

hand. But fast and faster came down the blows upon poor little Rag's shoulders, until, in spite of her declaration a short time before that she was "gettin' quite 'customed to it," the poor little half-starved, hardly-clad, scarce ten-years-old child fainted away.

"You've killed her! you've killed her—my little Rag, my darlin'," exclaimed Tag, as he rushed to her side, and raising her gently, leant her head against his shoulder. "Hands off!" he said fiercely—almost as fiercely as the men could have said it themselves—when they drew near to look at the child. "You've killed her, an' I'll set the perleece on yer, if yer kills me for it, I will."

"Look here, Tag," interrupted the "dreadfulest." "One word more, and I'll give you such a punishment as you've never felt afore. She's not killed; she's only fainting, and will come to directly. Give her this," and he put the bottle containing the gin into Tag's hand. The only thanks he got from the boy was the bottle thrown to the other side of the cellar and smashed to pieces.

"You do deserve it, you do, you ungrateful young varmint," cried the enraged man; and raising his hand, Tag would have received a blow which would have quickly laid him beside Rag, had not his companion caught hold of his up-lifted arm, and after whispering a few words in his ear, they both left the cellar.

"Rag, Rag, lill' darlin'; look at me; look at yer own Tag. They've gone away, an' we'll go too. We'll go away as soon as iver you can walk. Try and stir, Rag."

"I'm stirrin' all right, Tag. I'm only a little dazed like. I wor dead for a bit, worn't I? That wor a hard blow of the 'dreadfulest'—the hardest he iver guv. It made me cold instead of warm. He niver hitted so hard afore."

"An' he'll niver hit so hard again!" burst out Tag. "We'll be off, Rag, an' this werry minit too, or they'll be back."

"You've got the big shillin' safe?" whispered Rag, faintly; "though I nearly spilte all. But I couldn't abear to see the blows on yer arms an' legs. Tag, oh, how—how we hates them!" she added vehemently.

"Wait till I'm a man, Rag!" and Tag clenched his little fist; "see if I don't pay 'em out; if they put me in prison for it, I'll pay 'em out!"

"But 'appen they'll die afore then," sighed Rag, wearily.

"I wish as they was dead now—dead this werry minit, an' could niver hurt us any more. But wishin' is no use," and Tag rose up. "Let's be off at once afore they comes back; we've nothin' to take with us, 'ceptin' the half-crown. We shall walk werry light, that's a comfort. Come on, Rag, quick; don't stay a-fussin' there."

"One minit, Tag, one minit. Jist strike a match for once more afore we goes. I do want my lill' l'elfent. I've kept 'im an' kept 'im ever so long—ever since I can 'member; an' I shouldn't like 'im to be put on the board, an' mebbe Carrots get 'im for nothin';" and from underneath the little heap of straw in the corner which formed her resting-place at night, Rag pulled out a little broken wooden elephant. White, and pretty, and solid-looking it had once been, but now he was a wreck of his former self—blackened with much handling, tears, and kisses; two legs gone, one tusk and only half a proboscis left. It was only the eye of love that could have beheld any beauty in him; but to poor little tattered, half-starved Rag it was her real dearly-loved "lill' l'elfent"—her only treasure, and often when the poor little aching limbs, after one of the "dreadfulest's" strappings, had kept her awake half the night, her only comfort.

"You can't carry 'im in yer hand, Rag; he'll fall out when yer gets right down cold; an' what'll ye do if yer loses 'im? See here, take this," and Tag's quick eyes spied out in a corner of the sack a large red handkerchief. "It's not much as they ever guv us, so lay hold on it quick, tie up l'elfent in it, an' throw it over yer 'ead—'twill be cold enough when we're out; an' see here," going to a heap of ragged clothes in the corner, "I'll take this." The "this" was an old corduroy jacket, far too large for him; but it covered him well, which was what he needed. "If only I could find somethin' for yer soldgers, Rag, we'd do. Strike another match, quick," and he turned the heap over impatiently.

