

RAG AND TAG.

BY MRS EDMUND WHITTAKER,

(Author of "Hilda and Hildebrand," "The Return from India," "Little Nellie," &c.)

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

"Ah! bless them, that's what I want it to be. The Lord knows that;" and honest John, after warmly wringing his friend's hand, and bidding Rag and Tag "follow close behind him," was soon on his way towards his home.

CHAPTER VI.

The next Thursday a disappointment awaited Rag and Tag. About the time they should have started for Mr. Stubbins' house, the verger himself appeared, to say that owing to his little girl being very poorly that day she was not able to have Rag and Tag at tea; "but," he continued, "knowing how disappointed you would be, little Susan has asked me to take you into some of the nice streets, that you may see how beautiful the shops look, all preparing for Christmas."

This comforted the children very much—indeed it was a greater treat than even the tea would have been. John was busy in the warehouse, but Mrs. Burton gave her free permission, and off they went.

Mr. Stubbins was so kind and amusing, and took them to look at such bright, lovely shops, and gave them such a handsome supply of oranges and cake, that Rag could not believe it was the same tall, grave man in the long black gown who had looked so sternly at her in church.

After a time Mr. Stubbins said he thought they had been out long enough, but that he would, as he was close to his home, "just ask how his little Susie was."

Tag and Rag also felt a curious feeling come over them, as they found themselves once again in the old dreary street where they had passed so many days, and each held Mr. Stubbins' hand tighter than before when they discovered themselves just passing their old cellar. There was the board as usual resting on the pavement, covered with a few odds and ends, and a few, very few, people were haggling over the different things put for sale. At first they dared hardly look, for fear they should see the "dreadfuls;" but Mr. Stubbins, guessing what was passing in their minds, comforted them with the assurance "that the old ones would never appear on this side London again, or the other either, for the matter of that, as the police had carried them off."

So Rag and Tag looked with curiosity at their old haunt, and their old occupation; also to see who was the seller now instead of themselves.

"It was a thin, tattered wretched-looking girl, if possible more thin and squaid than even they them-

selves had been; as they passed by on the opposite side, and the straggling gas-lamps shed a ray of light on her upturned, occupied face, Rag and Tag started, and involuntarily screamed—out "Long Nose!"

Yes, it was poor "Long Nose" they saw, and "Long Nose," though they did not know it, saw them.

On reaching Mr. Stubbins' door, it was opened by a woman who, from the great likeness, Rag and Tag had little difficulty in recognising as his sister. Susan had just fallen asleep, so they did not go in; but before they left, the children, out of the supply their friend had given them, drew two oranges each from their pockets; also a pretty little brightly-papered box which Rag, with the two pennies she had so long re-

ed Bibles promised them by Mr. Hannington.

It was Saturday night, bitterly cold, and Christmas day was on the Saturday following, when Rag and Tag, well muffled up, went out on their way to Mr. Hambledon's night-school. They were allowed to go alone now, John being very much engaged with the Christmas accounts at the warehouse. He, however, generally went about half-past eight to bring them home. As Rag and Tag walked hand-in-hand happily down the street, talking to each other of the happy Christmas they were going to have, of the promised plum-puddings and mince pies which Rag had assisted Mrs. Burton in making—and from the sundry little pieces she had popped into her mouth during their prepara-

the children's discomfort. Pale, drawn, thin, and jaded, and with hollow cough, she looked the shadow of her former self.

"Oh, I'm glad yer've stopped at last," she exclaimed, breathlessly; "I don't like to beg on yer, but if yer've just a penny in yer pocket, give it me. I'm starvin'."

Almost exhausted, she lent against the wall.

The children looked at her white sunken cheeks and colourless lips, and then at one another.

"She is starving, sure enough," whispered Rag to her brother, in a low voice. "It's just the way I've often seen you look when you had nothing to eat for ever so long; and I've felt as she's feeling too, but I haven't a copper about me. What shall we do?"

"And I haven't either," replied Tag. "see, we are close to the school. I'll run on and ask our clergyman if he'll come."

"No, no!" and "Long Nose" roused herself at once, and spoke in the old sharp way. "Whatever you do, don't be setting people arter me. I'm not like you: no' un will take to me as they have to you. I've seen a deal more badderness than you two have, an' I'd rather just go on managin for myself. I've not stol'd for some time, or anythin' of that sort' else you'd not see me like this."

"I have a a'penny!" suddenly screamed out Rag. "I was going to put it in—"

"Don't mind what you wor agoin' to do with it; get me somethin' to eat out of that there baker's shop or I'll die. I'm fair clamme'd this time, I can tell yer."

Rag, who had rushed off to her bidding, came back in a second with a large piece of bread. The baker, who had followed her to the door to watch what she was going to do with it, seeing how matters stood, went back to an inner part of his shop, and soon came out with a brown paper parcel under his apron full of scraps of bread and meat.

"There, poor girl, eat that, and then go home if you have one;" and the floury looking man turned away quickly, as if half-ashamed of what he had done.

"Long Nose" looked after him, but said nothing.

Rag and Tag stood by her in great delight watching the good the bread and meat were doing.

"Long Nose" ate very sparingly, but seemed much revived.

"I'll put this by"—and she returned a piece into the brown paper parcel; "I may want it still more badly to-morrow. I can stan' a good deal, but when one is werry empty, an' hunger gnaws awful hard, like big teeth bitin' inside, it's uncommon bad to bear. You knows a bit about it little 'uns, don't yer?"

"We did, but not now," answered Rag, gravely; and I wish you didn't either, poor 'Long Nose.'"



RAG AND TAG VISIT THEIR OLD HOME.

tained, and with another penny of her own added to it, had bought that evening for the "lill sick gel."

The gift was graciously accepted by the somewhat stern looking lady, and Mr. Stubbins, finding it was growing late, hastened back with his little companions to their home.

It was a great delight to good John and his wife to witness the daily improvement in the children. Tag was getting quite useful in the warehouse, and Rag was a daughter to Mrs. Burton, so gentle and willing, so cleanly, quick and bright, that that good woman felt indeed the Lord was rewarding them for what they had undertaken for Him.

Every evening was spent at the night-school, and Rag and Tag were doing all they could to improve, and to gain the much covet-

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