To London Town

by Arthur Morrison

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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

TALES OF MEAN STREETS

1 vol.

A CHILD OF THE JAGO

1 vol.

TO LONDON TOWN

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON, AUTHOR OF “A CHILD OF THE JAGO,” ETC. ETC.

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LEIPZIG BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ 1899.

TO LADY DOROTHY NEVILL.

NOTE.

I designed this story, and, indeed, began to write it, between the publication of Tales of Mean Streets and that of A Child of the Jago, to be read together with those books: not that I pretend to figure in all three—much less in any one of them—a complete picture of life in the eastern parts of London, but because they are complementary, each to the two others.

A. M.

TO LONDON TOWN. I.

The afternoon had slumbered in the sun, but now the August air freshened with an awakening breath, and Epping Thicks stirred and whispered through a myriad leaves. Far away beyond the heaving greenwoods distant clouds floated flat on the upper air, and a richer gold grew over the hills as the day went westward. This way and that, between and about trees and undergrowth, an indistinct path went straggling by easy grades to the lower ground by Wormleyton Pits; an errant path

whose every bend gave choice of green passes toward banks of heather and bracken. It was by this way that an old man and a crippled child had reached the Pits. He was a small old man, white-haired, and a trifle bent; but he went his way with a sturdy tread, satchel at side and butterfly-net in hand. As for the child, she too went sturdily enough, but she hung from a crutch by the right shoulder, and she moved with a jog and a swing. The hand that gripped the crutch gripped also a little bunch of meadowsweet, and the other clasped tight against her pinafore a tattered old book that would else have fallen to pieces.

Once on the heathery slade, the old man lifted the strap over his head and put the satchel down by a tree clump at the wood's edge.

"'Nother rest for you, Bess," he said, as he knelt to open his bag. "I'm goin' over the pits pretty close to-day." He packed his pockets with pill-boxes, a poison bottle, and a battered, flat tin case; while the child, with a quick rejection of the crutch, sat and watched.

The old man stood, slapped one pocket after another, and then, with a playful sweep of the net-gauze across the child's face, tramped off among the heather. "Good luck, gran'dad!" she cried after him, and settled on her elbow to read.

The book needed a careful separation, being open at back as at front; likewise great heed lest the leaves fell into confusion: for, since they were worn into a shape more oval than rectangular, the page numbers had gone, and in places corners of text had gone too. But the main body of the matter, thumbed and rubbed, stood good for many a score more readings; and the story was The Sicilian Romance.

Round about the pits and across the farther ground of Genesis Slade the old man pushed his chase. Now letting himself cautiously down the side of a pit; now stealing softly among bracken, with outstretched net; and again running his best through the wiry heather. Always working toward sun and wind, and often standing watchfully still, his eye alert for a fluttering spot amid the flood of colour about him.

Meantime the little cripple conned again the familiar periods of the old romance. Few, indeed, of its ragged leaves but might have been replaced, if lost, from pure memory; few, indeed, for that matter, of The Pilgrim's Progress or of Susan Hopley, or of The Scottish Chiefs: worn volumes all, in her grandfather's little shelf of a dozen or fifteen books. So that now, because of old acquaintance, the tale was best enjoyed with many pauses; pauses filled with the smell of the meadowsweet, and with the fantasy that abode in the woods. For the jangle of a herd-bell was the clank of a knight's armour, the distant boom of a great gun at Waltham Abbey told of the downfall of enchanted castles, and in the sudden plaint of an errant cow she heard the growling of an ogre in the forest.

The western hillsides grew more glorious, and the sunlight, peeping under heavy boughs, flung along the sward, gilt the tree-boles whose shadows veined it, and lit nooks under bushes where the wake-robin raised its scarlet mace of berries. The old man had dropped his net, and for awhile had been searching the herbage. It was late in the day for butterflies, but fox-moth caterpillars were plenty among the heather; as well as others. Thus Bessy read and dreamed, and her grandfather rummaged the bushes till the sunlight was gathered up from the turf under the trees, and lifted from the tallest spire among the agrimony, as the sun went beyond the hill-tops. Then at last the old man returned to his satchel.

"The flies ain't much," he observed, as Bessy looked up, "but for trade it's best not to miss anything: it's always what you're shortest of as sells; and the blues was out late to-day. But I've got luck with caterpillars. If they go all right I ought to have a box-full o' Rosy Marbled out o' these!"

"Rosy Marbled! It's a late brood then. And so long since you had any!"

"Two year; and this is the only place for 'em." The old man packed his bag and slung it across his back. "We'll see about tea now," he added, as the child rose on her crutch; "but we'll keep open eyes as we go."

Over the slade they took their way, where the purple carpet was patterned with round hollows, black with heather-ash and green with star-moss; by the edges of the old gravel-pits, overhung with bramble and bush; and so into more woods.

A jay flew up before them, scolding angrily. Now and again a gap among the trees let through red light from beyond Woodredon. Again and again the old man checked his walk, sometimes but to drop once more into his even tramp, sometimes to stop, and sometimes to beat the undergrowth and to shake branches. To any who saw there was always a vaguely familiar quality in old May's walk; ever a patient plod, and, burdened or not, ever an odd suggestion of something carried over shoulder; matters made plain when it was learned that the old man had been forty years a postman.

Presently as they walked they heard shrieks, guffaws, and a discordant singing that half-smothered the whine of a concertina. The noise was the louder as they went, and when they came where the white of a dusty road backed the tree-stems, they heard it at its fullest. Across the way was an inn, and by its side a space of open ground whereon some threescore beanfeasters sported at large. Many were busy at kiss-in-the-ring, some waved branches torn from trees, others stood up empty bottles and flung more bottles at them; they stood, sat, ran, lay, and rolled, but each made noise of some sort, and most drank. Plainly donkey-riding had palled, for a man and a boy had gathered their half-dozen donkeys together, and were driving them off.

The people were Londoners, as Bessy knew, for she had often seen others. She had forgotten London herself—all of it but a large drab room with a row of little beds like her own, each bed with a board on it, for toys; and this, too, she would have forgotten (for she was very little indeed then) but that a large and terrible gentleman had come every day and hurt her bad leg. It was the Shadwell Hospital. But these were Londoners, and Bessy was a little afraid of them, and conceived London to be a very merry and noisy place, very badly broken, everywhere, by reason of the

Londoners. Other people, also, came in waggonettes, and were a little quieter, and less gloriously bedecked. She had seen such a party earlier in the day. Probably they were not real Londoners, but folk from parts adjoining. But these—these were Londoners proper, wearing each other's hats, with paper wreaths on them.

"Wayo, old 'un!" bawled one, as the old man, net in hand, crossed toward the wood opposite; "bin ketchin' tiddlers?" And he turned to his companions with a burst of laughter and a jerk of the thumb. "D'year, Bill! 'Ere's yer ole gran'father ketchin' tiddlers! Why doncher keep 'im out o' mischief?" And every flushed face, doubly reddened by the setting sun, turned and opened its mouth in a guffaw. "You'll cop it for gittin' yer trouseys wet!" screamed a woman. And somebody flung a lump of crust.

Bessy jogged the faster into the wood, and in its shadow her grandfather, smiling doubtfully, said, "They like their joke, some of 'em, don't they? But it's always 'tiddlers'!"

It grew dusk under the trees, and the sky was pale above. They came to where the ground fell away in a glen that was almost a trench, and a brook ran in the ultimate furrow. On the opposing hill a broad green ride stood like a wall before them, a deep moss of trees clinging at each side. Here they turned, and, where the glen widened, a cottage was to be seen on sloping ground, with a narrow roadway a little beyond it. A whitewashed cottage, so small that there seemed scarce a score of tiles on its roof; one of the few scattered habitations holding its place in the forest by right of ancient settlement. A little tumult of garden tumbled about the cottage—a jostle of cabbages, lavender, onions, wallflowers and hollyhock, confined, as with difficulty, by a precarious fence, patched with wood in every form of manufacture and in every stage of decay.

"I expect mother and Johnny finished tea long ago," Bessy remarked, her eyes fixed on the cottage. "Why there's a light!"

The path they went by grew barer of grass as it neared the cottage, and as they trod it, men's voices could be heard from within, and a woman's laughter.

"Sounds like visitors!" the old man exclaimed. "That's odd. I wonder who . . . "

"There you are then, father!" came a female voice from the door. "Here's Uncle Isaac an' a gentleman come to see us." It was Bessy's mother who spoke—a pleasant, fresh, active woman in a print dress, who stood in the doorway as the old man set back the gate.

The door opened into the living-room, where sat two men, while a boy of fourteen squeezed, abashed and a trifle sulky, in a corner. There was a smell of bad cigar, which had almost, but not quite, banished the wonted smell of the room; a smell in some degree due to camphor, though, perhaps, more to caterpillar; for the walls were hidden behind boxes and drawers of divers shapes and sizes, and before the window and in unexpected places on the floor stood other boxes, covered with muslin, nurseries for larvæ, pupæ, and doomed butterflies. And so many were these things that the room, itself a mere box, gave scant space to the three people and the little round table that were in it; wherefore Bessy's mother remained in the doorway, and Uncle Isaac, when he rose, took a very tall hat from the floor and clapped it on his head for lack of other safe place; for the little table sustained a load of cups and saucers. Uncle Isaac was a small man, though with a large face; a face fringed about with grey wisps of whisker, and characterised by wide and glassy eyes and a great tract of shaven upper lip.

"Good evenin', Mr. May, good evenin'!" said Uncle Isaac, shaking hands with the air of a man faithful to a friend in defiance of the world. "This is my friend Mr. Butson."

Mr. Butson was a tall, rather handsome man of forty or thereabout, with curly hair and whiskers, and he greeted the old man with grum condescension.

"Mr. Butson," Uncle Isaac continued, with a wave of the hand, "is a gentleman at

present in connection with the steamboat profession, though above it by fam'ly and inclination. Mr. Butson an' me 'as bin takin' a day's 'olludy with a seleck party by name of beanfeast, in brakes."

"O yes," responded old May, divesting himself of his bag; "we passed some of 'em by the Dun Cow, an' very merry they was, too, with concertinas, an' kiss-in-the-ring, an' what not—very gay."

"O damn, no," growled the distinguished Butson. "Not that low lot. He means that coster crowd in vans," he added, for Uncle Isaac's enlightenment. "I ain't fell as low as that. Lor, no." He sucked savagely at the butt of his cigar, found it extinct, looked vainly for somewhere to fling it, and at last dropped it into a teacup.

"No, Mr. May, no; not them lot," Uncle Isaac said, with a touch of grave reproof. "As a man of some little property meself, an' in company of Mr. Butson, by nature genteel-disposed, I should be far from mixin' with such. We come down with the shipwrights an' engineers from Lawsonses. That was prob'ly Mr. May's little joke, Mr. Butson. Mr. May is a man of property hisself, besides a man of science, as I think I told you. This 'ere land an' residence bein' in pint. If any man was to come an' say to Mr. May, 'Git out o' that property, Mr. May,' what would the lawr say to that man? Nullavoid. That's what the lawr 'ud say. It 'ud say, 'Git out yerself, your claim's nullavoid.'" Uncle Isaac, checking a solemn thump at the table just in time to save the tea-cups, took his hat off instead, and put it on again.

Mr. Butson grunted "Ah!" and Mrs. May, taking the net, squeezed in, with Bessy behind her. "I'll put a few o' these boxes on the stairs, an' make more room," she said. "The kettle's still boiling in the backhouse, an' I'll make some more tea."

Bessy had a habit of shyness in presence of strangers, and Uncle Isaac ranked as one, for it was two years at least since he had been there before. Indeed, what she remembered of him then made her the shyer. For he had harangued her very loudly on the gratitude she owed her grandfather, calling her a cripple very often in course

of his argument, and sometimes a burden. She knew that she was a cripple and a burden, but to be held tightly by the arm and told so, by a gentleman with such a loud voice and such large eyes as Uncle Isaac, somehow inclined her to cry. So now, as soon as might be, she joined her brother, and the two retreated into the shadowy corner between the stairfoot and the backhouse door.

The old butterfly-hunter, too, was shy in his more elderly way. Beyond his widowed daughter-in-law and her two children he had scarce an acquaintance, or at least none more familiar than the naturalists in London to whom he sold his specimens. So that now, in presence of this very genteel Mr. Butson, who, he feared, was already disgusted at the humble character of the establishment, he made but a hollow meal. A half-forgotten notion afflicted him, that it was proper to drink tea in only one of two possible ways; but whether from the cup or from the saucer he could not resolve himself. Mr. Butson had finished his tea, so that his example was lacking: though indeed the lees in his saucer seemed to offer a hint—a hint soon triumphantly confirmed by Uncle Isaac, who was nothing averse from a supplementary cup, and who emptied it straightway into his saucer and gulped ardently, glaring fearfully over the edge. Whereat his host drank from the saucer also, and took heed to remember for the future. Still he was uncomfortable, and a little later he almost blushed at detecting himself inhospitably grateful for signs that Mr. Butson began to tire of the visit. Meanwhile he modestly contributed little to the conversation.

“No,” said Mr. Butson gloomily after a long pause, and in reply to nothing in particular, “I ain’t a man of property. I wish I was. If people got what they was brought up to—but there!” He stuck his hands lower in his pockets and savagely regarded vacancy.

“Mr. Butson’s uncle,” said Uncle Isaac, “is a mayor. A mayor. An’ ’is other relations is of almost equal aristocracy. But ’e won’t ’ave nothin’ to say to ’em, not a word. It’s jist blood—pride o’ breedin’. But what I say is, it may be proper

self-respeck, but it ain't proper self-justice. It ain't self-justice, in my way o' puttin' it. Why 'e won't even name 'em! Won't name 'em, Mr. May!"

"Won't he?" the old man answered, rather tamely, "dear, dear!" Mr. Butson laid his head back, jerked his chin, and snorted scorn at the ceiling.

"No—won't as much as name 'em, such is 'is lawfty contemp'. Otherwise, what 'ud be my path of dooty? My path of dooty on behalf of self-justice to Mr. Butson would be to see 'em an' put a pint o' argument. 'Ere, I puts it, is 'im, an' 'ere is me. 'Ere is Mr. 'Enery Butson, your very dootiful relation of fash'nable instinks, an' a engineer than which none better though much above it, an' unsuitably enchained by worldly circumstances in the engine-room of a penny steamer." (Here Mr. Butson snorted again.) "Likewise 'ere is me, a elderly man of some small property, an' a shipwright of practical experience. Them circumstances bein' the case, cons'kently, what more nachral an' proper than a partnership—with capital. That's 'ow I'd put the pint; a partnership with capital."

"Jus' so," said old May. And seeing that the other still paused, he added "Of course."

"But 'e's proud—proud!" said Uncle Isaac, shaking his head plaintively.

"P'raps I am proud," Mr. Butson admitted candidly, "I s'pose I got my faults. But I wouldn't take a penny from 'em—not if they was to beg me on their knees. Why I'd sooner be be'olding to strangers!"

"Ah, that 'e would," sighed Uncle Isaac. "But it ain't self-justice. No, it ain't self-justice!"

"It's self-respect, any'ow," said Mr. Butson sullenly. "If they like to treat me unnatural, let 'em."

"Ah," observed Uncle Isaac, "some fam'lies is unnachral an' some is nachral, an' there's a deal o' difference between 'em. Look at Mr. May now. 'E ain't altogether in my family, though my niece's father-in-law by marriage. But what nachralness!

His son was a engineer in yer own trade, Mr. Butson,—fitter at Maidment's. 'E left my niece a widder, cons'kence of a coat-tail in a cog wheel. What does Mr. May do? Why 'e shows 'is nachralness. 'E brings 'er an' 'er children down 'ere on 'is own free'old residence, an' cons'kently—'ere they are. Look at that!"

It was a principle with Uncle Isaac to neglect no opportunity of reciting at large the excellences of any person of the smallest importance with whom he might be acquainted; or the excellences which that person might be supposed to desire credit for: if in his actual presence, so much the better. Nothing could be cheaper, and on the whole it paid very well. At worst, it advertised an amiable character; and there remained off-chances of personal benefit. Moreover the practice solidified Uncle Isaac's reputation among his acquaintances. For here, quoth each in his turn, was plainly a man of sagacious discernment. The old postman, however, was merely uneasy. To his mind it was nothing but a matter of course that when his son died, the widow and children should come under his own roof, and it was as a matter of course that he had brought them there. But Bessy's mother said simply:—"Yes, gran'dad's been a good one to us, always." She, as well as the children, called him "gran'dad."

"Yes," proceeded Uncle Isaac, "an' 'im with as much to think about as a man of edication too—wonderful. Why there's nothink as 'e don't know in astronomy an'—an'—an' insectonomy. Nothink!"

"No, not astronomy," interjected old May, a little startled by both counts of the imputation. "Not astronomy, Mr. Mundy."

"I say yes," answered Uncle Isaac, with an emphatic slap on the knee. "Modesty under a bushel's all very well, Mr. May, all very well, but I know—I know! Astronomy, an' medicamedica an' all the other classics. I know! Ah, I'd give best part o' my small property, sich as it is, for 'alf your edication, Mr. May!"

It was generally agreed in the family that Uncle Isaac was very "close" as to this

small property of his. Nothing could induce him to speak of it with any particularity of detail, and opinions varied as to its character. Still, whatever it was, it sufficed to gain Uncle Isaac much deference and consideration—the more, probably, because of its mysterious character; a deference and a consideration which Uncle Isaac could stimulate from time to time by cloudy allusions to altering his will.

“Well,” observed Mr. Butson rising from his chair, “education never done me much good.”

“No, unforchnately!” commented Uncle Isaac.

“An’ I’d prefer property meself.” Mr. Butson made toward the door, and Uncle Isaac prepared to follow. At this moment a harsh female voice suddenly screamed from the darkness without. “Lor’! I almost fell over a blessed ’ouse!” it said, and there was a shrill laugh. “We’ll ask ’em the way back.”

Old May stepped over the threshold at the sound; but the magnificence was stricken from the face of Mr. Butson. His cheeks paled, his mouth and eyes opened together, and he shrank back, even toward the stairfoot. Nobody marked him, however, but the children, for attention was directed without.

“Djear! which way to the Dun Cow?”

“See the lane?” answered the old postman. “Follow that to the right an’ you’ll come to it. It’s a bit farther than through the wood, but ye can’t go wrong.”

“Right!” There were two women and a man. The screaming woman said something to the others in a quieter tone, in which, however, the word “tiddlers” was plain to hear, and there was a laugh. “Good-night, ole chap,” she bawled back. “Put ’em in a jam-pot with a bit o’ water-creese!”

