

## Choice Literature.

### THE ROSE OF BLACK ROY ALLEY.

#### CHAPTER II.

Nixie's mother was really ill, much worse than Nixie knew. Joe came again next morning, and the women from upstairs and the women from next door, and one or two others, came and talked about her. She did not attempt to rise from the pailasse, and Nixie, understanding little save that somehow Joe had done it, sat in the corner by the wall, and held her mother's hand till some one turned her out, telling her that she was in the way and bidding her not to return for a couple of hours at least.

Moggy made no objection to the child's departure. So Nixie went and wandered aimlessly about the streets. She wandered a good way farther than she had ever done before, down across one of the bridges of the dock and out into the winding riverside streets beyond. She did not know where she was going or why she was going, but she felt restless. Till yesterday she had never heard of England. Now she longed to get there; and to see roses and smell them and take them to mother became an absorbing desire.

Suddenly she found herself out from the narrow, smoke-enrusted street and free of the shadow of the London Dock. She stood in a comparatively open space and directly opposite, divided from her only by a low wall and high iron railing, was an enclosure which could only be a garden. Her mother did not often have moments of expansion such as that of yesterday; but she had told Nixie of gardens that people had in the country with trees in them and flowers and beds and ornamental stones. Here were all those things and overhead the sky quite wide and bright. Nixie could hardly believe her eyes as she held with both hands to the iron railing and gazed before her. She forgot her fatigue, she forgot her sick mother, she forgot everything but her great and marvellous discovery. Grass, flowers, trees, not dead, not for sale, but living, growing in the ground as her mother had told her that they did! She turned her eyes from one to another. She felt bewildered at this extraordinary and unexpected realization of her dream. She did not know till now how little she had in truth believed it all. Then, as she recovered a little, she drew long breath to prove whether the scent would work the wonders her mother had attributed to the scent of roses. No smell reached her but the smell of dusty grass, but she fancied herself the better for it. She was the better for it. Elate and fresh as if she had just risen from a comfortable bed, she began to walk round the outside of the garden. Her mother had told her that in the gardens of England there were vegetables and fruit besides the flowers. And then roses! Since all else was true, why not that? There might be roses in this very garden. To see the child scurrying with bare feet and tattered garments from end to end of that iron-railed wall, few of the passers-by could have suspected what it was she sought so eagerly. At last she cried aloud for joy: "Roses! roses!" More than one turned to look at her, but it was not their business and they passed on; for she had found in a neglected corner out of reach, but still not very far from the railing, a magnificent tall bush. It was as high as a man. It was covered all over with pink flowers and under the leaves she could see, even from where she stood, that there were, as her mother had told her, thorns upon the branches. All was right in every particular. She climbed upon the little wall, and stretched an arm in her excitement through the railings toward it. "Oh, you beautiful! you beautiful!" she exclaimed. "I wish I could take you to my mother."

"What are you doing on the railings? Get along down with you and be off."

Nixie had attracted attention at last from the only person whose business it was, and her delight was for the moment ended in the grasp of a policeman, who lifted her down from the wall and ordered her to look sharp off home. But her pink blossoms were visible above the wall; they comforted and reassured her and she had no wish now to stay any longer here. She wanted to speed home and tell her mother. Here, she felt, was a joy that could be shared, and the darksome alleys of Prussom Island nodded with trees and glowed with flowers for her as she went home.

"Mother! mother!" she cried as she sped at last down their own court and at their own door. "I've seen roses! pinkie all over the tree, and"

She stopped, for here was home, but not her home. The table was gone, the pailasse was gone, her mother was gone, and in their place there was a strange round table and a bedstead, a strange lot of children crawling about the floor, and a strange woman girding herself with pitched cord in preparation for her work at the sacks.

The woman looked up as Nixie paused, speechless, upon the threshold.

"I suppose you're the little girl who used to live here? Your mother ain't here; she's gone!"

"But I left her here this morning."

"Here to-day and gone to-morrow!" The woman was slightly tipsy, or she would have had more compassion on the scared, bewildered countenance Nixie turned toward her. She now found a bit of cord round her hand and, crooning a song, she applied herself to her work. The hard, unmusical sound lived in Nixie's memory for years.

One of the strange children pushed up against Nixie. "Get away," he said; "you don't belong here."

She turned from the doorstep into the court.

"But I left her here this morning," she repeated mechanically. She had nothing else to say. She looked up and down, to right, to left. The court was swimming before her, its ugliness and its noises all confused.

"Why, Nixie, are you fretting for your mother?" That was the first sound she heard distinctly; it came from a friendly neighbor who passed by. "Never you fear, she'll be all right. Joe's taken her to the hospital, and the best thing he could do too, after knocking her about yesterday. He's pledged the things to pay for the expense of the moving; but he'll look after you. You sit and wait a bit."

