

CHAPTER I

OF DAVE AND DOLLY WARDLE AND THEIR UNCLE MOSES, WHO HAD BEEN A PRIZEFIGHTER, AND THEIR AUNT M'RIAR, WHO KEPT AN EYE ON THEM. OF DAVE'S SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC, AND OF ANOTHER PUBLIC THAT NEARLY MADE UNCLE MO BANKRUPT. OF HIS PAST BATTLES, NOTABLY ONE WITH A SWEEP. OF MRS. PRICHARD AND MRS. BURR, WHO LIVED UPSTAIRS. OF A BAD ACCIDENT THAT BEFELL DAVE, AND OF SIMEON STYLITES. HOW UNCLE MO STRAPPED UP DAVE'S HEAD WITH DIACHYUM BOUGHT BY A VERY BAD BOY, MICHAEL RAGSTROAR, THE LIKE OF WHOM YOU NEVER! OF THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON, AND DAVE'S CAT

IN the last house down the Court, the one that was so handy to the dustbin, lived a very small boy and a still smaller sister. There were other members of the household—to wit, their Uncle Moses and their Aunt M'riar, who were not husband and wife, but respectively brother and sister of Dave's father and mother. Uncle Moses' name was Wardle, Aunt M'riar's that of a deceased or vanished husband. But Sapps Court was never prepared to say offhand what this name was, and "Aunt M'riar" was universal. So indeed was "Uncle Mo"; but, as No. 7 had been spoken of as "Wardle's" since his brother took the lower half of the house for himself and his first wife, with whom he had lived there fifteen years, the name Wardle had come to be the name of the house. This brother had been some ten years younger than Moses, and had had apparently more than his fair share of the family weddings; as "old Mo," if he ever was married, had kept the lady secret; from his brother's family certainly, and presumably from the rest of the world.

Our little boy was the sort of boy you were sorry was ever going to be eleven, because at five years and ten months he was that square and compact, that chunky and yet that tender, that no right-minded person could desire him to be changed to an impudent young scaramouch like young Michael Ragstroar four doors higher up, who was eleven and a regular handful.

His name was Dave Wardle, after his father; and his sister's Dorothea, after her mother. Both names appeared on a tomb-