“Full o’ their games!” remarked the old man with a tolerant smile, as he turned toward the door. “That was the person as said I’d catch it for gettin’ my clothes wet, as we came past the Dun Cow.”

The voices of the beanfeasters abated and ceased, and now Mr. Butson left no doubt of his readiness to depart. “Come,” he said, with chap-fallen briskness, “we’ll ’ave to git back to the others; they’ll be goin’.” He took leave with so much less dignity and so much more haste than accorded with his earlier manner that Mr. May was a trifle puzzled, though he soon forgot it.

“Good-night, Mr. May, I wish you good-night,” said Uncle Isaac, shaking hands impressively. “I’ve greatly enjoyed your flow of conversation, Mr. May.” He made after the impatient Butson, stopped half-way to the gate and called gently:—“Nan!”

“Yes, uncle,” Mrs. May replied, stepping out to him. “What is it?”

Uncle Isaac whispered gravely in her ear, and she returned and whispered to the old man. “Of course—certainly,” he said, looking mightily concerned, as he re-entered the cottage.

Mrs. May reached a cracked cup from a shelf, and, turning over a few coppers, elicited a half-crown. With this she returned to Uncle Isaac.

“I’ll make a note of it,” said Uncle Isaac as he pocketed the money, “and send a postal-order.”

“O, don’t trouble about that, Uncle Isaac!” For Uncle Isaac, with the small property, must not be offended in a matter of a half-crown.

“What? Trouble?” he ejaculated, deeply pained. “To pay my—”

“’Ere—come on!” growled Mr. Butson savagely from the outer gloom. “Come on!” And they went together, taking the lane in the direction opposite to that lately used by the noisy woman.

“Well,” old May observed, “we don’t often have visitors, an’ I was glad to see your Uncle Isaac, Nan. An’ Mr. Butson, too,” he added impartially.

“Yes,” returned Bessy’s mother innocently. “Such a gentleman, isn’t he?”

“There’s one thing I forgot,” the old man said suddenly. “I might ha’ asked ’em to

take a drop o’ beer ’fore they went.”

“They had some while they was waitin’ for tea. An’—an’ I don’t think there’s much left.” She dragged a large tapped jar from under the breeding-box at the window, and it was empty.

“Ah!” was all the old man’s comment, as he surveyed the jar thoughtfully.

Presently he turned into the back-house and emerged with a tin pot and a brush. “I’m a goin’ treaclin’ a bit,” he said. “Come, Johnny?”

The boy pulled his cap from his pocket, fetched a lantern, and was straightway ready, while Bessy sat to her belated tea.

The last pale light lay in the west, and the evening offered up an oblation of sweet smells. All things that feed by night were out, and nests were silent save for once and again a sleepy twitter. Every moment another star peeped, and then one more. The boy and the old man walked up the slope among the trees, pausing now at one, now at another, to daub the bark with the mixture of rum and treacle that was in the pot.

“It’s always best to be careful where you treacle when there’s holiday folk about,” said Johnny’s grandfather. “They don’t understand it. Often I’ve treacled a log or a stump and found a couple sittin’ on it when I came back—with new dresses, and sich. It’s no good explainin’—they think it’s all done for practical jokin’. It’s best to go on an’ take no notice. I’ve heard ’em say:—’Don’t the country smell lovely?’—meanin’ the smell o’ the rum an’ treacle they was a-sittin’ on. But when they find it—lor, the language I have heard! Awful! . . . ”

The boy was quiet almost all the round. Presently he said, “Gran’dad, do you really like that likeness I made of mother?”

“Like it, my boy? Why o’ course. It’s a nobby picture!”

“Uncle Isaac said it was bad.”

“O!” There was a thoughtful pause while they tramped toward the next tree. “That’s only Uncle Isaac’s little game, Johnny. You mustn’t mind that. It’s a nobby picture.”

“I don’t believe Uncle Isaac knows anything about it,” said the boy vehemently. “I think he’s ignorant.”

“Here, Johnny, Johnny!” cried his grandfather. “That won’t do, you know. Not at all. You mustn’t say things like that.”

“Well, that’s what I think, gran’dad. An’ I know he says things wrong. When he came before he said that ship I drew was bad—an’ I—I very near cried.” (He did cry, but that was in secret, and not to be confessed.) “But now,” Johnny went on, “I’m fourteen, an’ I know better. I don’t believe Uncle Isaac knows a bit about things.”

They had come again to the tree first treacled, and, leaving the pot and brush at its foot, the old man, by help of the lantern, took certain of the moths that had been attracted. From this he carried the lantern to the next tree in the round and then to the next, filling the intervals between his moth-captures with successive chapters of a mild and rather vague lecture on respect for elders.

It was dark night now, and the sky all a-dust with stars. The old man and the boy took their way more by use than by sight amid the spectral presences of the trees, whose infinite whispering filled the sharpening air. They emerged on high ground, whence could be seen, here the lights of Loughton and there the lights of Woodford, and others more distant in the flatter country. Here the night wind swept up lustily from all Essex, and away from far on the Robin Hood Road came a rumble and a murmur, and presently the glare of hand-lights red and green, the sign and token of homing beanfeasters.

II.

For some while a problem had confronted the inmates of the cottage, and now it was

ever with them: the choice of a trade for Johnny. The situation of the cottage itself made the main difficulty. There was a walk of two miles to the nearest railway station, and then London was twelve miles off. It was in London that trades were learnt; but to get there? Here the family must stay, for here was the cottage, which cost no rent, for the old man had bought it with his little savings. Moreover, here also were the butterflies and the moths, which meant butter to the dry bread of the little pension; and here was the garden. To part with Johnny altogether was more than his mother could face, and, indeed, what was to pay for his lodging and keep?

The moths and butterflies could be no living for Johnny. To begin with, though he was always ready to help in the hatching, killing, setting, and what not, he was no born insect-hunter, like his grandfather; and then the old man had long realised that the forest was growing a poorer and poorer hunting-ground each year, and must some day (after he was dead, he hoped) be no longer worth working. People were hard on the hawks, so that insect-eating birds multiplied apace, and butterflies were fewer. And there was something else, or so it seemed—some subtle influence from the great smoky province that lay to the south-west. For London grew and grew, and washed nearer and still nearer its scummy edge of barren brickbats and clinkers. It had passed Stratford long since, and had nearly reached Leyton. And though Leyton was eight miles off, still the advancing town sent something before it—an odour, a subtle principle—that drove off the butterflies. The old man had once taken the Emperor Moth at Stratford, in a place long covered with a row of grimy little houses; now the Emperor was none too easy to find in the thickest of the woodland. And, indeed, when the wind came from the south-west the air seemed less clear, in the old man's eyes, than was its wont a dozen years back. True, many amateurs came with nets—boys from boarding-schools thereabout, chiefly—and did not complain. But he, who by trade had noted day by day for many years the forest's produce in egg, larva, pupa, and imago, saw and knew the change. So that butterflies being beyond possibility as Johnny's trade, his grandfather naturally bethought him

of the one other he himself was familiar with, and spoke of the post-office. He knew the postmaster at Loughton, and the postmasters at other of the villages about the forest. By making a little interest Johnny might take the next vacancy as messenger. But the prospect did not tempt the boy. He protested, and it was almost his sole contribution to the daily discussion, that he wanted to make something; and there was little doubt, if one might judge from the unpleasing ships and figures in coloured chalks wherewith he defaced whatever offered a fair surface, that he would most like to make pictures. He never urged the choice in plain terms, for that were hopeless: but both his mother and his grandfather condemned it in all respects as though he did.

“There’s a deal more caterpillar than butterfly in this life for the likes of us, my boy,” the old man would say, as he laboured at his setting. “Makin’ pictures an’ such is all very well, but we can’t always choose our own line. I’ve bin a lucky man in my time, thank God. The insects was my hobby long ’fore I made any money of ’em. Your poor gran’mother that you never saw, ‘A lot o’ good them moths an’ grubs’ll be to you,’ she used to say. ‘Why not bees, as you can make somethin’ out of?’ An’ Haskins, that took the next round to mine, he kep’ bees. But I began sellin’ a few specimens to gentlemen here an’ there, an’ then more, an’ after that I took ’em to London reg’lar, same as now. It ain’t as good as it was, an’ it’s goin’ to be worse, but I’m in hopes it’ll last my time out. It was because I was carryin’ letters here that I had the chance o’ doin’ it at all. If you was to carry ’em yourself, you’d be able to do something else too—bees p’raps. A good few mends boots, but we’re a bit off the villages here. Here’s the house—yours an’ your mother’s when I’m gone, an’ I’m sixty-nine; an’ it’s healthier an’ cleaner than London. You could put up a little bit o’ glass in the garden an’ grow tomatoes an’ cucumbers. Them—an’ fowls—you could keep fowls—would sell very well to the gentlefolk, an’ they all know the postman. Wages ain’t high, but you live cheap here, with no rent, and there’s a pension, p’raps. That’s your line, depend on it, Johnny.”

“But I should like a trade where I could make something,” the boy would answer wistfully. “I really should, gran’dad.”

“Ah”—with a shake of the head—“make what? I doubt but you’re meanin’ pictures. You must get that notion out of your head, Johnny. Some of them as make ’em may do well, but most’s awful. I see ’em in London often, drorin’ on the pavement; reg’lar clever ones, too, doin’ mackerel an’ bits o’ salmon splendid, and likenesses o’ the Queen, an’ sunsets, with the sky shaded beautiful. Beggin’! Reg’lar beggin’, with a cap out for coppers, an’ ‘Help gifted poverty’ wrote in chalk. That won’t do, ye know, Johnny.”

The boy’s mother felt for him an indefinite ambition not to be realised by a life of letter-carrying, though picture-making she favoured as little as did the old man. But there was the situation of the cottage—a hindrance they could see no way to overcome. This being so, they left it for the time, and betook themselves to smaller difficulties. Putting the letter-carrying aside for the moment, and forgetting distance as an obstacle, what trades were there to choose from? Truly a good many: and that none should be missed, Johnny’s grandfather took paper and a pencil and walked to Woodford, where he begged use of a London Directory and read through all the trades, from Absorbent Cotton Wool Manufacturers to Zincographic Printers, making a laborious list as he went, omitting (with some reluctance) such items as Bankers, Brokers—Stock and Share—Merchants, Patentees, and Physicians, and hesitating a little over such as Aëronauts and Shive Turners. The task filled a large part of three days of uncommonly hard work, and old David May finished his list in mental bedevilment. What was a Shive Turner? Indeed, for that matter, what was an Ammeter?

The list did but multiply confusion and divide counsel. Nan May sang less at her house-work now, thinking of what she could remember of the trades that began with Absorbent Cotton Wool Manufacture and ended with Zincographic Printing. Little

Bess neglected the bookshelf, and pored over the crabbed catalogue with earnest incomprehension. It afflicted Johnny himself with a feeling akin to terror, for which he found it hard to account. The arena of the struggle for bread was so vast, and he so small a combatant to choose a way into the scrimmage! More, it seemed all so unattractive. There could be little to envy in the daily life of a Seed Crusher or a Court Plaster Maker. But the old man would pin a sheet of the list to the wall and study it while he worked within doors: full of patience and simple courage.

"Bakin' Powder Maker," he would call aloud to whomsoever it might reach. "How's that? That's makin' something. . . . "

Sometimes Bob Smallpiece, the forest keeper, would look in on his way by the cottage and be consulted. Bob was an immense being in much leather and velveteen, with a face like a long-kept pippin. When he first came to the forest, years back, his amiable peeps into the house may have been prompted by professional considerations, for it was his habit to keep an eye on solitary cottages in his walk: cottages wherein it had once or twice been his luck to spy by surprise some furry little heap that a poke of his ash stick had separated into dead rabbits. Indeed, had old May's tastes lain that way, nothing would have been easier for him than to set a snare or two at night as he hunted his moths. But soon the keeper found that this one, at least, of the cottagers thereabouts was no poacher, and then his greetings were as friendly as they seemed. As to Johnny's trade, he had few ideas beyond one that butchers did very well in London: his sister having married one. And what a Shive Turner or an Ammeter might be he knew no more than his stick. But he knew well enough what a poacher was (as also, perhaps, did the stick, if contact could teach it); and he counselled that the boy be kept away from certain "lots"—as the "Blandy lot," the "Honeywell lot," and the "Hayes lot"—who would do him no good. The old butterfly-hunter knew these "lots" very well on his own account; and his perpetual gropings about banks and undergrowth made him no friends among them. They would scarce believe, even after long experience, that grubs alone

accounted for his activity; and truly, a man with a government pension, who affected scientific tastes, who lived a clean life, who was called “Mr. May” by keepers, and who, moreover, had such uncommon opportunities of witnessing what passed in the woods, might well be an object of suspicion. In simple truth, the village loafers had small conception of the old man’s knowledge of their behaviour among the rabbit burrows. He knew the woods as they knew the inwards of a quart pot, and his eyes, aged as they might be, were trained by years of search for things well-nigh invisible amid grass, leaves, and undergrowths. He could have found their wires blindfold, and he knew Joe Blandy’s wires from Amos Honeywell’s better than Joe and Amos themselves. But of all this he said nothing, holding himself a strict neutral, and judging it best never to seem too knowing. Still it was the fact that when the “lots” were periodically weeded of members caught with disjoinable guns, wire nooses, or dead things furred or feathered, those left behind were apt to link circumstances together, and to regard the old man with doubt and ill-favour. Once, indeed, he hung in doubt for days, much tempted to carry a hint to Bob Smallpiece of a peculiarly foul and barbarous manner of deer-stealing, wherein figured a tied fawn, an anxious doe, a heavy stone, a broken leg, and a cut throat. But it chanced that the keeper was otherwise aware, and old May’s doubt was determined by news that the thief, waled and gory (for he had made a fight for it), had been brought to the police-cells, with a dripping doe on a truck behind him. Even now as Bob Smallpiece grinned in at the cottage door one saw the gap where two teeth had gone in that “up-and-downer.”

“No,” said the keeper, “it won’t do the boy no good to let him knock about with nothing to do. ’Bout here, specially. Boys that knocks about this part mostly gets in wi’ them lots as we bin speakin’ of, or something about as bad. Ain’t there no gentleman hereabout ’ud give him a job?”

“I’d like him to learn a trade,” the old man said anxiously, “but I don’t see how. It’s always somethin’ to stand by, is a trade, an’ it’s what he wants. Wants to make somethin’—that’s the way he puts it. Else I’d say post-office, same as me.”

“His father was in the engineerin’,” remarked Mrs. May, who had arrived at the door with certain sticks of rhubarb from the garden. “I’d like him to go to that, I think; but he can’t, from here.”

Bob Smallpiece knew nothing of engineering, and little more of any other of the several trades read out from the list pinned to the window-frame near which the old man worked at a setting-stick. And presently he departed on his walk. Bessy at the casement above saw him swing away toward the glen, lifting his stick in recognition of Johnny, who bore a bundle of dead sticks homeward.

Johnny’s mother peeled and cut the rhubarb, revolving impossible expedients for bridging the space between them and London: the space that looked so small on the map, but was so great an obstacle to their purposes, and so wide a division between the two modes of life she knew. Johnny’s grandfather pinned and strapped deftly, deep in thought. Presently, looking up, “It beats me,” he said, fearful of ignoring some good thing in trades, “to guess what a Shive Turner is!”

III.

So life went at the cottage. For a little while they looked for another visit from Uncle Isaac; since, as he sent no postal order, it was felt that he must defer the return of the half-crown merely because he contemplated an early payment in person. But weeks passed and nothing was heard of him, nor seen. Meantime the problem of Johnny’s trade met no solution. He had left school nearly three months now, and, the thing seeming desperate, he had well-nigh resolved to give in to the post-office. At the thought London seemed a far and wondrous place whereto he could never attain; and awe of the terrible list his grandfather had compiled from the London Directory, became longing for the least inviting trade in the collection. He had his memories of London, too, and they were more numerous and more pleasant than Bessy’s. There he could see, from his bedroom window, the masts of many ships, quite close. In the

strong winds (and in his remembered London the weather was ever cold, brisk, dry, and windy) the masts bent and rocked gravely, the ropes bellied, and the blocks whistled aloud. At nights he lay and heard the yards groan and the cordage creak and rattle. Just by the corner, ships sometimes thrust prying jib-booms clean over the dock wall, as if to see what a town was like; and often he had stood in the street to watch men climbing the rigging and hanging bent over spars, like earwigs. He had gone shopping, too, gripping tight at his mother's skirts, in flaring market-streets, where everybody shouted at once, and there were mountains of bulls'-eyes and peppermint on barrows. There was a street with shops on one side and a blank wall on the other; and over and behind this wall, lifted high in the air, was the monstrous skeleton of a great ship. Men swarmed like ants about the skeleton, and all day hammers went with a mighty clangour, and great lights flared at night. There were big blank walls at all the places where they made ships, and he could remember a little door in one such wall, a door beyond which he greatly desired to see. But it was rarely opened, and then but a little way, by an ill-natured old man, who squeezed through and closed it very quickly. So that Johnny believed he must issue thus to prevent the escape of some small and active animal, imprisoned within. All that Johnny remembered of his father was that he wiped his oily hands on cotton waste: a curious stuff—like a great deal of soft sewing-thread in a hopeless tangle—that he had never seen since. That and the funeral: when he rode in a carriage with a crape bow pinned to his new jacket, and his mother held his hand very tight at the grave-side. Most of his memories were of the streets, and some revived after long oblivion: as when the smell of roasted chestnuts brought a vision of a glowing coke fire by the corner of the ship-yard wall, with a pock-marked man behind it whom he would know anywhere now. And he was not to return to this place of wistful memory after all, nor to learn to make a ship nor an engine—let alone a picture.

The weeks went, and berries hung where flowers had been. Johnny and Bessy made

their yearly harvest of blackberries, some for puddings and jam at home, some to sell at such kitchen doors as might receive them. Until an afternoon in early October: when, with an order from a lady at Theydon, they betook themselves in search of sloes.

Warm colours touched the woods to a new harmony, and seen from high ground, they lay like flower-beds in green and red, yellow and brown. The honeysuckle bloomed its second time, and toadstools stood in crimson companies in the shade of the trees. Sloes were rare this year near home, so the children searched their way through the Wake Valley to Honey Lane Quarters, and there they found their sloes, though few.

