

"In this large place, shouldn't we?"

"But, Rag, this large place does not belong to me—I am only the head man here; so I could not let you live in this warehouse."

Poor children! how their thin, white little faces fell when they heard this!

"Then yer cannot give us work neither, if you bain't the guv'nor here." And Tag turned his face away.

"Yes," he replied, after a moment's pause, "I could give you work enough for you both to earn your living by; but where would you sleep? If you once left me to find a home of your own, you'd soon be back amongst the people you came from, and lie and steal again, and——"

"Have yer a wife, sir?" asked Rag, eagerly; "or any lill' children?"

"I have a wife, but no children," answered John Burton, sadly. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, 'cos' I could be yer wife's lill' servant. I'd run her errands, an' I'd clean up, an' I'd do anythin' as she wished; an' Tag would too—wouldn't yer, Tag?—it 'ud be betterer a deal than stealin' or beggin' or sweepin' crossin's. Do try us, sir."

"I have half a mind to try you, Rag; my missis has but poor health, and if she would take to you—. But come along—we will go and see her."

CHAPTER III.

Before he left, the warehouseman, holding a large lantern in his hand, went all round the premises, Rag and Tag following close behind him; he examined all the gas piping, saw all the lights were safely turned off, tried the fastening of the windows, the locks of the doors, and on finding everything to his satisfaction, he locked and double-locked the large door where the children first saw him standing; and then opening a small, thick, strong one at the end of the room, where Rag and Tag had their meals, he went out into the street; then drawing it to behind him, he took a great key from his pocket, and after slowly and surely turning the large bolt, he held out a hand to each child and walked quickly away. Not far though—only just up the passage where the barrel was lying, and which, by-the-by, had disappeared; then into a nice, clean, small court, very different looking from those Rag and Tag

had ever seen before; and turning the handle of the first door he arrived at, he opened it, drew the children in, and closed it again. What a sight met their eyes! For the first time in their lives the poor little things saw, if not plenty, at all events comfort. A large fire blazing on a beautifully clean hearth, no ashes or cinders lying about, all tidied up, fire-irons so clean and bright you could see your face in them; a kettle humming and buzzing away on the hob; a table with a clean white cloth, all prepared for a good tea, drawn up in front of the fire; a bright gas lamp hanging from the ceiling; an arm-chair and a pair of slippers on one side of the hearth; some colored pictures on the walls. A large oak chest of drawers with an oak cupboard on the top, polished like a mirror and ornamented with brass knobs, was at the further end of the room; a solid-looking bookshelf opposite, well filled with books; two or three brightly-polished oak chairs to match with the chest of drawers were placed here and there against the wall; a large cuckoo-clock took up another corner; but what struck Rag and Tag more than anything was an oval mirror framed in gilt, hung just over the chimney-piece, in which they could see their thin, white, wearied-looking little faces. John Burton watched the children as they stared round the comfortable, cheery-looking room, and a kindly smile passed over his own face, followed by rather a troubled, puzzled look. Then he placed two chairs close by the fire, desired the children to sit down, bade them be perfectly quiet and still; then changed his coat and shoes, and after washing his hands and face, he bolted the house-door, and telling the children he would soon come back, went into an inner room on the same floor.

"John, John, is that thee at last. What has kept my husband so long to-night? I have been wearying for the sound of your step, but it's all bright now you are come. Are you tired?"

"Not tired, wife, exactly; but I fear your head is aching again."

"You would not have found me in this room, but waiting at the door watching for you, had it not been aching so badly that I was forced to lay me down; but I'm all right now and coming into the kitchen for tea. I have ever such a good tea for

thee, John dear. I have been baking this afternoon; you must come and look at my loaves."

"In a minute, in a minute, wife. I have——"

"What?" interrupted the wife quickly; "are you not well? John, your face looks troubled—out with it, John; there's something on your mind, I see; and what's the use of us women if we cannot comfort and cheer the good, kind husbands, who are slaving all day to make things comfortable at home?"

"Well, wife, God has blessed us very much, has He not?"

"Very much—very, very much. Do you remember a few years ago how poor we were?—no nice loaves like we are going to have to-night; it was often hard work scraping on, John, was it not?"

"It was, wife; and it makes one's heart ache for those who have to scrape now, even harder—aye, a good bit harder, than we had, my wife."

"Poor things, it do, John!" and Mrs. Burton's cheerful face grew grave for a moment; "but as we can't help them straight off this instant, suppose we go and get our nice hot tea?"

"Wait a minute, wife—just one minute. Suppose we could help them, and just at this very instant too, would you do it?"

"Surely, John, surely."

"Then, my wife"—and John opened the door and drew her into the kitchen—"will you help your old John to bring up these two poor little creatures for the Father in Heaven?"

On the warm hearthrug in front of the fire, lay Rag and Tag, wearied out with their day's work; and overcome by the unusual heat and comfort, they were sleeping soundly. Thin and wan as they looked in the daylight, they appeared still more so now; and the habitual look of suffering which the excitement of the day had chased from their faces whilst in the warehouse was settled there now. And as John pointed to the bruised and bleeding shoulders of little Rag, and the bony discolored hands and legs of her brother, all that was womanly and motherly rose up in Mrs. Burton's large heart, and kneeling on the floor to look more closely at the two, she kissed each of their thin white foreheads. A smile passed over Tag's face, asleep as he was, and he murmured, "All right, Rag, we'll stick to each other; I've promised."

"Poor little creatures," and

Mrs. Burton's tears fell fast. "John, it's just like you to have done this; where did you find them?"

"In the large sugar-barrel this morning, as I was opening the warehouse." And then John seated himself in his arm-chair, and told his wife how it all happened, and all that he knew about them. "Now," he added, "have I done right or wrong, wife? It's two more mouths to feed;" and he looked earnestly into her peaceful, elderly face.

"Oh, John my husband"—and she put her hand on his—"remember our Master's words: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these... ye have done it unto Me.' Only think what an honor, John, for poor unworthy creatures, to do something for the dear Lord who has done all for us."

For a moment John covered his face with his great hands, and when he looked up there were tears standing in his honest eyes.

"We will have our tea now, please, wife," he said gently; "but let these little ones sleep."

Whilst they were enjoying their cosy meal, John asked his wife what she thought would be the best thing to do with the children, and it was decided by good Mrs. Burton that the very best thing they could do would be first to have them made thoroughly clean, then some good warm clothes put on them, and give them some employment, and after that watch and see what they were fit for.

"Now, wife," said John, rising from his chair, "let me thank God for my good tea; and after I have helped you to clear away, I will just go out and see if I cannot buy a couple of pair of strong boots cheaply for them, and some stockings. We can afford it nicely, dear; can we not, out of our beer money? Fetch the bag, my wife."

From the depth of her very deep pocket Mrs. Burton drew forth a purse, and from one of its inner pockets produced a key which she fitted into a strong oak box on which the clock stood, and opening a drawer, so cunningly devised no one could have guessed there was a drawer in it, brought forth a goodly-looking fat leather bag, which she put into her husband's hands.

(To be Continued.)

—"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."—*The Wonders of Prayer.*