There was an ash-heap close by, and Nixie sat down obedi-

ently upon it. "When will she come back?" she asked. "There's no knowing. Maybe they won't keep her a great while. You sit and wait for Joe."

All through the heat of that summer day Nixie sat and waited patiently upon the ash-heap. Already the absence of her mother's arm made a difference in the way that she was treated. The boys came and teased, the girls pulled her hair, decaying cabbage leaves were thrust into her face; the children who had come to live in her house stood by the doorstep and reviled her. But she scarcely knew it; her mother's absence had left her too desolate to realize anything but a sort of blackness in the day, which strangely opened sometimes to admit a vision of a tall, pink flowering tree. She shed no tears; she scarcely spoke, except to say quietly, "Let me alone," when her tormentors clustered thickly round her; and as the day wore on they did let her alone, for she gave them so little amusement. The court did not empty with the approach of darkness. On the contrary, it was at night that it was always most full and noisy. The men were set free from their work. Drinking began, swearing became more voluble, blows were not wanting, and the rougher sorts of quarrelling turned the place into a pandemonium. Nixie was worn out with her long day of waiting and fasting. No noise, no grief, could keep her awake at last. Her head began to droop; she sank down lower and lower, till her pretty gold curls touched the dust, and in the midst of the terrible turmoil she slept, for the first time homeless, upon the ash-heap.

It was nearly midnight when she was awakened roughly and suddenly by Joe.

"Here! I forgot all about you. You come along home to my missis; she wants a gal to help look after the brats and you can sleep somewhere along with them."

"Not in your house. I hate you! Where's my mother?"

Startled as she was from sleep, Nixie recognized Joe instantly, and gave him the benefit of an outburst which was quite unlike her ordinary, patient speech.

"Now then, spitfire!" he said, not ill-naturedly. "You'd better bridle your tongue, I warn you, before you come across my missis. Her hand's readier than mine."

"I won't come across her; I won't have anything to do with her, nor with you. Where's my mother?"

"Your mother's in the hospital and very comfortable and sends her love to you."

Nixie looked at him suspiciously, and refused to be comforted.

"I want my mother," she reiterated, turning a white, imploring countenance from one bystander to another.

The court was emptier and darker now; but a little group had collected round, and the woman who had spoken to Nixie early in the day undertook to reason with her.

"Your mother's where she should be, in the London Hospital, and she'll have the best of care and she said you were to go along with Joe till she came back."

"When will she come back?"

"In a fortnight, maybe. You can't stay out all that time without anything to eat."

"I won't go! I hate him. What call had he to knock her down?"

"Ah, well, if you don't do what she tells you, she won't know where to find you when she comes out, and then, maybe, you'll never see her again."

Nixie went; there was nothing else for her to do, and the thought that her mother might not know where to find her was the deciding one.

Through the now dark and desolate streets she followed Joe to a home much like as her own, situated in a distant court. His wife, who was in bed with some of the children round her, greeted him with a volley of abuse for coming home so late, and when she saw Nixie, was ready to turn her straight out of doors again. Joe, however, was the master in his own house.

"The child will stay," he decided, "and she'll look after the brats while you're at your work. Get you now to bed," he added to Nixie, and pointed as he spoke to a heap of flock in the corner of the room, where three children already lay. Nixie did not speak a word; she was reduced to feeling almost grateful as she crept to the place he had assigned.

He vouchsafed no explanation of where she had come from, and in the morning he gave her one piece of advice.

"Just you take my word for it, and don't mention your mother while you're here. Say I found you on a dust-heap, and told you my missis wanted a gal."

Nixie was glad to do as she was told. In this place her life was such as to make the old life with her mother seem in one day a paradise too far removed to have ever been realized. Joe's wife was not more often drunk than Moggy; but there was this great difference, that whenever she was drunk Nixie was beaten. The child, who had scarcely known a blow, would creep to her sleeping-corner at night, stunned and dizzy, and aching from head to foot. Then, instead of the mother by whose side she had been used to lie, her bed-fellows were rude children who kicked and pinched her at their will. To go from them to their mother was to go from bad to worse. The woman had a violent temper, and though Nixie was of real service to her in minding the babies, she seemed to bear a grudge against the child for the mere fact of her existence, and to be well determined to let her feel it. Nixie was no hungrier than she used often to be in her mother's care; but then, when she was hungry, she could be quiet and wait for better times. Now, when she was hungry, she had to drag heavy babies about, and as they were frequently hungry too, the task of amusing them was no trifling one. She felt often so faint and giddy that she could not lift the children from the ground, and then the longing for somewhere to hide from their cries and their mother's blows became such a yearning after her own strong mother's arms as was at times almost unendurable. In all the troubles of life she had up to this time enjoyed the comfort dearer than any other to the weak—a protector. Now she knew what it was to be alone. Her thin cheek grew thinner. The little face lost its confiding gentleness, and began to wear a constant expression of pain. Her mother's name

never passed her lips. She scarcely spoke at all, and so fearful was she of betraying anything in regard to herself that wild horses would not have drawn her to the court where she used to live. If, in perambulating the streets with the children she happened to pass the entrance, she would involuntarily turn her head away. Life was growing so hard that she could scarcely have endured it as she did but for the one sustaining faith that her mother would some day return and look for her in Joe's room. Evening after evening, when Joe came home, her eyes would search his face for news; but he never told her anything, and she never ventured upon a question. She was tempted at times to run away; but the sentence with which the woman in her own court had decided her to accompany Joe, chained her still to her slavery. "If you don't do what your mother tells you, she won't know where to find you when she comes out."