It was a long and scratchy task; and, when it was finished, they were well up in St. Thomas's Quarters, and the sun was setting. They made the best of their way back as far as the road near the Dun Cow, and there parted. For Bessy was tired and hungry, and though Johnny was little better, he resolved to carry his sloes fresh to Theydon and get the money, since he was already a little on the way. So Bessy turned up the lane that led to the cottage, and Johnny took to the woods again for Theydon, by way to right of Wormleyton Pits.

Dusk was growing to dark, but the boy stepped fearlessly, well knowing his path. The last throstle sang his last evensong for the year, and was still. The shadowy trees, so living and so silent about him: the wrestling trunks of beeches, the reaching arms of oak and hornbeam, all struck at gaze as though pausing in their everlasting struggle to watch and whisper as he passed: and the black depths between them might well have oppressed the imagination of such a boy from other parts; but Johnny tramped along among them little heeding, thinking of the great ship-haunted London he longed for, and forecasting nothing of the blow that should fall but in that hour and send him the journey sorrowing.

Presently he was aware of a light ahead. It moved a foot or two from the ground, and

Johnny knew its swing. Then it stopped, resting by a tree root. “You, gran’dad?” called Johnny, and “Hullo!” came the old man’s voice in answer.

The old man had cut a leaf, with a caterpillar on it, from a shrub, and was packing it in a pill-box. “Out for a few night-feeders,” he explained, as the boy stopped beside him. “But you ain’t been home to tea,” he added. “Takin’ home the sloes? Might ha’ left ’em till the morning, John, easy,—now you’ve got ’em.”

“Oh, I come up from over there”—Johnny made a vague toss of the arm—“an’ I thought I might as well cut across to Theydon first. Bess went up the lane. I’ll be home ’fore ye now, gran’dad, ’nless you ’re goin’ back straight.”

“I won’t be long behind ye; I’m just goin’ to the Pits. I can’t make nothin’ o’ them I took last night, under the brambles an’ heather,—never saw the like before quite; so I’m goin’ to see if there’s more, an’ get all I can.”

They walked together a few yards, till the trees thinned. “You’ll go ’cross the Slade,” said the old man. “Step it, or you’ll be beat!”

“I’ll step it,” the boy answered. “I want my tea.”

He was trotting home by the lane from Theydon, with his empty basket on his arm, and his hands (and the sixpence) in his trousers pockets, when he checked at a sound, as of a cry from the wood. But he heard no more, and trotted on. Probably the deer were fighting somewhere; rare fighters were the bucks in October.

IV.

Johnny had finished his tea, and was lying at his ease in the old easy-chair, whistling, rattling his heels on the hearth, and studying a crack in the ceiling that suggested an angry face. Mrs. May had put the sixpence the sloes had brought into the cracked teacup that still awaited the return of Uncle Isaac’s half-crown, had washed the tea-things, and was now mending the worn collar of gran’dad’s

great-coat, in readiness for the winter. Bessy had fallen asleep over her book, had been wakened, had fallen asleep again, and in the end had drowsily climbed the stairs to early bed: but still the old man did not return.

“I wonder gran’dad ain’t back yet,” Johnny’s mother said for the third time. “He said he’d be quick, so’s to finish that case to-night.” This was a glass-topped mahogany box, in course of setting with specimens of all the Sphinges: a special private order.

“’Spect he can’t find them caterpillars he went for,” Johnny conjectured; “that’s what it is. He’s forgot all about racin’ me home.”

Mrs. May finished the collar, lifted the coat by the loop, and turned it about in search of rents. Finding none, she put it down and stood at the door, listening.

“Think you’re too tired to go an’ look for him, Johnny?” she asked presently.

Johnny thought he was. “It’s them caterpillars, safe enough,” he said. “He never saw any before, an’ it was just a chance last night. To-night he can’t find ’em, and he’s keepin’ on searchin’ all over the Pits and the Slade; that’s about it.”

There was another pause, till Mrs. May remembered something. “The bit o’ candle he had in the lantern wouldn’t last an hour,” she said. “He’d ha’ had to come back for more. Johnny, I’m gettin’ nervous.”

“Why, what for?” asked Johnny, though the circumstance of the short candle startled his confidence. “He might get a light from somewhere else, ’stead o’ comin’ all the way back.”

“But where?” asked Mrs. May. “There’s only the Dun Cow, an’ he might almost as well come home—besides, he wouldn’t ask ’em.”

Johnny left the chair, and joined his mother at the door. As they listened a more regular sound made itself plain, amid the low hum of the trees; footsteps. “Here he comes,” said Johnny.

But the sound neared and the steps were long and the tread was heavy. In a few moments Bob Smallpiece's voice came from the gloom, wishing them good-night.

Mrs. May called to him. "Have you seen gran'dad anywhere, Mr. Smallpiece?"

The keeper checked his strides, and came to the garden gate, piebald with the light from the cottage door. "No," he said, "I ain't run across him, nor seen his light anywheres. Know which way he went?"

"He was just going to Wormleyton Pits an' back, that's all."

"Well, I've just come straight across the Pits, an' as straight here as ever I could go, past the Dun Cow; an' ain't seen ne'er a sign of him. Want him particular?"

"I'm gettin' nervous about him, Mr. Smallpiece—somehow I'm frightened to-night. He went out about six, an' now it don't want much to nine, an' he only had a bit o' candle that wouldn't burn an hour. And he never meant stopping long, I know, 'cause of a case he's got to set. I thought p'raps you might ha' seen—"

"No, I see nothin' of him. But I'll go back to the Pits now, if you like, an' welcome."

"I'd be sorry to bother you, but I would like someone to go. Here, Johnny, go along, there's a good boy."

"All right, all right," the keeper exclaimed cheerfully. "We'll go together. I expect he's invented some new speeches o' moth, an' he's forgot all about his light, thinkin' out the improvements. It ain't the first time he's been out o' night about here, anyhow. Not likely to lose himself, is Mr. May."

Johnny had his cap and was at the gate; and in a moment the keeper and he were mounting the slope.

"Mother's worryin' herself over nothing to-night," Johnny grumbled. "Gran'dad's been later 'n this many's a time, an' she never said a word. Why, when he gets after caterpillars an' things he forgets everything."

They walked on among the trees. Presently, “How long is it since your father died?” Bob Smallpiece asked abruptly.

“Nine years, now, and more.”

“Mother might ha’ married agen, I s’pose?”

“I dunno. Very likely. Never heard her say nothing.”

Bob Smallpiece walked on with no more reply than a grunt. Soon a light from the Dun Cow twinkled through the bordering coppice, and in a few paces they were up at the wood’s edge.

“No light along the road,” the keeper said, glancing to left and right, and making across the hard gravel.

“There’s somebody,” Johnny exclaimed, pointing up the pale road.

“Drunk,” objected the other. And truly the indistinct figure staggered and floundered. “An’ goin’ the wrong way. Chap just out o’ the Dun Cow. Come on.”

But Johnny’s gaze did not shift. “It’s gran’dad!” he cried suddenly, and started running.

Bob Smallpiece sprang after him, and in twenty paces they were running abreast. As they neared the old man they could hear him talking rapidly, in a monotonous, high-pitched voice; he was hatless, and though they called he took no heed, but stumbled on as one seeing and hearing nothing; till, as the keeper reached to seize his arm, he trod in a gulley and fell forward.

The shock interrupted his talk, and he breathed heavily, staring still before him, as he regained his uncertain foothold, and reeled a step farther. Then Bob Smallpiece grasped him above the elbow, and shouted his name.

“What’s the matter, gran’dad?” Johnny demanded. “Ill?”

The old man glared fixedly, and made as though to resume his course.

“Why, what’s this?” said Bob Smallpiece, retaining the arm, and lifting a hand

gently to the old man's hair. It was blood, dotted and trickling. "Lord! he's had a bad wipe over the head," said Bob, and with that lifted old May in his arms, as a nurse lifts a child. "Theydon's nearest; run, Johnny boy—run like blazes an' fetch the doctor tantivy!"

"Take him into the Dun Cow?"

"No—home's best, an' save shiftin' him twice. Run it!"

"Purple Emperors an' Small Coppers," began the old man again in his shrill chatter. "Small Coppers an' Marsh Ringlets everywhere, and my bag full o' letters at the beginning of the round, but I finished my round and now they're all gone; all gone because o' London comin', an' I give in my empty bag—" and so he tailed off into indistinguishable gabble, while Bob Smallpiece carried him into the wood.

To Johnny, scudding madly toward Theydon, it imparted a grotesque horror, as of some absurd nightmare, this baby-babble of his white-haired grandfather, carried baby-fashion. He blinked as he ran, and felt his head for his cap, half believing that he ran in a dream in very truth.

V.

Mrs. May still stood at the cottage door, and the keeper, warned by the light, called from a little distance. "Here we are, Mrs. May," he said, as cheerfully as might be. "He's all right—just had a little accident, that's all. So I'm carryin' him. Don't be frightened; get a little water—I think he's got a bit of a cut on the head. But it's nothing to fluster about." . . . And so assuring and protesting, Bob brought the old man in.

The woman saw the staring grey face and the blood. "O-o-o—my God!" she quavered, stricken sick and pale. "He's—he's—"

"No, no. No, no! Keep steady and help. Shift the table, an' I'll put him down on the

rug."

She mastered herself, and said no more. The old man, whose babble had sunk to an indistinct mutter, was no sooner laid on the floor than he made a vague effort to rise, as though to continue on his way. But he was feebler than before, and Bob Smallpiece pressed him gently back upon the new-mended coat, doubled to make a pillow.

Nan May, tense and white, curbed her agitation, ministering and suffering in silence. Years before a man had been carried home to her thus, but then all was over, and after the first numbness grief could take its vent. Once she asked Bob Smallpiece, in a whisper, how it had happened. He told how little he knew, and save for passing the words to Bessy, wakened by unwonted sounds, Mrs. May said nothing. Bessy, in her nightgown, sat on the stairs, hugging her crutch, and sobbing with what quietness she could compel of herself.

There was a little brandy in a quartern bottle, and the keeper thought it well to force the spirit between the old man's teeth, while Mrs. May bathed the head and washed away the clotted blood. As they did so the wheels of the doctor's dog-cart were heard in the lane, and soon the doctor came in at the door, pulling off his gloves.

Johnny stood, pale, helpless, and still almost breathless, behind the group, while the doctor knelt at his grandfather's side. There was a contused wound at the top of the head, the doctor could see, a little back, not serious. But blood still dripped from the ears, and the doctor shook his head. "Fracture of the base," he said, as to himself.

Reviving a little, because of the brandy and the bathing, the old man once more made a motion as if to rise, his eyes grew brighter, though fixed still, and his voice rose distinctly as ever.

"—took the bag in, yes. London's comin' fast, London's comin' an' a-frightenin' out the butterflies. London's a-drivin' the butterflies out o' my round, out o' my round, an' butterflies can't live near it. London's out o' my round an' I've done my

round an' now I'll give in the empty bag. Take the bag: an' look for the pension. That's the 'vantage o' the Pos'-Office, John. Some gets pensions but some don', but the butterflies'll last my time I hope: an' Haskins he kep' bees, but I'm hopin' to finish my roun'—" and so on and so on till the voice fell again and the muttering was fainter than before.

Bob Smallpiece stood awkwardly by, unwilling to remain a useless intruder, but just as reluctant to desert friends in trouble. Presently he bethought himself that work was still to do in inquiry how the old man's hurt had befallen, whether by accident or attack; perhaps, indeed, to inform the police, and that in good time. So he asked, turning his hat about in his hands, if there was anything else he could do.

"Nothing more, Smallpiece, thanks," the doctor said, with an unmistakable lift of the brows and a glance at the door.

"God bless you for helpin' us, Mr. Smallpiece," Mrs. May said as she let him out. "I'll let you know how he is in the mornin' if you can't call." And when the door was shut, "Go to bed, Johnny, my boy, and take a rest." But Johnny went no farther than the stairs, and sat there with his sister.

The old man's muttering ceased wholly, and he breathed heavily, stertorously. The doctor rose to his feet and turned to Mrs. May.

"Won't you tell me, sir," she said. "Is it—is it—"

"It is very serious," the doctor said gravely; and added with impressive slowness, "very serious indeed."

The woman took a grip of the table, and caught three quick breaths.

"You must keep yourself calm, and you must bear up. You must prepare yourself—in case of something very bad indeed."

Twice she tried to speak, but was mute; and then, "No hope?" she said, more to sight than to hearing.

He put his hand kindly on her shoulder. “It would be wrong of me to encourage it,” he said. “As for what I can do, it is all over. . . . But you must bear up,” he went on firmly, as, guided to a chair, she bent forward and covered her face. “Drink this—” He took a small bottle from his bag, poured something into a cup and added water. “Drink it—drink it up; all of it. . . . I must go. . . . You’ve your children to think of, remember. Come to your mother, my boy. . . . ”

He was gone, and the children stood with their arms about their mother. The old man’s breathing, which had grown heavier and louder still, presently eased again, and his eyes closed drowsily. At this the woman looked up with an impossible hope in her heart. Truly, the breath was soft and natural, and the drawn lines had gone from the face: he must be sleeping. Why had she not thought to ask Bob Smallpiece to carry him up to bed? And why had the doctor not ordered it? Softly she turned the wet cloth that lay over the wound.

The breath grew lighter and still lighter, and more peaceful the face, till one might almost trace a smile. Quieter and quieter, and still more peaceful: till all was peace indeed.

VI.

Bob Smallpiece and a police-inspector busied themselves that night at Wormleyton Pits. The pits were none of them deep—six feet at most. At the bottom of the deepest they found old May’s lantern, with the glass broken and the candle overrun and extinguished; and the gravel was spotted with marks which, in the clearer light of the morning, were seen to be marks of blood. It was useless to look for foot-prints. The ground was dry, and, except in the pits themselves, it was covered with heather, whereon no such traces were possible. And this was all the police had to say at the inquest, whereat the jury gave a verdict of Accidental Death. For the old man had died, as was medically certified after post-mortem examination, of

brain-laceration produced by fracture of the base of the skull; and the fracture was caused by percussion from a blow on the upper part of the head—a blow probably suffered by falling backward into the pit and striking the head against a large stone embedded at the bottom. Everything suggested such an explanation. Above the steepest wall of the pit, over which the fall must have chanced, a narrow ledge of ground ran between the brink and a close clump of bramble and bush; and this ledge was grown thick with tough heather, as apt, almost, as a tangle of wire, to catch the foot and cause a stumble. It was plain that, stooping to his occupation on this ledge, and perhaps forgetting his situation in the interest of his search, he had fallen backward into the pit with the lantern. He had probably lain there insensible for some while, and then, developing a crazed half-consciousness, he had crawled out by the easy slope at the farther end, and staggered off whithersoever his disjointed faculties might carry him. Nobody had seen him but his grandson and the keeper; so that the verdict was a matter of course, and the dismal inquiry was soon done with. And indeed the jury knew all there was to know, unless it were a trivial matter, of some professional interest to Bob Smallpiece, about which the police preferred to have nothing said; since it could not help the jury, though it might chance, later, to be of some use to themselves. It was simply the fact that several very fresh peg-holes were observed about the pits, hinting a tearing away of rabbit-snares with no care to hide the marks.

The days were bad dreams to Johnny. He found himself continually repeating in his mind that gran'dad was dead, gran'dad was dead; as though he were forcing himself to learn a lesson that persistently slipped his memory. Well enough he knew it, and it puzzled him that he should find it so hard to believe, and, mostly, so easy a grief. As he woke in the morning the thought struck down his spirits, and then, with an instant revulsion, he doubted it was but the aftertaste of a dream. But there lay the empty half of the bed they were wont to share, and the lesson began again. He went about the house. Here was a sheet of gran'dad's list of trades, pinned to the wall,

there the unfinished case of moths for which the customer was waiting. These, and the shelves, and the breeding-boxes—all were as parts of the old man, impossible to consider apart from his active, white-headed figure. In some odd, hopeless way they seemed to suggest that it was all right, and that gran'dad was simply in the garden, or upstairs, or in the backhouse, and presently would come in as usual and put them all to their daily uses. And it was only by dint of stern concentration of thought that Johnny forced on himself the assurance that the old man would come among his cases no more, nor ever again discuss with him the list of London trades. Then the full conviction struck him sorely, like a blow behind the neck: the heavy stroke of bereavement and the sick fear of the world for his mother and sister, together. But there—he was merely torturing himself. He took refuge in a curious callousness, that he could call back very easily when he would. So the days went, but with each new day the intermissions of full realisation grew longer: till plain grief persisted in a leaden ache, rarely broken by a spell of apathy.

His mother and his sister went about household duties silently, not often apart. They were comforted in companionship, it seemed, but solitude brought tears and heartbreak. Nan May's London upbringing caused her some thought of what her acquaintances there would have called a "proper" funeral. But here the machinery of such funerals must be brought from a distance, thus becoming doubly expensive; and this being the case, cottagers made very little emulation at such times, and a walking funeral—perhaps at best a cab from the rank at Loughton station—satisfied most. Moreover, the old man himself had many a time preached strong disapproval of money wasted on funerals; had, indeed, prophesied that if any costliness were wasted on him, he would rise from his coffin and kick a mute. So now that the time had come, a Theydon carpenter made the coffin, and a cab from Loughton was the whole show. The old man's relations were not, and of Nan May's most still alive were forgotten; for in the forest cottage the little family had been secluded from such connections, as by sundering seas. At first they had seemed too near for

correspondence, and then they had been found too far for visiting. Uncle Isaac came to the funeral, however; and though in the beginning he seemed prepared for solemn declamation, something in the sober grief at the cottage made him unwontedly quiet.

It was a short coffin, accommodated under the cabman's seat with no great protrusion at the ends; what there was being covered decently with a black cloth. And the cab held the mourners easily: Johnny and Bessy in their Sunday clothes, their mother in hers (they had always been black since she was first a widow) and Uncle Isaac in a creasy suit of lustrous black, oddly bunched and wrinkled at the seams: the conventional Sunday suit of his generation of artisans, folded carefully and long preserved, and designed to be available alike for church and for such funerals as might come to pass.

