



CHAPTER III.

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

Gillian, meanwhile, had completed her work, and followed her husband's example of going out to find a patron for it, with less success than he had met.

None of the tradesmen to whom she offered the little packet of cards, painted with pretty, feeble designs, wanted them, or had need of any service she was fitted to perform. She was only one of many hundreds of women, gently born and nurtured, who were tramping the streets of London that day on similar errands, trying to turn to some profit the conventional accomplishments which is part of what is termed their education.

Of all sad spectacles in the world, the penniless lady is the most hopeless. One meets her on every hand, bravely and silently fighting her hopeless battle, content if she can secure wages a bricklayer would scorn. And every day her numbers increase.

A neighbour as poor as herself, a little seamstress who worked sixteen hours a day for five farthings an hour in the garret overhead, had taken charge of Dora for her during her absence. She had nothing but thanks to give her for her services, nor

would the brave little woman have accepted any recompense more solid.

Only those who have lived among the poor can know what they are to each other, how by continual little shiftings of their common burden they make it endurable to their bruised and heavy shoulders.

Gillian sat with her child in her lap beside the window in the fading light of the chill spring evening. There was a threat of rain in the low-lying clouds and in the moist, dark air. At no time in the year is Peter-street a particularly pleasant neighbourhood, but it knows its dreariest period in the dreary evenings which precede the coming of summer, at least to the minds of such of its inhabitants as have any memory or imagination of the brooding peace of the lands beyond the city.

The cracked and dirty pavements, the roadway littered with vegetable offal, the sordid houses, from whose windows dangle wretched scraps of household linen, the heavy air, gritty with dust or foul with the mists of the neighbouring river and the fumes of the forest of chimneys, all weigh upon the spirit with a leaden gloom. Swarms of children, ragged, dirty and unkempt, fill the streets with tumult in a haggard semblance of play. Rusty cats and dilapidated poultry swear and spit

and cluck and scratch about the kennels.

She fell into a dreamy reverie, from which she was awakened by the striking of a clock on the floor below.

"Nine!" she counted. "It is time he was here. Surely, oh, surely he will not disappoint me to-day, when he knows how much depends on it."

The child stirred in her lap with a feverish wail, and she raised it to her breast and rocked it there, singing to quiet it.

"If we could only get away from London," she thought, "away from the people who take Philip from his work and his home! Oh, darling, hush! You must be patient, dear. Papa will come directly, and bring the medicine to make my darling well again, and perhaps the money to take us into the country, all among the grass and flowers and the fresh air."

She ran on, as mothers will, talking to the child, as if her words were as comprehensible to its little intelligence as the happy tone in which she forced herself to speak them.

"That's all we want, isn't it, to make us well and strong again? Hush, what's that?"

She paused in her talk to the child with a sudden catch of the breath.

"Philip? Yes, thank God!"