"That's my sort!" eagerly exclaimed Rag, as she pulled out a small red plaid shawl, and wrapped it round her. "This'll look ever so fine, an' it's ever so comfor'ble. Let's go now, afore they can come an' ketch us," and away the poor little things went out into the dimly-

lighted street, away for ever from the rude shelter which for long had been their only home—away into the large world of London, of which they formed such a tiny part, and yet in the sorrow and misery, pain and trouble of which they, although barely ten and eleven years old, had borne such a large part. Kept by these two men after the death of their parents, if at first from any feeling of humanity, yet afterwards merely for their own advantage and gain; ill-clad, ill-treated, ill-fed, scarcely ever allowed to stir from their dismal cellars, except to be taken into the more frequented streets to beg or steal; uncared for, uncaring—each day coming in contact with those as ignorant as themselves—vice of all sorts growing up unreproved and unchecked around them; their only aim and object to sell what they could, take what they could, and make all the money they could for the two hard bad men calling themselves their masters—what wonder if the poor children thought nothing of lying, stealing, cheating, or what means they took to secure for themselves food sufficient to keep them alive, or clothes to cover them.

"Where are you goin,' Tag?" asked the little girl, as he hurried her along up one street and down another, but always farther and farther from the one they had left.

"I dunno exac'ly, but anywhere as long as we gets away from there, I'm so afeard of their finding us and gettin' us back; let's go on an' on, an' to-morrer we'll find somethin' to do. Would you like to look at some o' the large gran' shops?—we are gettin' close to them."

You may imagine Rag's answer. For half an hour the cellar, the board, "lill' l'elfent," even the "dreadful ones," were forgotten, in their joy and delight as they gazed in at the windows of the beautifully lighted shops, and saw all the lovely things displayed for sale.

They were now in front of a large jeweller's and amongst the precious stones and ornaments exposed to view none so attracted Rag as a beautiful necklace composed of large stars of diamonds which, lying in its soft velvet case, flashed and sparkled as the precious stones gave out their brilliant colors in the bright gaslight; to Rag's wondering and delighted eyes they seemed to quiver and quaver and run over with beauty.

"Oh, the lovelies!" she exclaimed; "if only I could have one, wouldn't I wear it around my neck, an' warm my fingers on it when they're cold, an' shake it afore my eyes to see the pretty lights. What are they, Tag; an' what are they made of?"

"Stars," answered Tag; "that's what they are."

Rag raised her eyes to the spangled heavens above and gazed earnestly for a moment.

"Stars!" she repeated wonderingly. "Howsumever did they get 'em down?"

But the jeweller's men coming out to put up the shutters put an end to further enquiries, and Rag and Tag moved on.

"S'pose we find somethin' to sit on," suggested Rag. "I'se sure lill' l'elfent is tired an' hungry."

Accordingly, on a doorstep close at hand the two seated themselves, and after finishing a good part of the plum-pudding and bread they had so carefully put away in the afternoon, they fell asleep. Curious dreams they had that night—now they were running away as fast as they could from the "dreadful ones;" now they were selling their goods; now Rag was hunting for oranges, and now Tag was hunting for her. Soundly, soundly, in spite of the cold, they were sleeping, each curled up side by side on the wide step. Presently Rag found herself far away from the oranges and going in search of the little sick girl, when suddenly the beautiful diamond star came dancing before her eyes so brightly, so vividly, so dazzlingly, that it quite pained her, and with an exclamation she awoke—to find a policeman holding a lantern close to her face and shaking her arm.

"Move on, my children,"—and he said it not unkindly; "you ought to be home; where is your home? If I find you here again, I shall have to take you up."

"Up?—up where?" asked Rag.

"Well, down if you like, into prison."

"Oh, but we're agoin' 'ome—indeed we are," interrupted Tag quickly; "we were only restin' a little, for we wor tired; we'll not stay 'ere another minit; come on, Rag," and away they went.

(To be Continued.)

—"They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."
—The Wonders of Prayer.