A brisk wind stirred the trees, and flung showers of fallen leaves after the shabby old four-wheeler as it climbed the lanes that led up to the little churchyard; where the sexton and his odd man waited with planks and ropes by the new-dug grave. It was a bright afternoon, but a fresh chill in the wind hinted the coming of winter. A belated Red Admiral seemed to chase the cab, fluttering this way or that, now by one window, now by the other, and again away over the hedge-top. Nothing was said. Now and again Johnny took his eyes from the open window to look at his companions. His mother, opposite, sat, pale and worn, with her hands in her lap, and gazed blankly over his head at the front window of the cab. She was commonly a woman of healthy skin and colour, but now the skin seemed coarser, and there was no colour but the pink about her red eyelids. Uncle Isaac, next her, sat forward, and rubbed his chin over and round the knob of his walking stick, a bamboo topped with a "Turk's head" of tarred cord. As for Bessy, sitting at the far end of his own seat, Johnny saw nothing of her face for her handkerchief and the crutch-handle. But she was very quiet, and he scarcely thought she was crying. For himself, he was sad enough, in a heavy way, but in no danger of tears; and he turned again, and looked out of the window.

At last the cab stopped at the lych gate. Here Bob Smallpiece unexpectedly appeared, to lend a hand with the coffin. So that with the sexton, and the carpenter who was the undertaker, Uncle Isaac, and the keeper, the cabman's help was not wanted. The cabman lingered a moment, to shift cloths and aprons, and to throw a glance or two after the little company as it followed the clergyman, and then he hastened to climb to his seat and drive after a young couple that he spied walking in the main road; for they were strangers, and looked a likely fare back to the station.

Johnny found church much as it was on Sunday, except that to-day they sat near the front, and that he was conscious of a faint sense of family importance by reason of the special service, and the coffin so conspicuously displayed. A few neighbours—women mostly—were there, too; and when the coffin was carried out to the grave, they grouped themselves a little way off in the background, with Bob Smallpiece farther back still.

From the grave's edge one looked down over the country-side, green and hilly, and marked out in meadows by rows of elms, with hedges at foot. The wind came up briskly and set the dead leaves going again and again, chasing them among the tombs and casting them into the new red grave. Bessy was quiet no longer, but sobbed aloud, and Nan May took no more care to dry her eyes. Johnny made an effort that brought him near to choking, and then another; and then he fixed his attention on the cows in a meadow below, counted them with brimming eyes, and named them (for he knew them well) as accurately as the distance would let him. He would scarce trust himself to take a last look, with the others, at the coffin below and its bright tin plate, but fell straightway to watching a man mending thatch on a barn, and wondering that he wore neither coat nor waistcoat in such a fresh wind. And so, except for a stray tear or two, which nobody saw overflow from the brimming eyes, he faced it out, and walked away with the others under the curious gaze of the neighbours, who lined up by the path. And Smallpiece went off in the opposite direction with the carpenter, who carried back the pall folded over his arm, like a

cloak.

The four mourners walked back by the lanes, in silence. Uncle Isaac bore the restraint with difficulty, and glanced uneasily at Nan May's face from time to time, as though he were watching an opportunity to expound his sentiments at length. But Johnny saw nothing of this, for affliction was upon him. Now that gran'dad was passed away indeed—was buried, and the clods were rising quickly over him—now that even the coffin was gone from the cottage, and would never be seen again—it seemed that he had never understood before, and he awoke to the full bitterness of things. More, his effort at restraint was spent, and in the revulsion he found he could hold in no longer. He peeped into the thickets by the lane-side as he went, questing for an excuse to drop behind. Seeing no other, he stooped and feigned to tie his bootlace; calling, in a voice that quavered absurdly in trying to seem indifferent, "Go on, mother, I'm comin' presently!"

He dashed among the bushes, flung himself on the grass, and burst into a blind fury of tears, writhing as though under a shower of stinging blows. He had meant to cry quietly, but all was past control, and any might hear that chanced by. He scarce knew whether the fit had endured for seconds, minutes, or hours, when he was aware of his mother, sitting beside him and pressing his bursting head to her breast. Bessy was there too, and his mother's arms were round both alike.

With that he grew quieter and quieter still. "We mustn't break down, Johnny boy—there's hard struggles before us," his mother said, smoothing back his hair. "An' you must be very good to me, Johnny, you're the man now!"

He kissed her, and brushed the last of his tears away. "Yes, mother, I will," he said. He rose, calmer, awake to new responsibilities, and felt a man indeed. Nothing remained of his outbreak but a chance-coming shudder in the breath, and, as he helped Bessy to her feet, he saw, five yards off, among the bushes, Uncle Isaac, under his very tall hat, gazing blankly at the group, and gently rubbing the Turk's

head on his stick among the loose grey whiskers that bordered his large face.

VII.

Nan May rose another woman in the morning; for there was work before her. The children marvelled to see her so calm and so busy, so full of thought for the business in hand, so little occupied with sorrowful remembrance. The old man, prudent ever, had arranged years since for what had now befallen. There was a simple little will on a sheet of notepaper. There was a great and complicated list, on odd scraps of paper, thickly beset with additions, alterations, and crossings-out, of the “specimens” hoarded in the cottage; with pencil notes of values, each revised a dozen times, as the market changed. There was a Post-Office Savings Bank deposit book, with entries amounting to eight pounds ten, and a nomination form whereby Nan May might withdraw the money. There was no life-insurance, for the old man had surrendered it years ago, to secure the few pounds he needed to make up the full price of the cottage.

The will gave Nan May all there might be to take, and left her to execute. Uncle Isaac, on the return to the cottage the day before, had at length broken into speech, and by devious approaches, cunningly disguised and ostentatiously casual, had reached the will. But he got little by his motion, for though his niece told him the will’s purport, she protested that till to-morrow she should do nothing with it, nor did she even offer to produce it. Of course, he had scarcely expected a legacy himself; but still, he was Uncle Isaac, profound in experience, learned in the law, and an oracle in the family. It seemed, to say the least, a little scandalous that he should not have had the handling of this property, the selling, the control, the doling out, with such consideration the exertion might earn, and the accidents of arithmetic detach.

“It’s an important thing, is a will,” said Uncle Isaac sagely. “A thing as ought to be

seen to by a experienced person. You might jist look an' see 'ow it's wrote. If any's wrote in pencil it's nullavoid."

"No," replied Mrs. May, without moving. "It's all in ink."

Then, after a long pause: "Lawyers comes very expensive with wills," Uncle Isaac observed. "They come expensive alwis, an' mostly they rob the property accordin' to form o' lawr. It's best to get a man of experience, as you can trust, to go straight to Somerset 'ouse in form o' porpus . . . It's the cheapest way, an' safe. 'E takes the will, jist as it might be me, an' 'e goes to the 'thorities, an' 'e talks to 'em, knowin' an' confidential. 'Ere I am, ses 'e, as it might be me, on be'alf o' the last will an' 'oly testament as it might be o' Mr. May. An' I've come in form o' porpus, 'avin' objections to lawyers. In form o' porpus," Uncle Isaac repeated impressively, tapping a forefinger on the table: as was his way of blazoning an erudite phrase that else might pass unregarded.

"Poor gran'dad told me what to do about goin' to Somerset House, an' all that," answered Nan May, "in case anything happened. But I'd take it very kind if you'd come with me, Uncle Isaac, me not understandin' such things. But I can't think about it to-day." And with so much of his finger in the pie Uncle Isaac was fain to be content. And soon he left, declining to stay for the night—to Johnny's great relief—because his cheap return-ticket was available for the day and no more.

And now Johnny, having brought sheets of foolscap paper from Loughton, was set to work to make a fair copy of the amazing list of specimens; a work at great length accomplished in an unstable round hand, but on the whole with not so many blots. And Nan May's series of visits to Somerset House was begun, saddening her with a cost of one and ninepence each visit for fares in train and omnibus. The first, indeed, cost more, for Uncle Isaac's fare from Millwall was also to be paid. But he came no more, for in truth his failure as a man of business was instant and ignoble.

To begin with, the shadow of the awful building fell on him as he neared it,

extinguishing his confidence and stopping his tongue. In the quadrangle the very tall hat distinguished an Uncle Isaac of hushed speech and meek docility, and along the corridors it followed Nan May deferentially, in unresting pursuit of room No. 37. The room was reached at last, and here Uncle Isaac found himself constrained to open the business. For Nan May herself held back now, and the young man in gold-rimmed glasses fixed him with his eye. So, taking off his hat with both hands, Uncle Isaac, in a humble murmur, began:—"We've—good mornin', sir—we've come as it might be in form o' porpus—"

"What?"

"As regards to a will," Uncle Isaac explained desperately, dropping his technicality like a hot rivet. "As regards to a will an' dyin' testament which the late deceased did—did write out."

"Very well. Are you the executor?"

"Well, sir, not as it might be executor. No. But as uncle to Mr. May's daughter-in-law by marriage—"

"Are you?" The gentleman turned abruptly to Nan May, who gave him the will. Whereupon Uncle Isaac, in a hopeful way of recovering nerve and eloquence, was thrust out of the business, and told that Nan May alone would be dealt with. And he retired once more into shadow, with a little relief to leaven a great deal of injured dignity.

So that for the rest Nan May relied on herself alone, and hardened her face to the world. When the specimens came to be sold, a smart young man came from the London firm of naturalists, to make an offer. He examined the trays and cases as hastily and carelessly as was consistent with a privily sharp eye to all they held, and with the air of contempt proper for a professional buyer. For in such a matter of business the widow and the orphan needing money are the weak party, humble and timid, watching small signs with sinking hearts, and easy to beat: and a man of

business worth the name of one, takes advantage of the fact for every penny it will bring. So the smart young man, looking more contemptuous than ever, and dusting his fingers with his pocket-handkerchief, flung Nan May an offer of five pounds for the lot.

“No, thank-you, sir,” the woman answered with simple decision. “I’m sorry you’ve had the trouble. Good-morning.” Which was not the reply the young man had looked for, and indeed, not a reply easy of rejoinder. So he was constrained to some unbending of manner, and a hint that his firm might increase the offer if she would name a sum. And the whole thing ended with a letter carrying a cheque for forty pounds. Which was very handsome indeed, for the young man’s firm would scarce have paid more than eighty pounds for the collection In the ordinary way of trade.

And so the old man’s little affairs were gathered up, and the Inland Revenue took its bite out of the estate, and there were no more journeys to Somerset House. But nobody would buy the cottage.

VIII.

Just such a day as Johnny’s London memories always brought, cold and dry and brisk, found him perched on the cart that was to take him to London again. Besides himself, the cart held his mother and his sister, and the household furniture from the cottage; while Banks, the carrier, sat on the shaft. Bessy was made comfortable in the armchair; her mother sat on a bundle of bedding, whence it was convenient to descend when steep hills were encountered; and Johnny sat on the tail-board, and jumped off and on as the humour took him.

All through long Loughton village there was something of a triumphal progress, for people knew them, and turned to look. Bessy alone remained in the cart for the long pull up Buckhurst Hill, while Johnny, tramping beside and making many excursions into the thicket, flung up into her lap sprigs of holly with berries. Already they had

plenty, packed close in a box, but it is better to have too much than too little, so any promising head was added to the store. For it was December, and Christmas would come in three weeks or so. And ere that Nan May was to open shop in London. It was to be a chandler's shop, with aspirations toward grocery and butter: chandlery, grocery, and butter being things of the buying and selling whereof Nan May knew as little as anybody in the world, beyond the usual retail prices at the forest villages. But something must be done, and everything has a beginning somewhere. So Nan May resolutely set face to the work, to play the world with all the rigour of the game; and her figure, as she tramped sturdily up the hill beside the cart, was visible symbol of her courage. Always a healthy, clear-skinned, almost a handsome woman, active and shapely, she walked the hill with something of steadfast fierceness, as one joying in trampling an obstacle: her eyes fixed before her, and taking no heed of the view that opened to Bessy's gaze as she looked back from under the tilt of the cart; but busy with thought of the fight she was beginning, a little fearful, but by so much the gamer. Meanwhile, it was a good piece of business to decorate a shop with holly at Christmas, and here Johnny found holly ready for the work; it would cost money in London.

The cart crowned the hill-top, and still Nan May regarded not the show that lay behind, whereof Bessy took her fill for the moments still left. There Loughton tumbled about its green hills, beset with dusky trees, like a spilt boxful of toys, with the sad-coloured forest making the horizon line behind it. Away to the left, seen between the boughs of the near pines, High Beach steeple lifted from the velvety edge, and as far to the right, on its own hill, rose the square church tower that stood by gran'dad's grave. And where the bold curve of Staples Hill lost itself among the woods, some tall brown trees uprose above the rest and gave good-bye. For invisible beyond them lay the empty cottage in its patch of garden, grown dank and waste. Then roadside trees shut all out, and the cart stopped on the level to take up Nan May.

And now the old mare jogged faster along to Woodford Wells and through the Green, fringed with a wonder of big houses, and many broad miles of country seen between them; then, farther, down the easy slope of Rising Sun Road, with thick woods at the way's edge on each side, their winter austerity softened by the sunlight among the brown twigs. And so on and on, till they emerged in bushy Leyton Flats, and turned off for Leytonstone.

And now they were nearing London indeed. Once past the Green Man, they were on a tram-lined road, and there were shops and houses with scarce a break. Where there was one bricklayers on scaffoldings were building shopfronts. The new shops had a raw, disagreeable look, and some of these a little older were just old enough to be dirty without being a whit less disagreeable and raw. Some were prosperous, brilliant with gilt and plate-glass; others, which had started even with them, stood confessed failures, poor and mean, with a pathetic air—almost an expression—of disappointment in every window. Older buildings—some very old—stood about Harrow Green, but already the wreckers had begun to pull a cottage down to make room for something else. And then the new shops began again, and lined the road without a check, till they were new no longer, but of the uncertain age of commonplace London brick and mortar; and Maryland Point Railway Station was passed; and it was town indeed, with clatter and smoke and mud.

Stratford Broadway lay wide and busy, wth the church and the town-hall imposing and large. But soon the road narrowed and grew fouler, and the mouths of unclean alleys dribbled slush and dirty children across the pavement. Then there were factories, and the road passed over narrow canals of curiously iridescent sludge, too thick, to the casual eye, for the passage of any craft, but interesting to the casual nose. And there was a great, low, misty waste of the dullest possible rubbish, where grass would not grow; a more hopelessly desolate and dispiriting wilderness than Johnny had ever dreamed of or Bessy ever read; with a chemical manure-works in a far corner, having a smell of great volume and range.

They topped Bow Bridge, and turned sharply to the left. Now it was London itself, London by Act of Parliament. There was a narrow way with a few wharf gates, and then an open space, with houses centuries old, fallen on leaner years, but still grubbily picturesque. Hence the old mare trotted through a long and winding street that led by dirty entries, by shops, by big distilleries, by clean, dull houses where managers lived, by wooden inns swinging ancient signs, over canal bridges: to a place of many streets lying regularly at right angles, all of small houses, all clean, every one a counterpart of every other. And then—the docks and the ships. At least, the great dock-gates, with the giant pepper-box and the clock above them, and the high walls, with here and there a mast. And at intervals, as the houses permitted, the high walls and the masts were visible again and again in the short way yet to go, pass Blackwall Cross, till at last the cart stopped before a little shut-up shop, badly in want of paint; in a street where one gained the house-doors down areas maybe, or up steps, or on the level, from a pavement a little more than two feet wide; while the doors themselves, and the wooden rails that guarded all the steps, were painted in divers unaccustomed and original colours, and had nothing in common but a subtle flavour of ship's stores. Over the way was the wall of a ship-yard. And wheresoever there might be a view of houses from the back, there were small flagstaffs rigged as masts, with gaffs complete.

The door of the little shop opened, after a short struggle with the rusty lock, and Nan May and her children were at home in London.

IX.

The shop in Harbour Lane had been a greengrocer's, a barber's, a fried-fishmonger's, and a tripe-seller's. But chiefly it had been shut up, as it was now. Nobody had ever come into it with much money, it is true, but all had gone out of it with less than they brought. It was said, indeed, that the greengrocer had gone

out with nothing but the clothes he wore; but as he went no farther than the end of the street, where he drowned himself from a swing bridge, he needed no more, nor even so much. Mr. Dunkin, the landlord, had bought the place at a low price, as was his way in buying things; but he got very little out of his investment, which was not his way at all. It was a novelty that surprised and irritated Mr. Dunkin. He was a substantial tradesman, who had long relinquished counter work, for there were a dozen assistants in the two departments of his chief shop, eight for grocery and butter, and four for oil and saucepans, paint and mousetraps; and there were half a dozen branches, some in the one trade and some in the other, scattered about in as many neighbouring parishes. He was a large man, of vast sympathy. The tone of his voice, the grasp of his wide, pulpy hand, told of infinite tenderness toward the sorrows and sins of the world. Even in the early days when he had but one shop (a little one) and no shopman, he would weigh out a pound of treacle with so melting a benignity that the treacle seemed balm of Gilead, and a bounteous gift at the price. He would drive a bargain in a voice of yearning beneficence that left the other party ashamed of his own self-seeking, as well as something the poorer by the deal. It was a voice wherein a purr had a large part—a purr that was hoarse yet soothing, and eloquent of compassion; so that no man was so happy but a talk with Mr. Dunkin would persuade him that the lot was hard indeed, that entitled him to such a wealth of sympathy. It was a wealth that Mr. Dunkin squandered with no restraint but this, that it carried no other sort of wealth with it.

On the whole, Nan May had counted herself fortunate in falling in with Mr. Dunkin. For when, in his fatherly solicitude, he discovered that she had a little money in hand, he undertook to supply her with stock, and to give her certain hints in the mystery of chandlery. He, also, felt no cause for complaint: for he had hoped for a tenant merely, and here was tenant and customer in one. More, she was a widow, knowing nothing of trade, so that it might be possible to sell her what others would not buy, at a little extra profit. As to rent, moreover, he was doing well. For on the

day the deposit was paid, Mrs. May had found little choice among vacant shops, and this was in a situation to suit her plans as to Johnny and his trade; and as she was tired and nervous, full of plain anxiety, sympathetic Mr. Dunkin saw his chance of trying for an extra shilling a week, and got it. And Nan May was left to pay for what painting and cleaning the place might need. It needed a good deal, as Mr. Dunkin had ruefully observed two days before, in expectation of a decorator's bill if ever a tenant came.

And now Nan May addressed herself to the work. First, the house must be cleaned; the paint could be considered after. She had swept one room into a habitable state on her last day in town, and here her little store of furniture was stacked. Then, her sleeves and her skirt turned back, and a duster over her head, she assailed walls and ceilings with a broom, and after these the floors. So far Johnny helped, but when scrubbing began he hindered. So it was that for a day or so, until it was time for him to help with the windows, he had leisure wherein to make himself acquainted with the neighbourhood.

