



THE TOY DID NOT SELL FOR MUCH AT THE PAWN-SHOP.

NELLY'S DARK DAYS

By the Author of "Lost in London."

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A DOLL.

As the night drew on, and the time at which he was accustomed to seek the excitement of the spirit-vaults or beer-shops, a sore conflict began with Rodney's soul. With the darkness came a cold, thick fog from the river, which penetrated into the ill-built houses, and wrapped freezingly about their poorly clad inmates. What few pence he had saved from the scanty wages of the previous week, he had spent earlier in the day in buying a little food for Nelly, and some medicine to lull his wife's racking cough. There was no light in his house, and the fire was sparingly fed with tiny lumps of coal or cinder, which gave little warmth, and no brightness to his hearth. The sick woman had stayed in bed all day, and had only strength enough to speak to him from time to time; while Nelly, who was also suffering from cold, and hunger but half-satisfied, grew dull as the darkness deepened, and rocked her doll silently to and fro, as she sat on the floor in front of the fire, where the gleams of red light from the embers fell upon her. Not far away was the brilliant ginpallace, where the light fell in rainbow colours on the glittering prisms of the gas pendants, to which his dim and drunken eyes were so often lifted in stupid admiration.

A chilly depression hung about Rodney, which by-and-by gave place to an intense, unutterable craving for the excitement of drink, which fastened upon him, and which he felt no power to shake off. As the dreary minutes dragged by, he pictured to himself the warmth and comfort that were within a stone's-throw of him. But there was no money now in his pocket, and nothing that was worth pawning in the house. He almost repented of having spent the poor sum that had been his in food and medicine—for Nelly was still hungry, and her mother's cough had not ceased. That cough irritated him almost to frenzy; and he felt that he should die, perish that night, of cold and misery if he could not buy one dram to warm and comfort him.

He peered anxiously around, in the gloom, upon

the few beggarly possessions remaining to him, and groaned aloud as he confessed to himself that they were worthless. His wandering glance fell upon Nelly, curled up sleepily on the hearth, with her doll lying on her arm. That looked gay and attractive in the red light, its blue dress and scarlet sash showing up brightly against Nelly's dingy rags. Rodney's conscience smote him for a moment as he thought that the toy, fresh and unsoiled still, might fetch enough, if sold, to satisfy his more immediate craving this evening, but the idea once in his mind, he could not banish it. To-morrow he would work, and earn money enough to buy Nelly another quite as good as this one. If he had not spent his money for her and her mother, he would not now be driven to taking her plaything from her; and it was only a toy—nothing necessary to her—as it was necessary to get warmth, and what was more to him than food. She would not be any colder or hungrier without her doll; and she would not mind it much, as it was for him. He did not mean to take it from her against her will; but she would give it up, he knew. Leaning forward, he laid his shaking hand upon her cheek.

"Nelly," he said, in his kindest tones; "Nelly, you've got a pretty plaything there."

"Oh, yes!" she answered, opening her eyes wide, and hugging the doll closer to her. "but it isn't a plaything, father. It's a lady that has come to live with me."

"A lady, is it?" said Rodney, laughing; "why, it's a queer place for a lady to live in. Would you mind lending her to me for a little while, Nelly?"

"What for?" asked Nelly, her eyes growing large with terror, and her hands fastening more closely around her treasure.

"No harm," he answered softly, "no harm at all, my little woman. I only want to show it to a friend of mine that's got a little girl like you that's fond of dolls. I'll bring it back very soon, all right."

"Oh, I cannot let her go!" cried Nelly, bursting into tears, and creeping away from him towards the bed where her mother lay.

"John," murmured the mother, in feeble and tremulous tones, "let the child keep her doll. It's the only comfort she's got."

Rodney sat still for another half-hour, the numbness and depression gaining upon him every minute. Nelly had sought refuge by her mother's side, and the dreary room was awfully silent. At last he could endure it no longer; and, with a hard resolution in his heart, he stirred the fire till a flickering light played about the bare walls, and then he strode across to the bedside.

