

ONE OF HIS JEWELS.

BY A. RYCROFT TAYLOR.

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"MOTHER BROWN'S" is a sort of private hotel if you will, where many of the youngsters who scour the streets at noon and night with papers, fuseses and matches, are wont to put up, lacking homes of their own.

A night's lodging can be had for a few coppers, and supper and breakfast at an equally cheap rate. Mother Brown is, as many of her boarders are always ready to admit, "not a bad sort," when payments are regular and money plentiful: when this order of things is reversed, she is apt to be anything but agreeable in her behaviour. Scud, however, is an exception: he is her prime favourite, and does pretty much as he likes. She never turns him out, as she frequently does the others when short of money; but trusts him, knowing he will pay up as soon as he is in funds again. He is the smartest of them all, and has earned his name from the manner in which he flies about the City, darting in and out amongst the vehicles and crowds of people who block the main thoroughfares, making his voice heard everywhere.

He has got a round amongst the warehouses and offices for the evening papers, and delivers them earlier and quicker than any of his competitors. He is about Mattie's age, bright-eyed, with sharp, intelligent features, despising caps and caring little for the state of his garments, which are usually ragged and torn. Somehow he has an influence over the youngsters with whom he comes in contact. At first they objected to Mother Brown making a favourite of him, and resented it; but Scud soon put down popular clamour, and it became apparent to all, that those who wished to gain the good will of "Mother," must be on friendly terms with Scud.

She never refuses a night's shelter to any one Scud brings home, and many a poor little waif, when hard up, has sought him out and through him obtained food and lodgings for the night.

When Scud returns that night, he climbs the rickety stairs with Mother Brown and enters the room, where in a "shake-down" as he appropriately terms the apology for a bed, Mattie and her brother are fast asleep.

"They looks very nice and comfortable, Mother: I means to stick to 'em, I does; so jist see after 'em well, will yer, Mother?" he says, holding the candle over the two little pale faces.

"Wery well, Scud, I'm quite agreeable, I'm sure," says Mother Brown.

Next morning they go downstairs, and find Scud waiting for them. After breakfast of hot coffee and thick bread-and-butter, Scud proposes to take them with him and show them about the city.

"In course ye'll 'ave to do somethink for yer livin'. Has yer any money left?"

Mattie has just sixpence-halfpenny.

"Wery well? yer had better spec in a dozen fuseses, that's tuppence: yer sells 'em three boxes a penny—that's tuppence profit; then when news time comes yer can buy thirteen for fourpence a penny, and yer makes another tuppence: that's the way to make money, and I'll show yer where to stand."

"Are all the boys and girls Mrs. Brown's children?" asks Mattie.

"Niver a one of us. We're none of us nothink to her, but she's all of us mothers in a way yer know, and yer can call her Mother too, if yer like," says Scud, anxious to place her on the best possible footing. He shows them all the ins and outs of the city in the course of the day, and fairly puts them in the way of earning their own living. Mattie is shy at first, but soon gets used to it. Willie is the most trouble to Scud, he is so timid and frightened at the noisy traffic, that it takes all the patience Scud can command to bear with him, and it is only after a deal of trouble he can be got into something like trim. In a few days they get accustomed to the streets and way of selling their matches and papers, and Scud, with some pride finds he can trust them by themselves. Day by day they earn sufficient just to keep them in food and lodgings, and thus the winter wears on, and they continue at Mother Brown's, where Mattie becomes a great favourite, not only with that peculiar lady, but with everyone about her. Her gentle disposition and kindly little ways win over to her the

roughest and most unruly of them, and there is scarcely anything they will not do for her. She helps Mother Brown in the household work, and makes the place look cleaner and more comfortable. She is handy with her needle, and does her best to keep the general wardrobe in a decent state of repair. Willie continues weakly, shy, and timid, and scarcely ever leaves her side. It takes Scud nearly all his time to keep in check the exuberant spirits of the various youngsters, who conceive the idea of making sport out of him, and enjoying themselves at his expense.

CHAPTER III.—(and last).

One evening Mattie and her brother are returning home earlier than usual; a dense fog has set in, spoiling the sale of papers, the streets being dark, and people glad to hurry home as quickly as possible.

They have nearly reached Jacob's Ladder, which by this time has become as familiar to them as the steps of the old wagon, when a lady in a waterproof and veil stops them, and asks if they attend any school.

Mattie says they do not, but would like to do, so the lady offers to take them to one close by, provided for poor boys and girls, and quite free. The lady takes them by the hand, and after walking a short distance and taking many turnings, they reach a low, shabby-looking building, resembling very much an old, disused mill or workshop.

A narrow flight of stairs leads to a somewhat spacious room, where are assembled a goodly number of children of pretty much the same class as Mattie sees in the streets every day. They are singing as they enter, and the lady takes them to a class, and opens her hymn-book and lets Mattie look on. She can only read a very little, so cannot make out very well what it is they sing. Every now and then she catches the words, "I want to be an angel," and soon learns the tune. She thinks she has never heard anything so beautiful before. After they have sung they all kneel down, whilst a gentleman says something which Mattie does not understand at all. Then they begin to work; some do sums, some writing, whilst others do knitting and sewing.

Whilst they are working, the lady, who is called Miss Bird, tells them a story. It is of one called Jesus, who, poor Himself, was very kind to poor little boys and girls; who does not mind them being poor and ragged, but loves them as much as He does the rich and well-dressed; who clothes and feeds them, and watches over them day and night; who, if they are good and do not tell stories, nor steal, will make them shining angels like those they have been singing about.

When the work is over, another gentleman gives out a hymn about "A day's march nearer home," which they sing, and afterwards kneel down again. This gentleman does not say much. He asks God to bless them all, especially little children; to keep them honest and good; to give them food and clothing; to bless their fathers and mothers, and to help those poor little ones who have none; to forgive all their sins, and afterwards take them to Himself for Christ's sake.

Miss Bird writes their names in the class-book, and telling them the school is open on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, hopes they will attend regularly.

It is nearly nine o'clock when they reach home. The noisy group are clamouring for their supper.

"Hallo, Mattie!" cries Scud: "thought yer must 'a' got lost in the fog. Where 'as yer bin to?"

"We've been to school, and oh! they sang so beautiful," says Mattie, taking off her old hat and tippet.

"Singing, 'as yer?—what about?" says Scud.

"Oh! it was so nice—something about angels and nearer home."

"Oh my! what else?" asks a youngster, a twinkle in his eye, as he thinks he sees some fun in prospect.

"Well, such a nice lady told us about Jesus."

"Who's he?" ask several at once.

"I don't know," she said; "he was very good to poor boys and girls, and gave them food and clothes."

"Oh! I know," exclaims a voice.

"What does yer know?" asks Scud.

"Is he a hold chap?" asks the first youngster.

"I don't know," says Mattie.

"In course he is. Didn't he give us a feed at the 'Thatch' and a warm muffler apiece and you girls a tippet, last Christmas? That's him, it is."