



her hair was long and straight and black, and her cheeks and lips were scarlet. She never allowed her face to be dirty, perhaps because she knew it was pretty and that dirt marred it. Her clothes were always in rags, but the rags were clean.

Poor little Nellie! She was clean and she was pretty, but there, alas! her virtues came to an end. She was a thief, and the man she stole from chiefly was a

benefactor of her father's. It was he who bought the vendor's rags, giving him always a few cents more than they were worth. He was a little man, old and white-haired, with a heart full of pity for every poor unfortunate. He kept a second-hand clothes shop; also he sold little trinkets, such as hair pins, plated brooches and rings, and celluloid bracelets. It was these—the hair pins and the bracelets—that Nellie's soul craved, not for her own adornment but to sell to school children on the streets, and the money she got for them she hid faithfully away in a battered mustard-tin that stood on a corner-shelf in the kitchen. This money she was hoarding for a very felicitous event, for Nellie was going to be married, and as Ted, her young man, at the present period of this history, was stowed comfortably away in some gaol, Nellie had to do the furnishing of the shanty, and she was agreeable.

It was at this interesting period of Nellie's career that she first met Claude, and from the moment Claude saw her and her beauty she was to him the one woman of his heart.

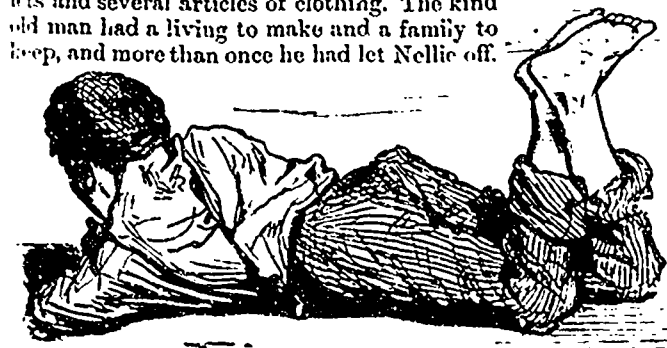
Claude was good. Everything in his life was against him. He was born of drunken parents, Dick's reputation was more than shady, that of his sister was still worse—and certainly the street is not conducive to a good moral training.

But Claude was good, he hadn't one vice, and had but one fault, and that was his temper. It was sudden and blinding as a flash of lightning, but there was never any thunder afterwards. All was over with the flash.

Once a little girl on the street stuck out her tongue at him. He was singing a hymn about the Cross at the time. He stopped, turned around quickly, and without a moment's warning struck the girl a sound blow on her ear. The instant he struck her he was sorry and tried to make friends. He said he was not angry because she stuck out her tongue at him, but because she did it when he was singing about the Cross. Then with all his spare coppers he bought the girl a hood, a warm scarlet one. It was in the winter time. He chose scarlet because of Nellie's cheeks and lips. After that the little girl and Claude were firm friends.

CHAPTER III.

Nellie was at her old tricks again. She couldn't resist a package of hair pins, a pair of red bracelets and several articles of clothing. The kind old man had a living to make and a family to keep, and more than once he had let Nellie off.



Her parents were respectable, he said, and for their sake, as well as her own, he tried to overlook the girl's wrongdoings. But this was the last straw—if she hadn't touched the clothing the old man would have once more washed the matter up. Then other people came to lodge complaints against Nellie. She was arrested and had to appear in court. But the old man was the chief witness in the case.

His voice wavered and trembled, and tears were in his eyes as he spoke against the girl.

It was the first time Claude was ever in a police-court, the place never had any fascination for him as it had for the other boys.

Nellie was quickly disposed of—a three months sentence. Then the girl was led away.

It was that—the three months—that cut like a knife into Claude's heart, it turned his blood to fire, his breath came quickly and his eyes dilated. All the lovely soft shining was lost in a blaze. They were wonderful to look upon, but at that moment they were the eyes of a madman.

His Nellie, his beautiful Nellie, Nellie who brought the Cross so much nearer to him, Nellie



drooping and fading away like some fair blossom in a prison cell; his innocent Nellie! Claude raved. You see he believed in her, believed with all his strength, and heart and soul—for such is love!

Claude did not know that Nellie had a lover other than himself; he never dreamed that Nellie laughed at him, and at his Cross and his odd ways, when in disreputable places with her companions. He never guessed this, and perhaps it was well.

He was still sitting in his seat, and scarcely noticed the people moving and talking around him; until mechanically he raised his eyes, where they rested on the little old man, who, with his white head bowed, was passing out into the street. Then he arose and followed, blinded by his mad passion.

On the roadside was a stone—not such a very large one, but it was an ugly-looking thing, with several sharp juts in it. Claude's hand trembled as he stooped to pick up the stone; but it faltered only for an instant. His aim was sure, and the stone struck the old man on the temple. He was an old man, and the stone was ugly, and the temple is a frail spot. He fell heavily to the ground, and never recovered consciousness. At nightfall he was

dead. Claude was soon surrounded, he didn't protest nor declare his innocence, as others would have done, for his passion had suddenly subsided, but he quietly allowed himself to be handcuffed and taken away.

Remember, it was not Claude in his right senses who killed the man. Our Claude—the Claude of the Cross—would not knowingly hurt the

lowest of God's creatures—not because he knew much about God, but because he had a heart of kindness, and because he was good.

He was sentenced to be hanged. He paled a little when he heard it first, but that was all.

The prison days went by neither slow nor swift, but in vague unreality.

Claude drooped and paled in the close confinement of his prison cell, but the shining had returned to his deep blue eyes. He spoke and looked like one in a dream. The gaoler, who loved him, hoped that he would die before the awful day would dawn, and it seemed for a while that he would—then he rallied, and the day broke.

They were erecting the gallows, and Claude could hear the sounds of the hammering. He dragged himself across to the little window and peered out between the bars. The gaoler tried to draw him back, it was a gruesome sight for anyone.

With his fevered vision he caught just a glimpse of the wooden structure. Then he threw his head back and clasped his hands together. The gaoler stooped over him and heard his whisperings.

"The Cross! The Cross!"

Nellie had been out of gaol for some months, so had found time, with the help of the mustard-tin, to stock her shanty. On the first of October she was to be married; and on the first of October—poor Claude!

The day came around, and after the wedding they had a little celebration—that is to say, Ted got drunk, and Nellie was in the same condition as Ted. Nellie was sitting on a stool, and Ted was lying on the floor with his head in Nellie's lap, and his feet perched upon a chair in front of him. They were both singing—hymns perhaps. People sing hymns when they are drunk, somehow.

Someone pushed open the door, and threw a piece of paper in the girl's lap. She picked it up and looked at it. There was writing on it. She didn't quite understand it at first. After a while it was clear, and then she laughed and held the paper that Ted might read it also.

There were only a few words:

"Good bye, Nellie. I've found the Cross.
CLAUDE."