But no life is altogether without joy. Besides the hope of her mother's return, Nixie had one interest still. She did not forget the promise made by her "teacher," as she persisted in calling him and her alleviating joy was to escape from the wretched household of which she formed a part, and to wander expectantly about the streets, where she would most likely, she thought, be sought for. He had told her it would be a long time before he came. She did not, therefore, doubt him in the least because he delayed. She hoped for him and sought for him and firmly believed that he would some day bring her a rose from England. A rose from England meant all that was sweet and graceful and beautiful to her, and was easy to believe in since she had seen the lovely garden. That garden to which she could never go now, for it was too far away, had stirred thoughts in her that she could hardly understand. Her "teacher" had given her one steadfast fact round which the new thoughts clustered. "God makes the roses grow in England." Faintly, doubtfully, the little heart was lifted up, and, as she wandered in the England of squalid streets and filthy smells and hideous sights and horrid sounds, her yearnings were perhaps just as reverent, if not so conscious, as those which, long ago, in another desert, lifted another heart to the faith that some day, instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle-tree. Somehow at this, the most unhappy period of her life, the dream of goodness which makes roses grow gave her the only comfort which she had. She craved to know more about it; she craved for a sight of the man who had been kind to her; and when day followed day and he did not come, she at last inquired of the children round who went to school where it was that the teachers came from. "Up the Commercial Road in trams and 'busses," they told her.

From that time forth she never failed to escape at least once a day from her bondage and the travellers by tram and bus in the Commercial Road often noticed a little ragged figure with eager countenance, who ran alongside and peered into the vehicles when they stopped. If any one inquired what she wanted, the answer was always the same, "I'm looking for a teacher, please."

#### GOD IS MANIFEST.

I own my surprise not only at the fact, but at the manner in which in this day writers, whose name is Legion, unimpeached in character and abounding in talent, not only put away from them, cast into shadow, or into the very gulf of negation itself, the conception of a Deity, an acting and a ruling Deity. Of this belief, which has satisfied the doubts, and wiped away the tears, and found guidance for the footsteps of so many a weary wanderer on earth, which among the best and greatest of our race has been so cherished by those who had it, and so longed and sought for by those who had it not, we might suppose that if at length we had discovered that it was in the light of truth untenable, that the accumulated testimony of man was worthless, and that his wisdom was but folly, yet at least the decencies of mourning would be vouchsafed to this irreparable loss. Instead of this, it is with a joy and exultation that might almost recall the frantic orgies of the Commune, that this, at least at first sight, terrific and overwhelming calamity is accepted and recorded as a gain. One recent, and in many ways respected, writer—a woman long wont to unship creed as sailors discharge excess of cargo in a storm, and passing at length into formal atheism—rejoices to find herself on the open, free and "breezy common of humanity." Another, also a woman, and dealing only with the working and manifestations of God, finds in the theory of a physical evolution as recently developed by Mr. Darwin, and received with extensive favour, both an emancipation from error and a novelty in kind. She rejoices to think that now at last Darwin "shows life as a harmonious whole, and makes the future stride possible by the past advance." Evolution, that is physical evolution, which alone is in view, may be true (like the solar theory), may be delightful and wonderful, in its right place; but are we really to understand that varieties of animals brought about through domestication, the wasting of organs (for instance, the tails of men) by disuse, that natural selection and the survival of the fittest, all in the physical order, exhibit to us the great *arxanum* of creation, the sum and centre of life, so that mind and spirit are dethroned from their old supremacy, are no longer sovereign by right, but may find somewhere by charity a place assigned them, as appendages, perhaps only as excrescences, of the material creation? I contend that evolution in its highest form has not been a thing heretofore unknown to history, to philosophy, or to theology. I contend that it was before the mind of St. Paul when he taught that in the fulness of time God sent forth His Son, and of Eusebius, when he wrote the "Preparation for the Gospel," and of Augustine when he composed the "City of God"; and, beautiful and splendid as are the lessons taught by natural objects, they are, for Christendom, at least, indefinitely beneath the sublime unfolding of the great drama of human action, in which, through long ages, Greece was making ready a language and an intellectual type, and Rome a framework of order and an idea of law, such that in them were to be shaped and fashioned the destinies of a regenerated world. For those who believe that the old foundations are unshaken still, and that