

Family Department.

BE CARETH.

What can it mean? Is it aught to Him
That the nights are long and the days are dim?
Can He be touched by the griefs I bear,
Which sadden the heart and whiten the hair?
About His throne are eternal calms,
And strong, glad music of happy psalms,
And bliss unruffled by any strife;
How can He care for my little life?

And yet I want Him to care for me,
While I live in this world where the sorrows be,
When the lights die down in the path I take,
When strength is feeble and friends forsake,
When love and music that once did bless
Have left me to silence and loneliness,
And my life-song changes to sobbing prayers,
Then my spirit cries out for a God who cares.

When shadows hang over the whole day long,
And my spirit is bowed with shame and wrong
When I am not good, and the deeper shade
Of conscious sin in my heart is made,
And the busy world has too much to do
To stay in its course to help me through;
And I long for a Saviour—can it be
That the God of the universe cares for me?

O wonderful story of deathless love.
Each child is dear to that heart above;
He fights for me when I cannot fight;
He comforts me in the gloom of night;
He lifts the burden, for He is strong;
He stills the sigh and awakes the song;
The sorrow that bowed me down He bears,
And loves and pardons because He cares.

Let all who are sad take heart again;
We are not alone in our hours of pain;
Our Father stoops from His throne above
To soothe and quiet us with His love.
He leaves us not when the strife is high;
And we have safety, for He is nigh;
Can it be trouble which He doth share?
O rest in peace, for the Lord will care.

—Christian Union.

THE LORD'S PURSEBEARERS.

CHAPTER II.

A DARK DEN.

It was a chilly and dark morning, late in November; not so early in the day but that the sun might be shining with wintry brightness on country lanes and fields, where brown and amber leaves still hung upon the beech-trees and oaks, though all the other trees were bare. But in London the only sign of the sun was the yellowish light through the fog, which filled every street and alley of its vast labyrinth. From one side of the street you could not see the opposite houses, and only by close observation could you distinguish the objects placed in the shop windows, where the gas was kept alight all the day long. The narrow streets of the East End, where there are few lamps, and still fewer shop windows, where even darker than the great thoroughfares; especially the streets filled with lodging-houses, those crowded and comfortless dens, which are the only homes of thousands upon thousands of the London poor.

'It's a bad day for us,' said an old man who had been crouching over the fire in one of the lowest of the low lodging-houses, 'but needs must, Tatters.'

'I s'pose so,' she answered gruffly.

She was a pale, thin woman under forty years of age, sitting on the floor by the chimney, jamb, and smoking a small black pipe. Both

he and the woman were miserable objects, and had the air of being the victims of an irresistible fate. He stretched out his long lean hands shiveringly over the low fire before he spoke again in a little higher key.

'Joan,' he called, 'we must hook it.'

The dim room was full of wretched women and children sitting idly on benches or squatting on the dirty floor. They had slept all night with their clothes on in the crowded bed-rooms overhead, and there had been no chance of washing themselves. The faces that had been grimy last night were still more grimy this morning; and the children, who were crawling about the floor, grew every moment more hopelessly dirty. There was a good deal of mournful whining and moaning to be heard as an undertone to the men's oaths and the women's quarrelling. But not a sound of play or laughter had mingled with the other noises.

'Joan!' called the old man again.

'I'm comin,' grandfather,' was the answer.

A young girl who was nursing a crying baby in one of the darkest corners put it down gently, and came forward into the dim light of the fire. A tall overgrown girl of twelve or thirteen years of age, neither she nor her grandfather knew exactly, in a tattered frock far too short for her, displaying two spindled-shanked legs barely covered with worn-out stockings, and boots which were made to stick to the feet by an ingenious lacing of string. There was a promise of beauty about her which caught Tatters' eye as she came into the light.

'Joan'll be worth a mint o' money by and by,' she said.

'How fur to-day, grandfather?' asked Joan cheerfully.

'Right across,' he answered, pointing westward; 'there's no chance here, but it mayn't be as bad out yonder. You be a good girl, Joan, and never hearken to what Tatters says; you come of a good stock my lass. Come on, Tatters, we'll see if the sun doesn't shine brighter on rich folks than on poor beggars like us.'

'I'll not stir a step without a baby,' answered the woman; 'what's the good o' goin' a-beggin' without a baby? 'Why aren't you earnin' a honest living?' they say, 'a strong, hearty woman like you; and that great girl, why don't you put her into a place?' But a baby makes up the family complete, and draws the money out o' their pocket better than anything. A pretty day we'd make of it; you and Joan may go tramp alone if we canna' hire a baby.'

