

LADDIE.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

"He've been doing well in London?"

"Well, my Laddie's a gentleman! He's a regular doctor, and keeps a carriage, and has a big house and servants. Mr. Mason, our parish doctor, says as he's one of the first doctors in London, and that I may well be proud of him. Bless me! how pleased the boy will be to see his old mother! Maybe I shall see him walking in the streets, but if I don't I'll find his house and creep in at the back door so as he shan't see me, and tell the gal to say to the doctor (doctor indeed! my Laddie!) as some one wants to see him very particular. And then—" The old woman broke down here half-sobbing, half-laughing, with an anticipation too tenderly, ecstatically sweet for words. "My dear," she said, as she wiped her brimming eyes, "I've thought of it and dreamt of it so long, and to think as I should have lived to see it!"

The expectations of her travelling companion were far less bright, though she had youth to paint the future with bright hopes, and only nineteen winters to throw into the picture, dark shadows of foreboding. She had been well-brought up and gone into comfortable service, and her life had run on in a quiet, happy course, till she met with Harry Joyce.

"Folks says all manner of ill about him," said the girl's trembling voice, "but he were always good to me. I didn't know much about him except as he liked me and I liked him dearly, for he come from London at fair time and he stopped about the place doing odd jobs, and he come after me constant. My m'istress were sore set against him, but I were pretty near mad about him, so we was married without letting my folks at home know nought about it. Oh yes! we was married all right. I've got my lines as I could show you as there wasn't no mistake about it; and it were all happy enough for a bit, and he got took on as ostler at the George; and there wasn't a steadier, better behaved young feller in the place. But, oh dear! it didn't last long. He came in one day and I said as how he'd lost his place and was going right off to London to get work there. I didn't say never a word, but I got up and begun to put our bits of things together; and then he says as he'd best go first and find a place for me, and I must go home to my mother. I thought it would have broke my heart, I did, to part with him; but he stuck to it and I went home. Our village is nigh upon eight mile from Merrifield, and I'd never heard a word from mother since I wrote to tell them I was wed. When I got home that day I almost thought as they'd have shut the door on me. A story had got about as I wasn't married at all, and had brought shame and trouble on my folks, and my coming home like that made people talk all the more, though I showed them my lines and told my story truthful. Well, mother took me in, and I hid there till my baby was born, and she and father was good to me, I'll not say as they wasn't; but they were always uneasy and suspicious-like about Harry, and I got sick of folks looking and whispering, as if I ought to be ashamed when I had nought to be ashamed of. And I wrote to Harry more

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than once to say as I'd rather come to him if he'd a hole to put me in; and he always wrote to bid me bide a bit longer, till baby come; and then I just wrote and said I must come anyhow, and so set off. But, oh! I feel skeered to think of London, and Harry maybe not glad to see me.

It was dark by this time, and the women peering out could often only see the reflections of their own faces in the windows or ghostly puffs of smoke flitting past. Now and then little points of light in the darkness told of homes where there were warm hearths and bright lights, and once, up above, a star showed, looking kindly and home like to the old woman. "Every bit as if it were that very same star as comes out over the elm-tree by the pond, but that ain't likely all this way off."

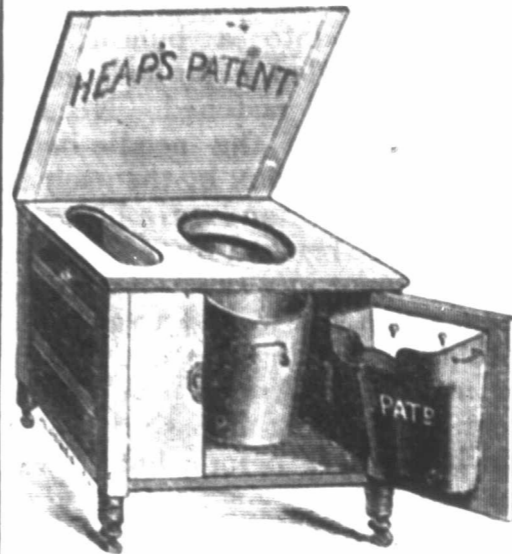
But soon the clouds covered the friendly star, and a fine rain fell, splashing the windows with tiny drops, and making the sights outside blurred and hazy. And then the scattered lights drew closer together, and the houses formed into rows, and gas lamps marked out perspective lines; and then there were houses bordering the line on either side instead of banks and hedges, and then the train stopped and a damp and steaming ticket-collector opened the door, letting in a puff of fog, and demanding the tickets, and was irritated to a great pitch of exasperation by the fumbling and slowness of the two women, who had put their tickets away in some place of extra safety and forgotten where that place was. And then in another minute the train was in Paddington; gas, and hurry, and noise, porters, cabs, and shrieking engines—a nightmare, indeed, to the dazzled country eyes and the deafened country ears.

(To be continued).

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I remain, faithfully,
THOMAS HEYS,
Analytical Chemist and Professor of Chemistry,
Toronto School of Medicine.

116 King St. West, Toronto, Nov. 30, 1895.

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