

quick now, tell me, and tell the truth."

"We wor doin' nothin' to the barrel, please sir;" and Rag made a sort of funny jerk, which she meant for a polite curtesy.

"It wor the barril as did somethin' to us, sir;" and Tag smiled brightly, for he was sharp and quick enough to see at once the man was good-natured.

"Why, what did it do to you, you young scapegrace?"

"It sarved for our lodgin' last night, sir, an' we'd a' been off this mornin' afore you com'd an' found us, only lill' Rag'ere slept so sound like, I didn't like to wake her."

"Humph," said the man, turning the barrel round a little—"just what I thought; one of my best barrels, too; nice for the next sugar! Tell me, my lad, why did you come here instead of going home?"

"We ain't got no 'ome anywheres."

"No father or mother?"

"No, sir."

"Don't you remember ever having any?"

"Yes—long, long ago."

"Where are they, then?"

"They're both on 'em dead. Father killed 'isself with drinkin' gin, an' mother died of her needle an' thread, an' nothin' to eat."

"Then why aren't you dead, too?"

"'Cos nothin' will kill us," said Rag, gravely. "We've been betted an' betted—look at my soldgers now—an' starved an' starved, an' all sorts o' thin's; but we allus lived through it all. I wor kilt last night for a bit after my soldgers had got it werry bad; but I com'd alive agin, an' I'm all right now, an' we're a-goin' to make our livin', Tag and I."

"Was this done to her should-ers last night?" asked the man, looking at Tag, as he drew the old red shawl on one side; they were swollen and striped black and blue.

Tag nodded.

An expression of pain passed over the man's face as he asked—"Was that why you ran away?"

Tag nodded again.

"Speak up, my boy, don't nod; you could speak well enough just now."

"It's them soldgers as does for me," answered Tag, passionately. "I see'd your face when you saw 'em, an' I can't abear to look on 'em 'ither. I promised mother to take care o' lill' Rag, but I couldn't keep

that off her;" and the poor, ragged, dirty boy leant against the wall and cried bitterly.

"He niver does like that in ginral," said Rag in surprise. "All the time I've know'd him I never see'd 'im like this afore; an' they've bet 'im and bet 'im, but he niver guv in like that—it's all along o' sleepin' in the barril; it wor so comfor'ble like, and p'raps 'e's thinkin' we shan't get it to-night. Don't 'e mind, Tag, dear, don't 'e mind; my soldgers are ever so well now, an' it's time for us to go and 'arn somethin'."

"You want to earn something, do you? But stealing and begging isn't proper earning. Ah, you need not look red, my girl. I heard what you were saying to him a little time ago, and I heard what he said."

Rag looked inclined to run away, but the man laid his hand on hers and the other on Tag, and said, "Come with me a moment."

"Oh! oh!" and Rag almost screamed in her alarm. "Yer not for givin' us back to 'the dreadfuls.' Oh, don't 'e guv us back; we'll do anythin' you like—run messages, tidy up, clean winders, anythin' you tell us, we'll do; only don't guv us back—they'd kill me for ever this time, an' I'd niver come 'live no more; an' Tag he'd get dead too, and—"

"He'll not guv us back, Rag, no fear—I knows 'im; but we must get forrard now," and Tag tried to get away.

"You think you know me, my boy; but you don't if you imagine I'm going to let you off in this way."

Tag now began to look almost as much alarmed as Rag. "Let us go, sir, let us go, do now; we only want to live respect'ble an' try an' make our livin'."

"Is that really true, my boy? I mean is that really what you wish—to try and be respectable, and make a living for your sister and yourself?"

"Tis indeed, sir, reely, reely true—only we don't quite know how to begin." And Tag looked into the eyes of the man, who was evidently taking an interest in him.

"Well, now, supposing I take you two to-day into the warehouse and give you something to do, will you do it?"

"Try us, sir, only try us!" exclaimed both the children at once.

"Yes, I'll try you; but mind, disappoint me and off you go."

"What are we to do, please, sir?" asked Rag.

"First of all get clean, and then I will tell you. Wash your hands and faces at this pump, and dry them with this," throwing them a large piece of sacking, "and then come to me—I shall be in that little inner room."

Very soon the children appeared, their faces and hands certainly the better for their acquaintance with the pump; but two more wretched, pitiful-looking little objects the man thought he had never seen.

"Now then, boy, what's your name?"

"Tag, sir."

"Well, Tag, look here—this is your work, follow me;" and Tag followed him, accompanied by Rag, into a large long room, well lit up by gas, which made it nice and warm, entirely filled with boxes of different sizes, some empty, some full, but none too heavy for the boy to lift.

"I want you to sort all these boxes, and arrange them on the shelves according to their sizes—the smaller at the top, the larger at the bottom; empty ones on this side of the room, full ones on that. Here are a pair of steps for you to stand on, and in a couple of hours' time I'll come back and see how you are managing; the little girl can help you, or I can give her something to do in another room."

"I'd rather stay an' help Tag, please, sir."

"Very well; but look here, mind you don't stir either one or the other from this room until I come for you. You would not like to be caught by your late friends again, and more than likely they are on the look-out for you. Now be good children, and see how tidy and neat you can make this place look before I return. I tell you what, I'll just turn the key on you, and then you will be quite safe."

"Sir, sir!" exclaimed poor little Rag in terror; "yer not goin' for to lock us up for ever, like prisin'."

"'Rag' is what Tag calls you, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Rag, my girl, look into my face, and tell me if I look like a man who would be unkind to you, strap your should-ers, or lock you up in prison? No; it's to save you from prison, and try and do you good, that I am keeping you here—not to harm you. Can't you believe me, little Rag?"

Rag looked up sharply in his face for a moment; then, as if perfectly satisfied, she turned away.

"Yes, I b'lieve yer; lock us up, or anythin' yer like."

The tall, strong warehouseman looked down on the two children, and with a muttered "Poor, poor little things," left the room, turning the key in the door as he shut it.

"Come, Rag, this 'ere's jolly. I like it a deal betterer than sellin' off the board. We'll soon get this place tidied up, an' then p'raps he'll give us somethin' more to do to-morrer; an' in time we'll make our fortins."

"It wor a good thin' we crept into the barril, worn't it, Tag?"

"Niver mind talkin', Rag, just now; let's get these boxes up."

In about an hour's time the children stopped to admire their work and take breath.

"Oh! but it's bootiful—so tidy and nice; it's fit for the Queen to come and dine in now, ain't it, Tag?"

"Well, it do look nice. S'posin' we sit down on this box for a lill' bit an' talk."

"Yes, let's. I say, Tag, why do all of us say it's fit for the Queen when a thin' is werry partickler nice?"

"'Cos she's so werry partickler nice herself—I s'pose that's the reason."

"Would she be angry with the 'dreadfuls' if she knew of our soldgers?"

"I should think as she would be—werry partickler angry."

"Where do she live, Tag?"

"Oh, in a good many places; ev'rythin' down 'ere belongs to her."

"What does she do all day long?"

"Sits in a boot'iful large chair, with a crown a' gold atop o' er 'ead, an' smiles iver so sweet."

"But you niver see'd her, Tag?"

"No, but I've see'd her picter many an' many a time in the gran' shop-winders; an' she's bootiful, an' that's what she does."

"I'd rather, arter all, Tag, be adoin' of these boxes than sit like that a-smilin' all day long; it must be werry tirin' for her."

"Oh, not so werry. Give me that box, Rag; we must get on with our work. It's not like doin' it for the 'dreadfuls.' He looked so kind at us, I could work all day for him, and such as him."

(To be Continued.)