It was a neighbourhood with a flavour distinct from that of the districts about it. There the flat rows of six-roomed cottages, characterless all, stretched everywhere, rank behind rank, in masses unbroken except by the busier thoroughfares of shops. Here each little house asserted its individuality by diversity of paint as much as by diversity of shape. It was, indeed, the last stronghold of the shipwrights and mast-makers, fallen from their high estate since the invasion of iron ships and northern competition. In fact, Shipwrights' Row was the name of a short rank of cottages close by, with gardens in front, each with its mast and flag complete. In other places, where the back-yards were very small, the flagstaff and stays were apt to take to their use the whole space: the pole rising from the exact centre, and a stay taking its purchase from each extreme corner, so that anybody essaying a circuit must perform it with many sudden obeisances. The little streets had an air of cleanliness all their own, largely due to the fresh paint that embellished whatsoever

there was an excuse for painting. Many front-doors were reached by two stone steps, always well whitened; and whether there were steps or not, the flagstones before each threshold were distinguished by a whited semicircle five feet in diameter. Noting this curious fact as he tramped along one such street, Johnny was startled by an angry voice close at his elbow, a voice so very sudden and irate that he jumped aside ere he looked for the source. A red-faced woman knelt within a door.

"Idle young faggit!" she said. "Stompin' yer muddy boots all over my clean step!" And she made so vigorous a grasp at a broom that Johnny went five yards at a gallop.

Now truly there was no step of any sort to the house. And Johnny had but crossed the semicircle because he conceived the footpath to be public property, and because it was narrow. But he learnt, afterwards, that the semicircle was a sacred institution of the place, in as high regard among the women as its fellow-fetish, the flagstaff, was among the men; also that none but grown people—and those of low habits or in drink—dared trespass on it; and that it was always called "the step." He learnt much, too, in the matter of paint. Every male inhabitant of Harbour Lane, Shipwrights' Row, and the neighbouring streets, carried, in his leisure moments, a pipe, a pot of paint, and a brush. He puffed comfortably at the pipe, and stumped about his back (or front) garden with the paint-pot in one hand and the brush in the other, "touching-up" whatever paint would stick to. Rails, posts, water-butts, dustbins, clothes-posts, all were treated, not because they needed it (for they were scarce dry from the last coat), but because there was the paint, and there was the brush, and there was the leisure; and this was the only way to use all three. So that most things about the gardens took an interesting variety of tints in the run of the year, since it was rarely the case that the same colour was used twice in succession. When all wooden surfaces were covered, it was customary to take a turn at window-sills, rain-water pipes, and the stones or oyster-shells that bordered the little flower-beds; and when nothing else was left, then the paint-pot and the brush and the pipe were

conveyed to the front, and the front-door, which had been green, became royal blue, or flaming salmon; as did the railings, if there were any, and the window-frames. Two things alone were not subject to such changes of complexion: the flagstaff and the brick pavings. For it was a law immutable that the flagstaffs should be speckless white, and the bricks a cheerful vermilion; this last a colour frequently renewed, because of nailed boots, but done in good oil paint, because of wet weather. Everything else took the range of the rainbow, and something beyond; so that it was possible, in those houses where two families lived, to tell at a glance whether the upstairs family were on terms of intimacy or merely of distant civility with the downstairs, by the colours, uniform or diverse, of the sills and the model fences that guarded the flower-pots on them. For the token and sign of friendship in Harbour Lane was the loan or the exchange of paint. It was the proper method of breaking the ice between new acquaintances, and was recognised as such by general sanction. The greeting, “Bit o’ blue paint any use to ye?” and the offer of the pot across the back fence, were the Harbour Lane equivalents of a call and cards; and the newcomer made early haste with an offer of yellow or green paint in return. Indeed, it was in this way that the paint arrived which afterwards made Nan May’s little shop a bedazzlement to the wayfarer, and furnished Johnny with the first painting job he ever grew tired of. But newcomers were rare in the neighbourhood, for it was a colony apart, with independent manners and habits of thought. True, it had its own divisions and differences: as, for instance, on the question whether or not the association of the paint-pot and brush with the Sunday paper were sinful; but these divisions were purely internal, and nothing was heard of them beyond the boundaries.

But paint was something more than a recreation and an instrument of social amenity. It furnished the colony with an equivalent of high finance, wherein all the operations proper to Money and Credit (as spelt with capital initials) were reflected in Paint. For it was a permanent condition of life in Harbour Lane and thereabouts, that

everybody owed everybody else some amount of Paint, and was owed Paint, in his turn, by others. So that a complicated system of exchange prevailed, in which verbal bills and cheques were drawn. As thus, to make a simple case:

"'Ullo, Bill, what about that pot o' paint?"

"Well, I was goin' to bring it round to-night."

"All right. But don't bring it to me—take it to George. Ye see, I owe Jim a bit o' paint, an' 'e owes Joe a bit, an' Joe owes George a bit. So that'll make it right all round. Don't forget!"

With many such arrangements synchronising, crossing and mixing with each other, and made intricate by differing degrees and manners of debit and credit between Bill and George and Jim and Joe, the unlikely subject of Paint became involved in a mathematical web of exceeding interest, a small image of the Money Market, a sort of chaos by double entry wherein few operators were able to strike a balance at a moment, and most were vaguely uncertain whether their accounts inclined toward an affluence of Paint or toward sheer bankruptcy. An exciting result attained without the aid of capital, and with no serious hurt to anybody.

But these were things that Johnny learned in the succeeding weeks. In his walks while his mother scrubbed floors at home, he observed one or two matters. As to costume, he perceived that the men wore blue dungaree jackets with large bone buttons, and outside these, now that it was winter, short pilot coats of dark blue stuff, thick and stiff, like a board. The trousers were moleskins, perhaps once white, all stained with very shiny black patches, and all of one cut, which placed the seat (very baggy) a few inches above the bend of the knee; and there was a peaked cap, of the same shiny black all over that distinguished parts of the trousers. He also saw that whereas yesterday the backyards were brisk with fluttering linen, to-day they held scarce any. For yesterday was Monday, and it was matter of pride among the energetic housewives of the place to get washing done at the beginning of the week.

For a woman fell in her neighbours' respect the later in the week her washing day came.

So Johnny explored the streets with wide eyes and a full heart. For here was London, where they made great things—ships and engines. There were places he fancied he recognised—great blank walls with masts behind them. But now the masts seemed fewer and shorter than in the old days: as in truth they were, for now more of the ships were steamships, filling greater space for half the show of mast. Then in other places he came on basins filled with none but sailing-ships, and here the masts were as tall and fine as ever, stayed with much cordage, and had their yards slung at a gallant slope, like the sword on Sir Walter Raleigh's hip. And at Blackwall Stairs, looking across the river, stood an old, old house that Johnny stared at for minutes together: a month or two later he heard the tradition that Sir Walter Raleigh himself had lived there. It was first of a row of old waterside buildings, the newest of which had looked across, and almost fallen into, the river, when King George's ships had anchored off Blackwall—and King Charles's for that matter. There, too, stood the Artichoke Tavern, clean and white and wooden, a heap of gables and windows all out of perpendicular: a house widest and biggest everywhere at the top, and smallest at the ground floor; a house that seemed ready to topple into the river at a push, so far did its walls and galleries overhang the water, and so slender were the piles that supported them. Here, in the square space on the quay, brown men in blue jerseys sold bloaters by the score, stringing them through the gills with tarry yarn; and half the brown men wore earrings. Below, on the foreshore, lay many boats, and children ran among them, or raked for river-mussels among the stones.

In another place he came on just such market-streets as he remembered to have trotted along, at his mother's side, in the old London life; though now, indeed, they seemed something dirtier and meaner, and the people seemed less cheerful. But this was a place away from Harbour Lane—a neighbourhood of dull and dingy rows of

little houses, range on range. And still farther he found another street of shops, or rather half a street, for one side was a blank wall. But no great skeleton ship lifted its ribs above the bricks, and no hammers clanged behind them; for it was a ship-yard abandoned, and a painted board, thick with grime, offered the place for sale or hire. Some of the shops opposite were abandoned too, and the others were poor and dull. Johnny walked a few steps backward, looking at the shops, and when he turned about at a corner, he almost scorched himself at a coke fire where chestnuts were roasting; and there behind the fire stood the pockmarked man himself, not a whit altered! There he stood, with his hands deep in his pockets, and tapped the kerb with his clogged boots, just as he had stood when the great ship was making, and the lights flared round it, and the shops were all open and busy: perhaps the pitted face was a trifle paler, but that was all.

But Harbour Lane and thereabout were the most interesting parts, and the pleasantest for Johnny. Just beyond the Stairs, and the old houses, and the Artichoke Tavern, was a dock-inlet, with an extraordinary bridge that halved in the middle, and swung back to each of two quays, to let ships through. Men worked it quite easily, with a winch, and Johnny could have watched for an hour. But just here he caught sight of an acquaintance. For down on the quay below the bridge-end, sitting on a mooring-post, was Mr. Butson. A trifle seedy and fallen in condition, Johnny fancied, and grumly ill-used as ever. As Johnny looked, Mr. Butson took a pipe from his pocket, and a screw of paper. The paper yielded nothing. Mr. Butson raked through both jacket-pockets, and scowled at his empty hands. In the end, after a gloomy inspection of the pipe, he put it away and returned to savage meditation. And Johnny went home.

X.

It was at Maidment and Hurst’s, engineers, that Johnny’s father had met his death;

and it was to Maidment and Hurst that Nan had resolved to take the boy, and beg an apprenticeship for him. True, the firm had at the time done more than might have been expected of it, for the accident had been largely a matter of heedlessness on the victim's part, and the victim was no old hand, but had taken his job only a few months before. It had seen that nothing was lacking for the widow's immediate needs, nor for a decent funeral; and it had offered to find places in an orphanage for the children. But Nan May could not bring herself to part with them: Bessie, indeed, was barely out of the hospital at the time. And then the lonely old butterfly-hunter had cut matters short by carrying them off all three.

So that now, if Johnny were to learn a trade, Maidment and Hurst's was his best chance, for it was just possible that the firm would take him apprentice without premium, when it was reminded of his father. In this thing Nan May wasted no time. The house once clean within, and something done toward stocking the shop, Johnny was made ready, in the best of his clothes, for inspection. It was a muddy morning, and Mrs. May had fears for the polish on Johnny's boots. Gladly would she have carried him across the miry streets, as she had done in the London of years ago, though she knew better than to hint at such an outrage on his dignity. So they walked warily, dodging puddles with mutual warnings, and fleeing the splashes of passing vans. Truly London was changed, even more in Nan May's eyes than in Johnny's. The people seemed greyer, more anxious, worse fed, than when she lived among them before, a young wife in a smiling world, with the best part of thirty-eight shillings to spend every week. The shops were worse stocked, and many that she remembered well were shut. True, some flourished signs of prosperity, but to her it seemed prosperity of a different and a paltrier sort—vulgar and trumpery. Once out of the Harbour Lane district, the little houses lacked the snug, geranium-decked, wire-blinded, rep-curtained comfort of aspect she remembered so well—the air that suggested a red fire within, a shining copper kettle, a high fender, and muffins on a trivet. Things were cheap, and cold, and grubby. Above all, the

silent ship-yards oppressed her fancies. Truly, this looked an ill place for new trade! In her hunt for the vacant shop she had encountered no old friends, and now, though she walked through familiar streets, she had little but fancied recognition, now and again, of some face at a shop door.

Presently they turned a corner and came upon a joyful crowd of boys. They ran, they yelled, they flung, and in their midst cursed and floundered a rusty rag of a woman, drunk and infuriate, harried, battered and bedeviled. Her clothes were of decent black, but dusty and neglected, and one side of her skirt dripped with fresh mud. Her hair was draggled about her shoulders, and her bonnet hung in it, a bunch of mangled crape, while she staggered hither and thither, making futile swipes at the nimble rascals about her. She struck out feebly with a little parcel of bacon-rashers rolled in a paper, and already a rasher had escaped, to be flung at her head, and flung again by the hand that could first snatch it from the gutter.

“Yah! Old Mother Born-drunk!” shouted the young savages, and two swooped again with the stretched skipping-rope that had already tripped their victim twice. But she clasped a post with both arms, and cursed at large, hoarse and impotent.

Nan May started and stood, and then hurried on. For she had recognised a face at last, grimed and bloated though it had grown. “Law!” she said, “it’s Emma Pacey! To think—to think of it!”

Indeed the shock was great, and the change amazing. It was a change that would have baffled recognition by an eye that had less closely noted the Emma Pacey of seventeen years ago. But Emma Pacey was a smart girl then (though fast and forward, Nan May had always said), and had caused some little disturbance in a course of true love which led, nevertheless, to Nan’s wedding after all. In such circumstances a woman views her rival’s face, as she views her clothes, with a searching eye, and remembers well. “And to come to that!” mused Nan May, perplexed at a shade of emotion that seemed ill-turned to the occasion, wherein the

simple soul saw nothing of womanish triumph.

But the changes seemed not all for the worse. There were busy factories, and some that had been small were now large. Coffee-stalls, too, were set up in two or three places, where no such accommodation was in the old time: always a sign of increasing trade. But on the whole the walk did nothing to raise Nan's spirits.

Johnny saw little. The excursion was to decide whether he should learn to make steam-engines or not, though what manner of adventure he was to encounter he figured but vaguely. He was to come into presence of some gentlemen, presumably—gentlemen who would settle his whole destiny off-hand, on a cursory examination of his appearance and manner. He must be alert to show his best behaviour, though what things the gentlemen might do or say, and what unforeseen problems of conduct might present themselves, were past guessing; though he guessed and guessed, oblivious of present circumstance. Only once before had he felt quite that quality of trepidation, and that was three years back, when he trudged along the road to Woodford to get a tooth drawn.

But he came off very well, though the preliminaries were solemn—rather more portentous, he thought, than anything in the dentist's waiting-room. There was a sort of counter, with bright brass rails, and a ground-glass box with an office-boy inside it. The unprecedented and unbusinesslike apparition of Mrs. May, with a timid request to see Mr. Maidment or Mr. Hurst (one was dead, and the other never came near the place), wholly demoralised the office-boy, who retired upon his supports in the depths of the office. Thence there presently emerged a junior clerk, who, after certain questions, undertook to see if the acting partner were in. Then came a time of stealthy and distrustful inspection on the part of the office-boy, who, having regained his box, and gathered up his wits, began to suspect Johnny of designs on his situation. But at last Johnny and his mother were shown into an inner room, furnished with expensive austerity, where a gentleman of thirty or thirty-five

(himself expensively austere of mien) sat at a writing-table. The gentleman asked Mrs. May one or two rather abrupt questions about her dead husband—dates, and so forth—and referred to certain notes on his table after each answer. Then Nan offered him one of three papers which she had been fiddling in her hand since first she passed the street door—her marriage "lines."

"O, ah, yes—yes—of course," said the gentleman with some change of manner. "Of course. Quite right. Best to make sure—can't remember everybody. Sit down, Mrs. May. Come here, my boy. So you want to be an engineer, eh?"

"Yes, sir, if you please." He never thought it would be quite so hard to get it out.

"Ah. Plenty of hard work, you know. Not afraid of that, are you?"

"No, sir."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen next month, sir."

"Get on all right at school? What standard?"

"Passed seventh, sir."

Mrs. May handed over her other two papers: a "character" from the schoolmaster and another from the rector.

When the gentleman had read them, "Yes, yes, very good—very good, indeed," he said. "But you've not finished learning yet, you know, my boy, if you're to be an engineer. Fond of drawing?"

"Yes, sir."

And Nan May chimed in: "O, yes, sir, very fond."

"Well, if you stick well at your drawing in the evenings, and learn the theory, you'll be a foreman some day—perhaps a manager. It all depends on yourself. You shall have a chance to show us what you're made of. That's all we can do—the rest is for yourself, as I've said."

“Yes, sir, thank-you, sir—I’ll try.” And Mrs. May was audibly thankful too, and confident of Johnny.

“Very well, it’s settled.” The gentleman rang a bell, and bade the junior clerk “Just send for Cottam.”

“I have sent for the foreman,” he went on, “whose shop you will be in. He’ll look after you as long as you behave well and keep up to your work. You won’t see me very often, but I shall know all about you, remember.” And he turned to his table, and wrote.

Presently there was a sudden thump at the door, which opened slowly and admitted the foremost part—it was the abdomen—of Cottam the foreman. He was of middle height, though he seemed short by reason of his corpulence; deliberate in all his movements, yet hard, muscular, and active. He turned, as it were on his own axis, at the edge of the door, shut it with one hand, while he dangled a marine peaked cap in the other; and looked, with serene composure, from over his scrub of grey beard, first at Mrs. May, then at Johnny, and last at his employer.

“Oh, Cottam,” the gentleman said, writing one more word, and letting drop his pen, “this lad’s name is John May. I expect you’ll remember his father. Bad accident, I believe, in the heavy turning shop; died, in fact.” This with a slight glance at Nan May.

The foreman turned—turned his whole person, for his head was set on his vast shoulders with no visible neck between—bent a trifle, and inspected Johnny as he would have inspected some wholly novel and revolutionary piece of machinery. “Y-u-u-us,” he said, with a slowly rising inflection, expressive of cautious toleration, as of one reserving a definite opinion. “Y-u-u-us!”

“Well, he’s to come on as apprentice, and I’d like him to come into your shop. There’ll be no difficulty about that, will there?”

“N-o-o-o!” with the same deliberate inflection, similarly expressive.

"Then you'd better take him down, and tell the timekeeper. He may as well begin on Monday, I suppose."

"Y-u-u-us!" tuned once more in an ascending scale. And with that the acting partner bade Mrs. May good-morning, turned to his writing, and the business was over.

Cottam the foreman put his cap on his head and led the way through the outer office, along a corridor, down the stairs and across the yard, with no indecent haste. It was a good distance to go, and Johnny was vaguely reminded of a circus procession that had once passed through Loughton, and that he had followed up for nearly three miles, behind the elephant.

Half-way across the yard the foreman stopped, and made a half turn, so as to face Nan May as she came up. He raised an immense leathery fist, and jerked a commensurate thumb over his shoulder. "That's the young guv'nor," he said in a hoarse whisper, with a confidential twitch of one cheek that was almost a wink. "That's the young guv'nor, that is. Smart young chap. Knowed 'im so 'igh." He brought down his hand to the level of his lowest waistcoat button, twitched his cheek again, nodded, and walked on.