'Grandfather,' said Joan eagerly, 'I jest called in as I came by, and Mrs. Moss says as little Lucky nor Fidge aren't hired out yet.'

'Little Lucky' repeated the old man; 'why! Joan, there's sixpence an hour to start with, before we make a penny for ourselves. Babies cost such a deal, if they're worth anything; and little Lucky and Fidge cost more than the others.'

'I'll not stir out o' this without little Lucky or Fidge,' said Tatters doggedly. 'I'm not goin' to stand bein' jawed by rich folks. Sech a day as it is, too! If you'll do it handsome, Isaac, and get us up in good style, and let me have little Lucky, I'm willin' to go. But I'll not scrawl along the streets singin' hymns with nobody, only Joan and you.'

'Let's have little Lucky, grandfather,' pleaded Joan, 'and I'll sing my very best; I've learned some pretty new hymns o' purpose and you'll see how ladies'll come to their windows when they hear you and me a-singin' our best. What's sixpence a hour? And Tatters can come back by train, and save near a hour that way, whilst you and me walk. Let's have little Lucky.'

There was an eager tone of entreaty in the girl's voice, but it was some minutes before the old man consented to risk the sum which was necessary as deposit for the baby. When at last he agreed, Tatters rose reluctantly to her

feet, and put her empty pipe into her pocket. There was not a dirtier or more ragged creature in the miserable throng about her; but she trusted in Mrs. Moss to turn her out as a decent though poor woman, brought down to a sad pass by trouble. The old man would need nothing but a threadbare greatcoat, which would cover all his rags, and give to him the necessary air of making the best of every adverse circumstance. All three walked briskly along the narrow pavement, where the greasy mud felt slippery under the feet; Joan walking first with her quick young step, until she paused just before reaching the door of an old-clothes' shop and stood on one side for her grandfather and Tatters to pass her.

'Mrs. Moss mustn't know as I'm goin,' she whispered; 'say I've got a errand to do, and aren't a goin'.' She'll let you have little Lucky cheaper p'r'aps, if I'm not there. She's afeared o' me givin' her somethink to eat.'

The old man nodded, and nudged Tatters to attend to what John said. 'She's a clever one,' he chuckled, as Joan withdrew into the fog, and was almost instantly invisible. The shop they entered was a step or two below the level of the pavement, and so utterly dark on this murky day that they could not venture to advance a step until they had shouted to Mrs. Moss to bring a light. A match was struck in one of the farthest corners, and a woman's swarthy and wrinkled face leaning over it was vividly lit up by its momentary flash. It was a dark face, surrounded by a shock of grizzled hair, with a hard and cruel expression about the sunken eyes, and the hollow cheeks, which were sucked in on each side of the thin lips. She came forward slowly, bringing a small candle in her hand, which she held up to the faces of her customers.

'Old Chip-in-milk and Tatters!' she said in a deep, hoarse voice; 'and what may you be wanting sech a day as this?'

'We're making up a family, Mrs. Moss to go out west,' answered old Isaac in his smoothest tones. 'Tatters here is my poor widowed daughter, and I'm an unfortunate old man past work and afeared of the work house. She wants a baby, you know. Something like those pictures of the Holy Family: an old man for Joseph, and a Mary, and a Child. Only Tatters is a leetle too old, you know. But you're a clever woman, Mrs. Moss, as much too clever as Tatters is too old.'

He said it with a sneer and a laugh, but Tatters' attention was absorbed in a gown which was hanging against the wall, and ticketed for sale; she was feeling the pocket, and looking how much worn it was under the arms. Fortunately for Isaac, she did not hear him.

'I'll do the best I can for her,' said Mrs. Moss, 'and you'd better take little Lucky, Fidge is sech a object; too harrowin' for the West End, if you're going there. He does very well round about here where folks is used to objects, and wants somethink out o' the common. Come and see my little darlin'.'

She led them into a dark and dingy room at the back which was at once her kitchen and her bedroom; and at the head of her bed she opened the narrow door of a little den, which must once have been a pantry, as it was furnished with a small window of perforated zinc. There was no need for Isaac or Tatters to pass over the door-sill; the glimmer of the farthing candle lit up the whole closet.

There was not an article of furniture in it, no more than in a dog-kennel; and the dark walls reeked with damp and dirt. At the farthest end, but that was scarcely out of arm's-reach, there was a heap of filthy rags and straw partly mildewed, and lying on it, in the black gloom of this den, crouched two little children, whose ages it was hardly possible to guess at. One of them lifted up its tiny head at the sight of the light with a look of terror in its dazzled eyes, but the other took no notice of it, and lay still