Every one of these were well