The timekeeper inhabited a little wooden cabin just within the gates, and looked out of a pigeon-hole at all comers. Mr. Cottam put his head into this hole—a close fit—and when he withdrew it, the timekeeper, a grey man, came out of his side door and stared hard at Johnny. Then he growled "All right," and went in again.

"Six o'clock o' Monday mornin'," Mr. Cottam pronounced conclusively, addressing Mrs. May. "Six o'clock o' Monday mornin'. 'Ere," with a downward jerk of his thumb to make it plain that somewhere else would not do. Then, without a glance at Johnny, whom he had disregarded since they left the office, he turned and walked off. Johnny and his mother were opening the small door that was cut in the great gate, when Mr. Cottam stopped and turned. "Mornin'!" he roared, and went on.

Mother and boy went their way joyously. Here was one of Nan May's troubles

dissolved in air, and as for Johnny, a world of wonders was before him. Now he would understand how steam made engines go, and all day he would see them going—he would make engines himself, in fact. And for this delightful pursuit he would be paid. Six shillings a week was what apprentices got in their first year—a shilling for every day of work. Next year he would get eight shillings, and then ten, and so on. And at twenty-one he would be a man indeed, an engineer like his father before him. More, he was to draw. The gentleman had told him to draw in his spare time. The clang of hammers was as a merry peal from the works that lined their way, and the hoots of steamships on the river made them a moving music.

Nan May wondered to see such merry faces about the streets on the way home. Truly the place was changed; but, perhaps, after all, it was no such bad place, even now. The street was quiet where they had seen the drunken woman, though two very small boys were still kicking a filthy slice of bacon about the gutter. But three streets beyond they saw her for a moment. For the blackguard boys had contrived to topple Mother Born-drunk into a hand-barrow, which they were now trundling along at such a pace that the bedraggled sufferer could do no more than lie and cling to the rails, a gasping, uncleanly heap. Truly Emma Pacey's punishment was upon her.

Bessy brightened wonderfully at the news of Johnny's success. For she was thoughtful and "old-fashioned" even among the prematurely sage girl-children of her class, and she had been fretting silently. Now she hopped about with something of her old activity. She reported that the next-door neighbour on the left had been persistently peeping over the wall, and that just before their arrival the peep had been accompanied by a very artificial cough, meant to attract attention. So Mrs. May went into the back-yard.

"Mornin', mum," said the next-door neighbour, a very red-faced man in a dungaree jacket. "Weather's cleared up a bit. I've bin 'avin' 'alf a day auf, touchin' up things." He sank with a bob behind the wall, and rose again with a paint-pot in his

lifted hand. “Bit o’ red paint any use to ye?”

XI.

The red paint-pot, and a blue one from the same quarter, together with a yellow one from the neighbours on the other side, a white one from an old lighterman in the house behind, and a suitable collection of brushes subscribed by all three, were Johnny’s constant companions till the end of that weary week. The shop-shutters grew to be red, with a blue border. The window-frames were yellow, the wall beneath was white, so was the cornice above; and the door and the door-posts were red altogether, because the red paint went farthest, and the red pot had been fullest to begin with. Not only did the length of the job work off Johnny’s first enthusiasm, but its publicity embarrassed him. Perched conspicuously on a step-ladder, painting a shop in such stirring colours as these, he was the cynosure of all wayfaring folk, the target of whatever jibes their wits might compass. Three out of four warned him that the paint was laid on wrong side out. Some, in unkindly allusion to certain chance splashes, reminded him that he hadn’t half painted the window-panes; and facetious boys, in piteous pantomime, affected to be reduced to instant blindness by sudden knowledge of Johnny’s brilliant performance. But he was most discomforted by those who merely stood and stared, invisible behind him. If only he could have seen them it would not have been so bad; the oppressive consciousness that some contemptuous grown man behind and below—possibly a painter by trade—was narrowly observing every stroke of the brush, shook his nerve and enfeebled his execution. Most of these earnest spectators seemed to have no pressing business of their own, and their inspections were prolonged. One critic found speech to remark, as he turned to go his way: “Well, you are makin’ a bloomin’ mess up there!” But most, as if at a loss for words by mere amazement, sheered off with: “Well, blimy!” It was discouraging to find that all these people could have done it so much better,

and, long before the job was finished, Johnny was sore depressed and very humble, as well as tired. Only one of all his witnesses offered help, and he was a surprising person: very tall, very thin, and very sooty from work; with splay feet, sloping shoulders, a long face of exceeding diffidence, and long arms, which seemed to swing and flap irresponsibly with the skirts of his long overcoat, and to be a subject of mute apology. He saw Johnny tip-toeing at the very top of the steps, making a bad shift to reach the cornice. He stopped, looked about him, and then went on a step or two; stopped again, and came back, with a timorous glance at the shop window; and when Johnny turned and looked, he said, in a voice scarce above a whisper: "Can'tcher reach it?"

"Not very well."

"Let's come." And when Johnny descended, the long man, with one more glance about the street, went up three steps at a time and laid the paint on rapidly, many feet at a sweep. He came down and shifted the steps very easily with one hand—and they were heavy steps—went up again, and in three minutes carried the paint to the very end of the cornice. Then he came down, with a sheepish smile at Johnny's thanks, and shambled as far as next door, where he let himself in with a latch-key. And on Friday, at dinner-time, perceiving Johnny's progress from his window on the upper floor—he was a lodger, it seemed—he came stealthily down and gave the cornice another coat.

On Saturday morning the shop was opened in form, though Johnny's painting was not finished till dusk. Very little happened. A few children stopped on their way, and stared in at the door. The first customer was a boy from among these, who came in to beg a piece of string; and infested Harbour Lane for the rest of the day, swinging a dead rat on the end of it. Hours passed, and Nan May's spirits fell steadily. A few pounds, a very few—they could scarce be made to last three weeks—was all her reserve, and most of her scanty stock was perishable. If it spoiled it could never be

replaced, and unless people bought it, spoil it must. What more could she do? Industry, determination, and all the rest were well enough, but when all was said and done, nothing could make people come and buy.

Near noon the second customer came—a little girl this time. She wanted a bottle of ink for a halfpenny. There were half-a dozen little bottles of ink in a row in the window; but the price was a penny, so the little girl went away. It was a dull dinner that day. Bessy invented ingenious conjectures to account for the lack of trade, and prophesied a change in the afternoon, or the evening, or perhaps next week, or at latest the week after. Her mother could not understand. Customers came to other shops; why not to this one?

She had seen nothing of Uncle Isaac since she had come to Harbour Lane, though he knew where to find her. She had hoped he would lend a hand with the painting, or with the display of the stock; but no doubt he had been too busy. True, Johnny thought he had seen him once from the steps, some way down the street, but that must have been a mistake; for Uncle Isaac would not have come so near them without calling, nor would he have bolted instantly round the nearest corner at sight of the boy and his work, as Johnny had fancied he had.

The afternoon began no better than the morning. Nobody came but a child, who asked for sixpenn'orth of coppers, till about four. Then a hurried woman demanded a penn'orth of mixed pickles in a saucer, and grumbled at the quantity. She wouldn't come into the shop again, at anyrate; a threat so discomposing (for was not the woman the first paying customer?) that for hours Nan May could not forgive herself for her illiberality; though indeed she gained but a weak fraction of a farthing by the transaction.

Half an hour more went, and then there came a truly noble customer. He looked like a bricklayer, and he was far from sober: so far, indeed, that Johnny, on the steps, spying the mazy sinuosity of his approach, got a step lower and made ready to jump,

in case of accidents. But the bricklayer, conscious of the presence of many ladders, steered wide into the roadway, and there stopped, fascinated by the brilliancy before him. Some swaying moments of consideration resolved him that this was a shop: and after many steps up the curb, and as many back in the gutter, he picked a labyrinthine path among the myriad ladders, narrowly missing the real one as he went, shouldered against the wet door-post, and stumbled toward the counter. Here he regarded a bladder of lard with thoughtful severity, till Nan May timorously asked what he wanted.

"Shumm for kidsh," he replied sternly, to the lard. "Shummforkidsh." For some moments his scowl deepened; then he raised his hand and pointed. "W—wha'sha'?" he demanded.

"Lard."

"Tharr'll do." He plunged his hand into his trousers pocket. "Tharr'll do. 'Ow mush?"

"Sevenpence halfpenny a pound."

"Orrigh'? Gi's 'oldovit." He reached an unsteady hand, imperilling bottles; but Nan May was quicker, and took the bladder of lard from its perch.

"How much?" she asked.

"'Ow much? Thash wha' I wan' know. You give it 'ere, go on." His voice rose disputatively, and he fell on the bladder of lard with both hands. "'Ow mush?"

Nan reflected that it weighed more than three pounds, and that she had paid Mr. Dunkin eighteenpence for it. "Two shillings," she said.

"Two shillin'. Orrigh'," and instantly what remained of the new customer's week's wages was scattered about the counter. Mrs. May took two shillings and returned the rest; which with some difficulty was thrust back into the pocket. And the new customer, after looking narrowly about him in search of his purchase, and at last

discovering it under his arm, sallied forth with a wipe against the other door-post, and continued his winding way: a solemn and portentous bricklayer, with red paint on his shoulders and whiskers, and a bladder of lard that slipped sometimes forward and sometimes backward from his embrace, and was a deal of trouble to pick up again.

Here was a profit of sixpence at a stroke, unlikely as the chance was to recur; and it raised Nan's spirits, unreasonably enough. Still, the bricklayer brought luck of a sort. For there were three more customers within the next hour, two bringing a halfpenny and one a penny. And in the evening five or six came, one spending as much as fourpence. This was better, perhaps, but poor enough. At ten that night Nan May reckoned her profit for the day at ninepence farthing, including the bricklayer's sixpence; and she was sick with waiting and faint with fear. At half-past ten Uncle Isaac turned up.

"Ah hum," he said; "bin paintin'. Might 'a' laid it on a bit evener. There's right ways o' layin' on paint, an' there's wrong ways, an' one way ain't the same as the other." He raised his finger at Johnny instructively. "Far from it and contrairy, there's a great difference." Uncle Isaac paused, and no further amplification of his proposition occurring to him, he turned to Mrs. May. "'Ow's trade?" he asked.

Nan May shook her head sadly. "Very bad, uncle," she said. "Hardly any at all." And she felt nearer crying than ever since the funeral.

"Ah," said Uncle Isaac, sitting on a packing case—empty, but intended to look full; "ah, what you want's Enterprise. Enterprise; that's what you want. What is it as stimilates trade an' encourages prosperity to—to the latest improvements? Enterprise. Why is commercial opulentness took—at least, wafted—commercial opulentness wafted round the 'ole world consekince o' what? Consekince o' Enterprise." Uncle Isaac tapped the counter with his forefinger and gazed solemnly in Nan May's troubled face. "Consekince o' Enterprise," he repeated slowly, with

another tap. Then he added briskly, with a glance at the inner door: "'Adjer supper?"

"No, uncle," Nan answered. "I never thought of it. But, now you're here, p'raps you'll have a bit with us?"

"Ah—don't mind if I do," Uncle Isaac responded cheerfully. "That looks a nice little bit o' bacon. Now a rasher auf that, an' a hegg—got a hegg? O yus." He saw a dozen in a basin. "A rasher auf that, an' a hegg or two, 'ud be just the thing, with a drop o' beer, wouldn't it?"

Johnny fetched the beer, and Uncle Isaac had two rashers and four eggs; and he finished with a good solid piece of bread, and the first slice—a large one—out of the Dutch cheese from the counter. Nan May made no more than a pretence at eating a little bread and cheese.

When at last the jug was empty, and Uncle Isaac was full, he leaned back in his chair, and for some minutes exercised his lips in strange workings and twistings, with many incidental clicks and sucks and fizzes, while he benignantly contemplated the angle of the ceiling. When at last the display flagged, he brought his gaze gradually lower, till it rested on the diminished piece of bacon. "None so bad, that bacon," he observed, putting his head aside with a critical regard. "Though p'raps rayther more of a breakfast specie than a supper." He laid his head to the other side, as one anxious to be impartial. "Yus," he went on thoughtfully, "more of a breakfast specie, as you might say." Then after a pause, he added, with the air of one announcing a brilliant notion:—"I b'lieve—yus, I do b'lieve I'll try a bit for breakfast to-morrer mornin'!"

"If you like, uncle," Nan answered, a little faintly. "But—but-" timidly—"I was thinking p'raps it'll make it look rather small to—to put on the counter."

"So it would—so it would," Uncle Isaac admitted frankly; and indeed the remaining piece was scarce of four rashers' capacity. "Pity to cut it, as you say, Nan. Thanks—I'll just wrop it up as it is. It'll come in for Monday too; an' that large bit

o’ streaky’ll look a deal more nobler on the counter.”

Uncle Isaac’s visit swept away the day’s profits and a trifle more. But certainly, Uncle Isaac must not be offended now that things looked so gloomy ahead.

Bessy lay, and strained her wits far into the night, inventing comfortable theories and assurances, and exchanging them with her mother for others as hopeful. But in the morning each pillow had its wet spot.

XII.

But Monday saw another beginning. Johnny must rise soon after five now, to reach his work at six; but on this, the first morning, he was awake and eager at half-past four. Early as he was, his mother was before him, and as he pulled his new white ducks over his every-day clothes he could hear her moving below. Nan May was resolved that the boy should go out to begin the world fed and warm at least, and as cheerful as might be.

For this one morning Johnny felt nothing of the sleepy discomfort of any house in pitch dark a little before five. Two breakfasts were ready for him, one for the present moment (which he scarce touched, for he was excited), and another in a basin and a red handkerchief, for use at the workshop, with a new tin can full of coffee. For the half-hour allowed for breakfast would scarce suffice for the mere hurrying home and hurrying back again; and the full hour at midday would give him bare time for dinner with his mother.

Bessy was infected with the excitement, and stumped downstairs to honour Johnny’s setting out. He left the shop-door half an hour too soon, with a boot flung after him. The darkness of the street seemed more solid at this hour than ever at midnight, and it almost smothered the faint gas-lights. Now and again a touch of sleet came down the wind, and a little dirty, half-melted snow of yesterday made the ways sloppy. Nobody was about, to view the manly glory of Johnny’s white ducks, and he was

not sorry now that his overcoat largely hid them, for the wind was cold. And he reflected with satisfaction that the warming of his coffee on a furnace would smoke the inglorious newness off the tin can ere he carried it home in the open day.

The one or two policemen he met regarded him curiously, for workmen were not yet moving. But the coffee-stall was open by the swing bridge, and here the wind came over the river with an added chill. The coffee-stall keeper had no customers, and on the bridge and in the straight street beyond it nobody was in sight. Till presently a small figure showed indistinctly ahead, and crossed the road as though to avoid him. It moved hurriedly, keeping timidly to the wall, and Johnny saw it was a girl of something near his own age. He tramped on, and the girl, once past, seemed to gather courage, turned, and made a few steps after him. At this he stopped, and she spoke from a few yards off. She was a decently-dressed and rather a pretty girl, as he could see by the bad light of the nearest lamp, but her face was drawn with alarm, and her eyes were wet.

“Please have you seen a lady anywhere?” she asked tremulously. “Ill?”

Johnny had seen no lady, ill or well, and when he said no, the young girl, with a weak “Thank-you,” hastened on her way. It was very odd, thought Johnny, as he stared into the dark where she vanished. Who should lose a lady—ill—in Blackwall streets at this time of a pitch dark morning? As he thought, there rose in his mind the picture of gran’dad, straying and bloody and sick to death, that night that seemed so far away, though it was but a month or two since. Maybe the lady had wandered from her bed in some such plight as that. Johnny was sorry for the girl’s trouble, and would have liked to turn aside and join in her search; but this was the hour of great business of his own, and he went his way about it.

The policemen were knocking at doors now, rousing workmen, who answered with shouts from within. An old night-watchman, too, scurrying his hardest (for he had farther to go than the policemen), banged impatiently at the knockers of the more

conservative and old-fashioned. And as Johnny neared Maidment and Hurst's, the streets grew busy with the earliest workmen—those who lived farthest from their labour.

Maidment and Hurst's gate was shut fast; he was far too soon. He tried the little door that was cut in the great gate, but that was locked. He wondered if he ought to knock; and did venture on a faint tap of the knuckles. But he might as well have tapped the brick wall. Moreover, a passing apprentice observed the act, and guffawed aloud. "Try down the airey, mate," was his advice.

So Johnny stood and waited, keeping the new tin can where the gaslight over the gate should not betray its unsmoked brightness, and trying to look as much like an old hand as possible. But the passing men grinned at each other, jerking their heads toward him, and Johnny felt that somehow he was known for a greenhorn. The apprentices, immeasurable weeks ahead of him in experience, flung ironic advice and congratulation. "Hooray! Extry quarter for you, mate!" two or three said; one earnestly advising him to "chalk it on the gaffer's 'at, so's 'e won't forget." And still another shouted in tones of extravagant indignation:—"What? On'y jes' come? They bin a-waitin' for ye ever since the pubs shut!"

At length the timekeeper came, sour and grey, and tugged at a vertical iron bell-handle which Johnny had not perceived. The bell brought the night-watchman, with a lantern and a clank of keys, and the timekeeper stepped through the little door with a growl in acknowledgment. He left the door ajar, and Johnny, after a moment's hesitation, stepped in after him.

"Mr. Cottam told me to come this morning, sir," he said, before the timekeeper had quite disappeared into his box. "My name's May."

The timekeeper turned and growled again, that being his usual manner of conversation. "Awright," he continued. "You wait there till 'e comes in then." And it was many months ere Johnny next heard him say so much at once.

The timekeeper began hanging round metal tickets on a great board studded with hooks, a ticket to each hook, in numbered order. Presently a man came in at the door, selected a ticket from the board, and dropped it through a slot into what seemed to be a big money-box. Then three came together, and each did the same. Then there came a stream of men and boys, and the board grew barer of tickets and barer. In the midst came Mr. Cottam, suddenly appearing within the impossibly small wicket as by a conjuring trick.

He tramped heavily straight ahead, apparently unconscious of Johnny. But as he came by he dropped his hand on the boy's shoulder, and, gazing steadily ahead: "Well, me lad!" he roared, much as though addressing somebody at a window of the factory across the yard.

"Good-morning, sir," Johnny answered, walking at the foreman's side by compulsion; for the hand, however friendly, was the heaviest and strongest he had ever felt.

Mr. Cottam went several yards in silence, still gripping Johnny's shoulder. Then he spoke again. "Mother all right?" he asked fiercely, still addressing the window.

"Yes, sir, thank-you."