"Look here, Nelly," he said, in a harsh voice, "I promised that friend of mine to show his little girl your doll; so you'd better give it up quietly, or I must take it off you. What are you afraid of? I'm not going to do you any harm, but have the doll I must. I'll bring it back again with me, if you'll only lend it me without any more words."

"Nelly," said the mother, tenderly, "you must let him take it, my darling."

Nelly sat up in bed, rocking herself to and fro in a passion of grief and dread. Yet her father had promised to bring it back, and she had still some childish faith in him. The doll lay upon the ragged pillow, but she could not muster courage enough to give it herself into her father's hands, and, with a bitter sob, she pushed it towards her mother. "You give it him," she said.

For a minute or two Rodney's wife looked up steadily into his face for some sign of relenting; but, though his eyes fell and his head sank, he still held out his hand for the toy, which she gave to him, murmuring: "God have mercy upon you."

For a second Rodney stood irresolute, but the flickering flame died out, and darkness hid him from his wife and Nelly. Without speaking again he groped his way to the door, and passed out into the street.

It proved a very paltry, insufficient satisfaction after all. The toy, handsome as it seemed to him, did not sell for as much as he expected at the pawnshop, where they refused altogether to take

it in pledge. He could only drink enough to stupefy him for a little while, but not sufficient to give him the savage courage to go back and meet Nelly without her doll. What he had taken only served to quicken the stings of his conscience, which made it a difficult thing to return home at all. The night was even keener than the last when Nelly watched for him at the door of the ginpallace, yet he dare not go back till she was fast asleep, and in the morning he could readily pacify her by promising to buy another doll. He hung about the entrances of the spirit-vaults with a listless hope that some liberal comrade might offer him a glass, and as long as there was any chance of it he loitered in the streets. But they were closed at last, the brilliant lights extinguished, and the shutters put up, and Rodney was forced to return home tenfold more miserable than when he left it.

His hope that Nelly would be asleep was ill-founded. He could not see her, but the instant his foot struck against the door-sill he heard her eager voice calling to him to bring the doll back to her. His own voice, when he answered her, was broken by a whimper and a sob, which he could not control.

"Father could not bring it home," he answered "My friend's little girl wouldn't part with it to-night; but it will come home to-morrow, Nelly."

"Oh! I know it never will," wailed the child. "I shall never see my lady any more—never any more! They have stolen her off me, and I shall never, never have her again!"

He could hear her sobbing far into the night; and after she had cried herself to sleep, her breath came in long and troubled sighs. He cursed himself bitterly, vowing a hundred times that Nelly should have a doll again to-morrow. But when the day came, the daily temptation came with it; and though he found work, and borrowed a shilling from a fellow workman, the money went where his money had gone for many a past month and year.

For some days his child was dull and quiet—bearing malice, Rodney called it, when she gave no response to his fits of fondness. But neither she nor his wife spoke to him of the lost plaything, and before long it had passed away altogether from his weakened memory.

(To be continued.)

HOW SHALL I KNOW THAT I AM SAVED?

BY DR. A. T. PIERSON.

ONE afternoon some years since, a little girl, then only about eight years old, came into my study during the hours habitually given to conversation with those who were seeking salvation. To my question she frankly replied she came to talk with me about herself. I said to her:

"Anna, are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know yourself to be a child of God?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, how do you know it?"

"Why, sir, because God says so."

"Where does he say so?"

"He says," she confidently replied, "in that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

"But," I rejoined, "that does not say anything about your being a child of God. How, then, do you know that you are?"

"I know it because I know that I have come to him, and he says he will not cast out those who come."

"Then," said I, "you know you are his because you know what you have done, and you know and believe what God has said?"

"Yes, sir; that is it."

And I said within myself, what disciple of three-score years can give any better reason for his faith than this simple little child, who knows her saved state because she rests on God's word?

So deeply did this interview impress me that in the pulpit, the prayer meeting, and the enquiry-room I have frequently made use of this incident. It has been so helpful to others in awakening and strengthening faith in God's word of testimony that I was led to write a little tract or leaflet about it.