

"THE BATTLEFIELD."

(From the Children's Friend.)

CHAPTER I.

LAME GREG.

"Greg! Greg! where are ye? Where's that urchin got to?" was shouted in a harsh, unwomanly voice, by a fierce-looking, grey-haired woman, who was standing at the door of a miserable-looking house in a wretched court in the East-end of London. It was a dull day in autumn, with a biting east wind, which shook the woman's rags and blew her rough hair about, and certainly did not improve her temper. "Greg!" she shouted again. "I'll give it you well, if ye don't come!" Then, after a moment's waiting, she shut the door angrily, saying—"What a plague other folks' children be, to be sure!"

Meanwhile a most miserable object was crouched down on the cold pavement only just out of sight—a little, old, pale face, with tousled hair, and large, eager, hungry eyes, and a poor deformed body, which shrank and quivered as the woman's voice was heard. Standing close by was another child, with curly hair and a merry face, thin and pale enough, but looking as if she knew what love was, and feeling deeply for the poor deformed boy.

Both children remained quite silent a few minutes, but when they heard the door bang, the little girl stooped down and said softly—"Poor Greg! well, you're out of her way for a bit longer."

The boy's lips quivered: "She'll beat me awful when I go in."

"I know she will," said May, with tears in her eyes. "Why don't you run away, Greg? I would, if she beat me like that."

"You know I can't run, May," said the child, pitifully. "You're pretty; folks'd care for you, but, no one loves me."

Tender-hearted May could not stand this; she was eleven years old, a year older than Greg, and seemed to feel quite motherly towards him; she stooped down, and putting her arms around the poor, forlorn little cripple, she kissed his dirty, tear-stained face, saying cheerfully—"Yes, I love you, Greg; see, I love you."

Greg never remembered having a kiss before, though he had often played with May in the court that summer—the first summer she had been in that neighborhood—and he looked up quite surprised.

"What's the matter?" asked May, wondering at the expression

on the boy's face. "It's nice!" he said simply.

"Didn't your mother never kiss you?"

"Never had no mother," was the sorrowful reply.

"Oh yes, every one has a mother," said May, earnestly.

"No, I never had one, I tell you; I know I never had," he said passionately, as if he felt he had been denied what other children had. "But there," he added, subsiding into his usual quiet, patient way, "I suppose every one can't have 'em, and I was one that had to go without."

"Well," said May, considerably

there. The half-tipsy men laughed and made fun of his poor back, and the little fellow was deeply sensitive, suffering as much from their words as he did from his grandmother's hard blows.

"What were you doing in the court, May?" asked her mother. "You know I don't like your playing with the rude children about here."

"No, mother, I know. I wasn't playing with any one, I was talking to poor Greg; his grandmother was scolding and shouting to him, and he was hiding away."

"Poor little fellow!" said Mrs.

Langborne, "let me go." "Well, don't stay long; there is awful bad company in this court, and I don't like you to hear their talk, it don't do anybody any good."

"Why did we come here, mother? it isn't half so nice as where we was." Then seeing the tears in her mother's eyes, she added, "Is it, cause of father?"

Mrs. Langborne could not answer her little girl. She had had a happy home once, but her husband had taken to drink, and they had been brought lower and lower, till at last they had reached that wretched court, not inappropriately called "The Battlefield."

Ah! many a battle has been fought down there—the battle with poverty and dirt and wretchedness, the battle with sin and Satan. Most of the inhabitants yielded to the enemy, but even in that court God had His own witnesses, who were fighting on the winning side. Among them was Mrs. Langborne. She found it hard work, for all her efforts seemed useless to win her husband from what was degrading him. She was often cast down, but she generally managed to keep it from her little daughter, and only show her the bright side.

She soon dried her tears, and giving May a kiss she cut a slice of bread from the loaf she had just brought home, and saying, "There, give that to Greg—I dare say he does not get much to eat, the poor child often looks almost starved," she put it into May's hand, who looked up with a beaming "Thank you, mother, I'll tell him you sent it."

The happy child was soon downstairs in the court once more. She ran over to Greg, saying softly—"Greg, Greg, here's a bit of bread for you; and do you know you had a mother once?" and the child's eyes danced as if she were telling him a bit of rare good fortune.

"No, I tell you, I never had," was the slow and sorrowful answer in a muffled tone, on account of his mouth being full of bread.

"But mother says you had," persisted May. "She says everybody has a mother; but your mother must have died when you was quite little, and you don't remember her."

This was a new idea to Greg, and a light dawned on his face as he said slowly, "Then I had a mother like other children!"

"Of course you had," returned May, with assurance.

"Then where is she now?"

"If she loved Jesus, she's gone to be with Him."

"Where does He live?"



"HE LIVES UP IN HEAVEN," AND HER FINGER POINTED UPWARD."

mystified, "I always thought every one had. Never mind, Greg, I love you."

Presently a voice was heard calling out of an upper window—"May! May Langborne! are you there?"

"Yes, mother," answered May's clear voice, as she ran hastily in, leaving poor Greg alone in the cold wind and growing darkness. He did not stir. The poor little deformed body suffered a great deal of pain, and every movement was a difficulty. He knew that if he went indoors he should be sent out for gin to the public-house at the corner, and he dreaded going

Langborne, "my heart aches for him," and she sighed; "he has a hard time of it."

"And, mother," said May, still very puzzled "he says he never had a mother; he says some folks have to go without. I thought everybody had a mother."

"So they have, love," said Mrs. Langborne, with a sad smile. "I expect Greg's mother died when he was a baby, and he does not remember her."

"Yes, that must be it," said May, considerably relieved.

"Oh, mother, may I go and tell him? I think he'd be glad to know he had a mother once. Do

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