They walked on, and entered the factory. "This 'ere," said Mr. Cottam, turning on Johnny at last and glaring at him sternly: "this 'ere's the big shop. 'Eavy work. There's a big cylinder for the noo Red Star boat." He led his prisoner through the big shop, this way and that among the great lathes and planers, lit by gas from the rafters; and up a staircase to another workshop. "'Ere we are," said Mr. Cottam, releasing Johnny's shoulder at last. "Y'ain't a fool, are ye? Know what a lathe is, doncher, an' beltin', an' shaftin'? Awright. Needn't do nothin' 'fore breakfast. Look about an' see things, an' don't get in mischief. I got me eye on ye."

The foreman left him, and began to walk along the lines of machines; and the nearest apprentice grinned at Johnny, and winked. Johnny looked about, as the

foreman had advised. This place, where he was to learn to make engines, and where he was to work day by day till he was twenty-one, and a man, was a vast room with skylights in the roof: though this latter circumstance he did not notice till after breakfast, when the gas was turned off, and daylight penetrated from above. A confusion of heavy raftering stretched below the roof, carrying belted shafting everywhere; and every man bent over his machine or his bench, for Cottam was a sharp gaffer. Johnny watched the leading hand scribing curves on metal along lines already set out by punctured dots. “Lining off,” said the leading hand, seeing the boy’s interest. And then, leaning over to speak, because of the workshop din: “Centre-dabs,” he added, pointing to the dots. That, at least, Johnny resolved not to forget: lining off and centre-dabs.

For some reason—perhaps the usual reason, perhaps another—three or four of the men were “losing a quarter” that Monday morning, and some of them were men with whom young apprentices had been working. Consequently, Cottam, in addition to his general supervision, had to keep particular watch on these mentorless lads, and Johnny learned a little from the gaffer’s remarks.

“Well, wotjer doin’ with that file?” he would ask of one. “You ain’t a-playin’ cat’s cradle now, me lad! Look ’ere, keep ’er level, like this! It’s a file, it ain’t a rockin’-’orse!”

Or he would come behind another who was chipping bye-metal, and using a hammer with more zeal than skill. He would watch for a moment, and then break out, “Well, you are fond o’ exercise, I must say! Good job you’re strong enough to stand it. I ain’t. My constitootion won’t allow me to ’old a ’ammer like this ’ere.” This with a burlesque of the lad’s stiff grasp and whole-arm action. “It ’ud knock me up. Bein’ a more delicate sort o’ person” (his arm was near as thick as the boy’s waist) “I ’old a ’ammer like this—see!” And he took the shaft end loosely in his fingers and hammered steadily and firmly from the wrist. Johnny saw that and remembered.

Again, half an hour later, stopping at the elbow of another apprentice, a little older than the last: “Come,” said the foreman, “that’s a noo idea, that is! Takin’ auf the skin from cast iron with a bran’ noo file! I ’ope you’ve patented it. An’ I ’ope you won’t come an’ want another file in about ’alf an hour, ’cos if you do you won’t git it!” Whereat Johnny, astonished to learn that cast iron had a skin, resolved not to forget that you shouldn’t take it off with a new file, and made a mental note to ask somebody why.

Presently, as he came by the long fitting-bench, Johnny grew aware of a fitter, immensely tall and very thin, who grinned and nodded in furtive recognition. It was, indeed, the next door lodger, who had painted the cornice. He was very large, Johnny thought, to be so shy; he positively blushed as he grinned. “You come to this shop?” he asked in his odd whisper, as he stooped to judge the fit of his work. “I’m beddin’ down a junk ring; p’raps the gaffer’ll put you to ’elp me after breakfast.”

Bedding down a junk ring sounded advanced and technical, and Johnny felt taller at the prospect. He would learn what a junk ring was, probably, when he had to help bed it down. Meanwhile he watched the tall man, as he brought the metal to an exact face.

“Stop in to breakfast?” the man asked, as he stooped again.

“Yes.”

“Some o’ the boys ’ll try a game with ye, p’raps. Don’t mind a little game, do ye?”

“No.”

“Ah, I couldn’t stand it when I was a lad. Made me mis’rable. When ye go in the smiths’ shop to git yer breakfast, look about ye, if they’re special kind findin’ y’ a seat. Up above, f’r instance.”

Johnny left the long man, and presently observed that the foreman was not in the shop. There was an instant slackness perceivable among the younger and less steady men, for the leading hand had no such authority as Cottam. One man at a lathe,

throwing out his gear examined his work, and, turning to Johnny, said, “Look ’ere, me lad; I want to true this ’ere bit. Jes’ you go an’ ask Sam Wilkins—that man up at the end there, in the serge jacket—jes’ you go an’ ask ’im for the round square.”

Johnny knew the tool called a square, used for testing the truth of finished work, though he had never seen a round one. Howbeit he went off with alacrity: but it seemed that Sam Wilkins hadn’t the round square. It was Joe Mills, over in the far corner. So he tried Joe Mills; but he, it seemed, had just lent it to Bob White, at the biggest shaping-machine near the other end. Bob White understood perfectly, but thought he had last seen the round square in the possession of George Walker. Whereas George Walker was perfectly certain that it had gone downstairs to Bill Cook in the big shop. Doubting nothing from the uncommonly solemn faces of Sam and Joe and Bob and George, Johnny set off down the stone stairs, where he met the ascending gaffer, on his way back from the pattern-maker’s shop.

“’Ullo boy,” he said, “where you goin’?”

“Downstairs, sir, for the round square.”

Mr. Cottam’s eyes grew more prominent, and there were certain sounds, as of an imprisoned bull-frog, from somewhere deep in his throat. But his expression relaxed not a shade. Presently he said, “Know what a round is?”

“Yes sir.”

“Know what a square is?”

“Yes sir.”

“S’pose somebody wanted a round square drored on paper, what ’ud ye do?”

There was another internal croak, and somehow Johnny felt emboldened. “I think,” he said, with some sly hesitation, “I think I’d tell ’em to do it themselves.”

Mr. Cottam croaked again, louder, and this time with a heave of the chest. “Awright,” he said, “that’s good enough. Better say somethink like that to them as

sent ye. That's a very old 'ave, that is."

He resumed his heavy progress up the stairs, turning Johnny round by the shoulder, and sending him in front. There were furtive grins in the shop, and one lad asked "Got it?" in a voice cautiously subdued. But just then the bell rang for breakfast.

Most of the men and several of the boys made their best pace for the gate. These either lived near, or got their breakfasts at coffee-shops, and their half-hour began and ended in haste. The few others, more leisurely, stayed to gather their cans and handkerchiefs—some to wipe their hands on cotton waste, that curious tangled stuff by which alone Johnny remembered his father. As for him, he waited to do what the rest did, for he saw that his friend, the long man, had gone out with the patrons of coffee-shops. The boys took their cans and clattered down to the smiths' shop, Johnny well in the rear, for he was desirous of judging from a safe distance, what form the "little game" might take, that the long man had warned him of, in case it came soon. But a wayward fate preserved him from booby-traps that morning.

In the first place, he had come in a cap, and so forfended one ordeal. For it was the etiquette of the shop among apprentices that any bowler hat brought in on the head of a new lad must be pinned to the wall with the tangs of many files; since a bowler hat, ere a lad had four years at least of service, was a pretension, a vainglory, and an outrage. Next, his lagging saved his new ducks. The first lads down had prepared the customary trap, which consisted of a seat of honour in the best place near the fire; a seat doctored with a pool of oil, and situated exactly beneath a rafter on which stood a can of water taken from a lathe; a string depending from the can, with its lower end fastened behind the seat. So that the victim accepting the accommodation would receive a large oily embellishment on his new white ducks, and, by the impact of his back against the string, induce a copious christening of himself and his entire outfit. But it chanced that an elderly journeyman from the big shop—old Ben Cutts—appeared on the scene early, wiping his spectacles on his jacket lining as he

came. He knew nothing of a fresh ’prentice, saw nothing but a convenient and warm seat, and hastened to seize it.

The lads were taken by surprise. “No—not there!” shouted one a few yards away.

“Fust come fust served, me lad,” chuckled old Ben Cutts, as he dropped on the fatal spot. “’Ere I am, an’ ’ere I—”

With that the can fell, and Johnny at the door was astonished to observe a grey-headed workman, with a pair of spectacles in his hand and a vast oily patch on his white overalls, dripping and dancing and swearing, and smacking wildly at the heads of the boys about him, without hitting any.

There were no more tricks that breakfast-time. For when at length old Ben subsided to his meal, he put a little pile of wedges by his side, to fling at the first boy of whose behaviour he might disapprove. And as his spectacles were now on his nose, and his aim, thus aided, was known to be no bad one, and as the wedges, furthermore, were both hard and heavy, breakfasts were eaten with all the decorum possible in a smiths’ shop.

Johnny’s new can was satisfactorily blackened, and his breakfast was well disposed of. Such youths as tried him with verbal chaff he answered as well as he might, though he had as yet little of the Cockney boy’s readiness. And at last the bell rang again, and the breakfasters went back to work.

Mr. Cottam, casting his glance about the shop in search of the simplest possible job for Johnny to begin on, with a steady man at hand to watch him, stopped as his gaze reached Long Hicks, and sent Johnny to help him with his bolts. And so Johnny found the tall man’s surmise verified, and the tall man himself received him with another grin a little less shy. He set him to running down bolts and nuts, showing him how to fix the bolt in a vice and work the nut on it with a spanner. Johnny fell to the task enthusiastically, and so the morning went.

XIII.

When Nan May opened shop, she saw that men were pulling down as much of the ship-yard wall opposite as stood between two chalk lines. She thought no more of the thing at the time, not guessing how nearly it concerned her. For this was to be a new workmen's gate to the ship-yard and passing workmen might change the fortunes of a shop. For that day, however, there was no sign but the demand of a bricklayer's labourer for a penn'orth of cheese.

It was as bad a day as Saturday, in the matter of trade—indeed there was no drunken man to buy lard—and the woman's heart grew heavier as the empty hours went. Bessy stood at the back-parlour door, pale and anxious, but striving to lift a brave face. Before one o'clock there was dinner to be prepared; not that either Bessy or her mother could eat, but for Johnny. And at a quarter past one both met him at the door as cheerfully as they could; and indeed they were eager to hear of his fortunes. They wondered to see him coming with the long man who lived next door; and the long man, for his part, was awkward and nervous when he saw them. At first he hung back, as though to let Johnny go on alone; but he changed his mind, and came striding ahead hastily, looking neither to right nor to left, and plunged in at his door.

Johnny was hungry and in high spirits. He and Long Hicks, it seemed, had been bedding down a junk ring for a piston, Johnny easing the bolts and nuts, and Long Hicks doing the other work. He said nothing of the round square, but talked greatly of slide-valves and cranks, till Bessy judged him a full engineer already. Between his mouthfuls he illustrated the proper handling of hammer and file, and reprehended the sinful waste of spoiling the surface of a new file on the outer skin of a fresh iron casting. It cheered Nan May to see the boy taking so heartily to his work, through all her secret dread that she might lack the means to keep him at it. Johnny glanced anxiously at the clock from time to time, and at last declared that he must knock for Long Hicks, who was plainly forgetting how late it was. And in the

end he rushed away to disturb the tall man ten minutes too soon, and hurried off to Maidment and Hurst's, there to take his own new metal ticket from the great board, and drop it duly into the box.

The afternoon went busily at the factory, and busy days followed. Johnny acquired his first tool, a steel foot-rule, and carried it in public places with a full quarter of its length visible at the top of its appointed pocket. It was the way of all young apprentices to do this; the rule, they would say, thus being carried convenient for the hand. But it was an exact science among the observant to judge a lad's experience inversely by scale of the inches exposed, going at the rate of half an inch a year. A lad through two years of his "time" would show no more of his rule than two inches; by the end of four years one of these inches would have vanished; as his twenty-first birthday approached, the last inch shrank to a mere hint of bright metal; and nobody ever saw the foot-rule of a full journeyman, except he were using it.

Johnny's christening, postponed by the accident of old Ben Cutts, came when he was first put to a small lathe to try his hand at turning bolts. For when, returning from breakfast, he belted his lathe, he did not perceive that the water-can had been tied to the belt; realising it, however, the next instant, when it flew over the shafting and discharged the water on his head. Then he was free of the shop; suffering no more than the rest from the workshop pranks habitual among the younger lads, and joining in them: gammoning newer lads than himself with demands for the round square, and oppressing them with urgent messages to testy gaffers—that a cockroach had got in the foo-foo valve, that the donkey-man wanted an order for a new nosebag, and the like. Grew able, moreover, in workshop policy, making good interest with the storekeeper, who might sometimes oblige with the loan of a hammer. For a lost hammer meant a fine of three-and-sixpence, and when yours was stolen—everybody stole everybody else's hammer—a borrowed one would tide you over till you could steal another. Making friends, too, with the tool-smith, at a slight expense in drinks; though able to punish him also if necessary, by the secret

bedevilment of his fire with iron borings. Learned to manufacture an apparent water-crack by way of excuse for a broken file—a water-crack made with a touch of grease well squeezed between the broken ends. In short, became an initiated ’prentice engineer. In the trade itself, moreover, he was not slow, and Mr. Cottam had once mentioned him (though Johnny did not know it) as “none so bad a boy; one as can work ’is own ’ead.” Until his first enthusiasm had worn off, he never ceased from questioning Long Hicks, in his hours of leisure, on matters concerning steam-engines; so that the retiring Hicks grew almost out of touch with the accordion that had been the solace of his solitude. The tall man had never met quite so inquisitive an apprentice; engineering was in the blood, he supposed. He had guessed the boy’s mother an engineer’s wife when first Johnny came to his bench, because of the extra button Nan May had been careful to sew on his jacket cuff; a button used to tighten the sleeve, that it might not catch the driver on a lathe.

It was early in Johnny’s experience—indeed he had been scarce a fortnight at the engine-shop—when a man coming in from an outdoor job just before dinner told Cottam the foreman, that an old friend was awaiting him at the gate, looking for a job.

“An’ ’oo’s the ol’ friend?” asked Cottam, severely distrustful.

“Mr. ’Enery Butson, Esquire,” the man answered, with a grin.

“What? Butson?” the gaffer ejaculated, and his eyes grew rounder. “Butson? Agen? I’d—damme, I’d as soon ’ave a brass monkey!” And Mr. Cottam stumped indignantly up the shop.

“Sing’lar, that,” observed a labourer who was helping an erector with a little yacht engine near Johnny’s bench. “Sing’lar like what I ’eard the gaffer say at Lumley’s when Butson wanted a job there. ‘What?’ sez ’e. ‘Butson? Why, I’d rayther ’ave a chaney dawg auf my gran’mother’s mantelpiece,’ ’e sez. ‘’E wouldn’t spile castin’s,’ ’e sez.”

There were grins between the men who heard, for it would seem that Mr. Butson was not unknown among them. But when Johnny told his mother at dinner, she thought the men rude and ignorant; and she was especially surprised at Mr. Cottam.

For some little while Johnny wondered at the girl who was hunting for a sick lady in the street on that dark Monday morning. He looked out for her on his way to and from his work, resolved, if he met her, to ask how the search had fared, and how the lady was. But he saw nothing of her, and the thing began to drop from his mind. Till a Saturday afternoon, when he went to see a new "ram" launched; for half-way to the ship-yard he saw a pretty girl—and surely it was the same. In no tears nor trouble now, indeed, but most disconcertingly composed and dignified—yet surely the same. Johnny hesitated, and stopped: and then most precipitately resumed his walk. For truly this was a very awful young person, icily unconscious of him, her casual glance flung serenely through his head and over it. . . . Perhaps it wasn't the same, after all; and if not—well it was lucky he had said nothing. . . . Nevertheless his inner feeling was that he had made no mistake; more, that the girl remembered him, but was proud and would not own it. It didn't matter, he said to himself. But the afternoon went a little flat; the launch was less interesting than one might have expected. There was a great iron hull, tricked out with flags; and when men knocked away the dog-shores with sledge-hammers, the ship slid away, cradle and all, into the water. There wasn't much in that. Of course, if you knocked away the dog-shores, the ship was bound to slide: plainly enough. That wasn't very interesting. Johnny felt vaguely resentful of the proceedings. . . . But still he wondered afresh at the lost lady who was ill out of doors so early in the morning.

XIV.

But this launch was when Johnny's 'prentice teeth were cut: when the running down of bolts and pins was beneath his notice, and he could be trusted with work at a

small nibbling machine; when he had turned stop-valve spindles more than once, and felt secretly confident of his ability to cut a screw.

Meantime history was making at the shop: very slowly at first, it is true. The holly had been made the most of; but it seemed to attract not at all. Penn'orths and ha'porths were most of the sales, and even they were few. Nan May grew haggard and desperate. Uncle Isaac had called once soon after the opening Saturday, but since had been a stranger. He had said that he was about to change his lodgings (he was a widower), but Nan knew nothing of his new address. In truth, such was Uncle Isaac's tenderness of heart, that he disliked the sight or complaint of distress; and, in the manner of many other people of similar tenderness, he betook himself as far as possible from the scene thereof, and kept there.

It was within a few days of Christmas when things seemed hopeless. Johnny, indeed, had never ceased to hope till now. He had talked of the certainty of struggling on somehow till his wages were enough for all; indeed, even the six shillings a week seemed something considerable now, though he knew that the rent alone came to ten. But even Johnny's cheerfulness fell in face of the intenser dejection, the more open tears, of his mother and sister, as the days wore on. Long Hicks found him a quieter, less inquisitive boy, and a duller help than at first; and dinner at home was a sad make-believe. Each knew that the other two were contrasting the coming Christmas with the last. Then, gran'dad was with them, hale and merry; to look out of window was to look through a world of frosty twigs to woody deeps where the deer waited, timid and shadowy, for the crusts flung out afar for them from the garden. Now . . . but there!

But it was just at this desperate time that a change came, as by magic. The men who pulled down the wall at the opposite side of the street gave place to others who built a mighty brick pier at each side of the opening: a pier designed to carry its half of the new gate. But ere the work was near complete, men and boys from the yard

found it a convenient place to slip out and in at, on breakfast-time or dinner-time errands.

Now it chanced at the time that one of these men was in a domestic difficulty; a difficulty that a large part of the eight or nine hundred men of the ship-yard encountered in turn at more or less regular intervals. His wife inhabited the bedroom in company with a monthly nurse; while he roosted sleeplessly at night on a slippery horsehair couch in the parlour, or wallowed in a jumble of spare blankets and old coats on the floor; spending his home hours by day in desolate muddling in the kitchen, lost and incapable, and abject before the tyranny of the nurse. On dark mornings he made forlorn attempts at raking together a breakfast to carry with him to work; but as he had taken no thought to put anything into the cupboard over night, he found it no easy matter to extract a breakfast from it in the morning. So it came to pass that on the second day of his affliction this bedevilled husband, his hunger merely aggravated by the stale lumps of bread he had thought to make shift on, issued forth at the new gate in quest of breakfast. There was little time, and most of the shops were a distance off; but just opposite was a flaming little chandler's shop, newly opened. It was thinly stocked enough, but it would be hard luck indeed if it did not hold something eatable. And so Nan May's first customer that day was the starved husband.

"Got anythink t' eat?" he asked, his ravening gaze piercing the bare corners of the shop. "Got any bacon?"

"Yes, sir," Nan May answered, reaching for the insignificant bit of "streaky" that was all she had.

"No—cooked, I mean. Aincher got any cold boiled 'ock?"

"No, sir."

"Y' ought t' ave some cooked 'ock. Lots 'ud 'ave it in the yard. I can't eat that—the smiths' shop 's the other end o' the yard, an' I got nothing to toast it with. Aincher

got nothing else?”

Nan May grasped the situation, and conceived an instant notion, for indeed she had inborn talent as a shopkeeper, though till now it had had no chance to show itself. “Will you wait five minutes?” she asked.

Yes, he would wait five minutes, but no more: and he sat on the empty case, from which Uncle Isaac had delivered his recommendation of Enterprise. Nan May cut two rashers and retired to the shop parlour. In three minutes the hungry customer was hammering on the counter, declaring that he could wait no longer. Pacified by assurances from within, he resigned himself to a minute and a half more of patience: when Mrs. May returned with a massive sandwich, wherein the two rashers, fresh frizzled, lay between two thick slices of bread. Lifting the top slice for a moment, as guarantee of good faith, Nan May exchanged the whole ration for threepence.

“If you’d like any cold boiled bacon, sir,” she said, “I shall have some at one o’clock.”

He heard, but he was off at a trot with his sandwich. In five minutes Nan May’s bonnet was on, and in five more Bessy was minding shop alone, while her mother hastened to Mr. Dunkin’s for a hock of bacon. Here was a possible change of fortune, and Nan May was not a woman to waste a chance.

Boiled and cooled—or cooled enough for the taste of hungry riveters—the hock stood in a dish on the counter at one o’clock, flanked by carving-knife and fork. A card, bearing the best 10 that Bessy could draw, advertised the price, and the first quarter-pound of slices was duly cut for the desolate husband, who came back, a little later, for two ounces more; for he had been ill-fed for two or three days, and the new baby made an event wherewith some extra expense was natural. Boys came for two other quarter-pounds, so that it was plain that the first customer had told others; and a loaf was cut up to go with the bacon.

Mrs. May announced the new branch of trade to Johnny when he came to dinner;

and though as yet the returns were small enough, there was a new chance, and his mother was hopeful of it; so he went back to the lathe with a lighter heart.

That night the riveters worked overtime, and the bacon was in better demand still. More, at night two or three men took home a snack in paper, for supper; and from that day things grew better daily. The hock was finished by the afternoon of the next day, and the establishment was out of pickles; for men and boys who brought their own cold meat with them came now for pickles. Trade was better as the days went on, and Christmas, though it found them poor enough, was none so sad a festival after all. And in a month, when the gate had been formally opened for some time, and the men streamed by in hundreds, three large hocks would rarely last two days; and there was an average profit of three shillings a hock. More, the bread came in daily in batches, at trade price, and cheese and pickles went merrily. But what went best, and what increased in sale even beyond this point, was the bacon. Some customers called it ham, which pleased Nan May; for indeed her cooking hit the popular taste, and she began to feel a pride in it. Men who went home to dinner would buy bacon to take home for tea; and as many of these lived in Harbour Lane and thereabout, custom soon came from their wives, in soap and candles, treacle and pepper and blacking. Nan May's trade instinct grew with exercise. She found the particular sort of bacon that best suited her purpose and her customers' tastes; she had regular boilings throughout the week; she quickly found the trick of judging the quality of whatever she bought; and she bought to the best use of her money.

But here it must be said that Nan May, in her new prosperity, behaved toward one benefactor with an undutiful forgetfulness that was near ingratitude. For she bought almost nothing of Mr. Dunkin. He was reasonably grieved. True, she had begun by getting her first stock of him, but even then her critical examination of what was sent showed an unworthily suspicious attitude of mind. She even sent back many things and demanded better, wilfully blind to the fact that Mr. Dunkin could turn her out of the shop at a week's notice if he pleased; though indeed in his own mind he was not

vindictive, for another new tenant would be hard to find. He even submitted to outrage ending in actual loss and humiliation. For a large tin of mustard was Mrs. May's first supply, and it was a tin from among those kept for sale to small shopkeepers, and not on any account to be sold from retail, across Mr. Dunkin's own counter. But something in the feel and taste of this mustard did not please Nan May (though indeed she was not asked to eat it), and it went back. Now it chanced that Mr. Dunkin had taken on a new shopman that week, and this bungling incapable straightway began selling mustard from the returned tin. He had served three customers before his blunder was perceived, and then the matter came to light purely because the third customer chanced to be a food and drug inspector. This functionary gravely announced himself as soon as he had good hold of the parcel, and handsomely offered the return of a third part of the mustard, in a sealed packet. And the upshot was a fine of five pounds and costs for Mr. Dunkin, on the opinionative evidence of an analyst, who talked of starch and turmeric and ginger—all very excellent substances, as anybody knows. Truly it was a vexatious blow for Mr. Dunkin, and an unjust; for certainly the fault was not his, and to sell such an article, retail, was wholly against his principles. But he never complained, such was his forbearance: never spoke of his hardship to a soul, in fact, except when he "sacked" the new assistant. It was even said that he had offered a reporter money to keep it out of the papers; and though it did get into the papers (and at good length too) yet the effort was kindly meant. For truly it could but give Mrs. May pain to learn that she had been the cause of Mr. Dunkin's misfortune, if she were a woman of any feeling at all.

But as time went, he began to doubt if she were, for her custom dropped away to nothing. The rate at which bacon was handed in from the cart of a firm somewhere in the Borough, was scandalous to behold. Before his very eyes, too, when he called for the rent. He employed a collector, but presently took to coming for the rent himself, that by his presence and his manner he might shame so thankless a tenant

into some sense of decency, some order for bacon or mustard. He coughed gently and stared very hard at the incoming goods, but Nan May was in no wise abashed, and gave the carman his directions with shameless composure. With his sympathetic stop full out, Mr. Dunkin asked how trade was, and Nan May answered in proper shopkeeper terms, that "she mustn't grumble." With hums and purrs, he led back through casual questions and answers to the stock he had at first supplied, and asked her how she had done with this, and how that had "gone off." But her answers were so artlessly direct, so inconsiderately truthful, that good Mr. Dunkin was clean baffled, and reduced at last to a desperate hint that if anything were wanted he could take the order back with him. But he got no order, so he purred and hummed his way into Harbour Lane, and so away; and after a time the collector came in his stead.

Mr. Dunkin resolved to wait. He had some doubts of the permanence of this new prosperity in the shop. The place had never brought anybody a living yet, and he should not feel convinced till he had seen steady trade there for some time. Nan May's activities could always be kept from flagging by judicious increases of rent, and if the thing grew well established by her exertions, and was certain to continue a paying concern, why, here would be a new branch of Mr. Dunkin's business ready made. It needed but a week's notice, given unexpectedly, at a properly chosen time, when no neighbouring shop was to let, and a good stroke of business was happily completed. Mrs. May would vanish, a man would go in to manage at a pound or twenty-five shillings a week and his quarters, there would be no interruption to trade (for the outgoing tenant would naturally keep at work till the last minute, to get what little she could), and Mr. Dunkin would have a new branch, paying very excellently, with no trouble to himself. Mr. Dunkin had established other branches in the same way, and found it a very simple and cheap arrangement. There was no risk of his own capital, no trouble in "working-up" the trade, no cost of goodwill, and rent was coming regularly while the tenant laboured with the zeal of a man who imagines he is working for his own benefit and his children's. The important thing was to give

nothing but a weekly tenancy; else the tenant might find time to get going somewhere near at hand, and so perhaps deprive Mr. Dunkin of the just reward of his sagacity, foresight, and patience. But there was little difficulty in that matter. Beginners were timid and glad of a weekly tenancy, fearing the responsibility of anything longer, at first; and afterwards—well, things were in a groove, and Mr. Dunkin was so very kind and sympathetic that it wasn't worth while to bother about a change. And by this method Mr. Dunkin, judiciously selecting his purchases in shop property, had acquired two or three of his half-dozen branches, and flourished exceedingly; which all kindly souls rejoiced to see.

In the beginning he had no thought of this plan for the Harbour Lane shop, being mainly concerned to get a tenant, no matter in what trade; and indeed in his eye the place was as little suited for chandlery as for anything. Even now he must wait, for he doubted the lasting quality of the new prosperity; better a few years of forbearance than a too hurried seizure of a weakening concern, to find little more than the same tenantless shop on his hands after all. And if it seemed that the trade owed anything to the personal qualities and connexions of Mrs. May, well, it would be a simple thing to keep her on to manage, instead of a man. It would be an act of benevolence, moreover, to an unfortunate widow, and come cheaper. But that was a matter for the future.

Meanwhile Nan May, active and confident, filled her shop by purchase from whatsoever factor sold best and cheapest, and travellers called for her orders. The hungry husband who first came for cooked bacon she always treated with particular consideration, finding him good cuts. He ceased his regular visits in three weeks or less, and Nan May, taught by experience in her earlier London life, well guessed the cause of his coming. In the spring, three months or so later, great crowds thronged about the ship-yard to see the launch of the battleship that overtime had so long been worked on; and when the launch was over, this man and his wife, the man carrying the baby, came into the shop for something to celebrate the occasion at tea. The

parents did not altogether comprehend Nan May's enthusiasm over the baby, which she took from its father's arms and danced merrily about the shop, while customers waited. But they set it down to admiration of its personal beauty, though truly it was an ordinary slobbery baby enough. But it went away down the street in great state, triumphantly stabbing at its mouth with the sugarstick gripped by one hand, and at its father's whiskers with that brandished in the other.

XV.

On a Saturday afternoon about this time, Uncle Isaac, in his best black suit and very tall hat, and with the Turk's-head walking-stick in his hand, started out to see a foreman. Work was rather slack just now (shipwrights' work was slack everywhere), and the three holidays a week that once were the glory and boast of a free and independent shipwright, were now apt to be a woeful compulsion. Uncle Isaac had been of late poorer (because idler) than he liked, and in such case it was his way to seek the chance of meeting his foreman out of hours, in order to a display of rhetoric, oblique flattery, and dexterous suggestion, that might influence a distribution of short time that would be more favourable to the orator.

He had wondered much as to the fortunes of Nan and her children, but as it has been said, his tenderness of heart kept him as far as possible from what he believed must now be a scene of sheer failure and destitution: if, indeed, the shop were not abandoned; and he was by no means anxious that his poor relations should discover his new lodgings. So now he picked his way with circumspection, and with careful cogitation of a mental map of the streets; because a thoughtless straightforward journey would take him much too near to Harbour Lane.

He crossed a swing bridge that gave access to a hundred and fifty yards of roadway ending in another swing bridge. But there was a crook in the road, and when he passed it he found that the second bridge was open. Now in Blackwall an "open"

bridge did not mean one that the passenger could cross; that was a “shut” bridge. The “open” bridge was one swung aside to let a ship through, as a pair of gates is opened for a carriage. So Uncle Isaac resigned himself to wait, with an increasingly impatient group, till the bridge should swing into place again and give passage. He stood behind the chain that hung across the road to check traffic, and meditatively rubbed his nose with the Turk’s-head. Presently he grew conscious of a rusty figure on his left, edging unsteadily a little nearer.

“’Ow do, Mr. Mundy?” came a hoarse whisper. And Mother Born-drunk, a trifle less drunk than usual, but careful to grasp a post, leered a grimy leer and waved her disengaged hand in his face, as one saluting a friend at a great distance. Uncle Isaac emitted a non-committal grunt—one that might be taken for an accidental cough by the bystanders—and sidled a foot or two away. For he, too, had known Emma Pacey in her more decent days, and, with other acquaintances of that time, was sometimes put to shifts to avoid her.

Mother Born-drunk left the post and followed her victim. “Don’ run ’way,” she ejaculated, unsteadily. “I’m ole pal. Mish’ Mundy!” She thrust out a foul paw, and dropped her voice coaxingly. “Len’sh twopence!” Uncle Isaac gazed uneasily in another direction, and took more ground to the right. The waiting passengers, glad of a little amusement, grinned one at another.

“J’year, Mr. Mundy!” This in a loud voice, with an imperious gesture. “J’year! Can’tche’ answer when a lady speaks t’ye?”

“Go on, guv’nor!” said a boy encouragingly, sitting on a post. “Where’s yer manners? Take auf yer ’at to the laidy!” And there was a snigger. Uncle Isaac shifted farther still, and put a group of men between himself and his persecutor. But she was not to be so easily shaken off. Drawing herself up with a scornful majesty that was marred by an occasional lurch, and the bobbing of the tangled bonnet hanging over one ear, she came after Uncle Isaac through the passage readily made

by the knot of men.

“Ho! so it’s this, is it,” she declaimed, with a stately backward sweep of the arm. “If a lady asks a triflin’ favour you insult ’er. Ye low, common, scoundrel!” This very slowly, with a deep tragedy hiss and a long pause. Then with a piercing note of appeal: “Mr. Mundy! I demand an answer! Once more! Will you lend me twopence?”

The people (a small crowd by this time) forgot the troublesome bridge, and turned to the new diversion. “Give the laidy twopence!” roared the boy on the post, in a deep bass. “’Arf a pint ’ud save ’er life!”

Uncle Isaac looked desperately about him, but he saw no sympathy. Dockmen, workmen, boys—all were agog to see as much fun as possible in the time at disposal. The pursuing harpy came a step nearer, and bawled again, “Will you lend me twopence?”

“No!” cried Uncle Isaac, driven to bay at last. “No, I won’t! Go away! Go away, you—you infamious creacher!”

“You won’t?”

“No, not by no means. Go away. Y’ought to be ashamed of yerself, you—you—you opstroperous faggit!”

“Calls ’isself a gen’leman,” she said, lifting her gaze to the clouds. “Calls ’isself a gen’leman, an’ uses such language to a lady!”

“Shockin’,” said one in the hilarious crowd. “What a wicked ole bloke!”

Uncle Isaac gave another unquiet glance about him, and moved another yard. The woman brought her eyes to earth again, and: “Won’t gimme twopence,” she proclaimed, “an’ I’m a orficer’s widow! Never mind, len’ me a penny; on’y a penny, Mr. Mundy. Do, there’sh a dear! O you are a ole duck!” And Mother Born-drunk stumbled toward Uncle Isaac with affectionately extended arms.

The crowd shrieked with joy, but Uncle Isaac turned and ran, one hand clapped to the crown of his very tall hat. He would wait for no bridge now, but get away as best he could. The boys yelled and whistled, and kept up at an easy trot with the quick scuttle of his short legs; behind them came Mother Born-drunk, tripping and floundering, spurred to infuriate chase by sight and sound of her unchanging enemies, the boys, and growing at every step more desirous of clawing at one of them than of catching Uncle Isaac.

As for him, he dropped his hat once, and nearly fell on it, in looking behind. So he thrust it under his arm as he scurried past the bend in the road; and there despair seized him, for now the other bridge was open too. Which escape might he make first? At the end from which he had turned back, a great liner was being towed through at a snail's pace, funnels and masts scarce seeming to move across the street. But at this end a small coaster went out briskly, and her mizzen was more than half over now. The woman was less than twenty yards off, but though she still staggered nearer, she was engaged with boys. Uncle Isaac put panic aside, and resolved on dignity. He took his hat from under his arm, and began to brush it on his sleeve.

Mother Born-drunk was in the hands of her enemies, though there were fewer than usual. She swore and swiped at them, and they flung and yelled and danced. But they drew nearer Uncle Isaac, for it was a new variation in the sport to involve an old gentleman with his Sunday clothes on. Then shouted the woman breathlessly: "P'lice! p'lice! Mish' Mundy, I'll give y' in charge for annoyin' me. 'J'ear!" She came very near and made a catch at him, which he dodged without regard to dignity. "Mish' Mundy! Stand a drop—just a little drop for ole times! If ye don't stand a drop I'll give y' in charge!"

The coaster was through, and soon the bridge would shut. Uncle Isaac moved up toward the chain amid shouts and jibes. "Y'ought to be ashamed o' yerself," bawled

the woman, “a ole man like you, annoyin’ a lady!”

But the men were at the winch, and the bridge swung. First of all the impatient passengers, Uncle Isaac sprang on the moving iron and got across at peril of life and limb ere the sections were still. He heard a louder shout of laughter from behind, where Mother Born-drunk, forgetting the chain as she made for the bridge, had sprawled over it where it hung low in the middle; and he quickened his pace.

Now it chanced that Johnny May had been taken that week to his first out-door job, on a large steamer; and, full of the wonders of the ship, he had made interest with the “shippy” (who was officially called the shipkeeper) to bring Bessy on board on Saturday afternoon. The visit was a pure delight for both, with more than a spice of danger for Bessy in climbing gangways, companions, and greasy engine-room steps; indeed, the “shippy” carried her down the lower flights of these last. Johnny explained the prodigious engines with all the extreme technicality of a new hand, and with much pride pointed out the part whereon he (with the help of three or four journeymen) had been at work. Bessy stared and marvelled, and her admiration for her brother waxed into reverence. For was he not an engineer, master of these massy, shining immensities, so amazingly greater than any engines she had dreamed of, so awful in their monstrous stillness? Bessy peeped along the tunnel of the great shaft, and then, a minute after, up into the towering complexities above, and she was almost afraid—would have been afraid to stay there alone.

They walked home gay and talkative, and Bessy’s face had a light and a colour that it had lacked since Johnny and gran’dad had seen it together. For she had seen great things, and had walked in passenger saloons more wonderful than all her palaces of romance. It struck Johnny, for the first time in his life, that Bessy was rather pretty; and as to her lameness though some would call it a blemish (as it certainly was a misfortune), yet she carried it trimly, and he almost thought it suited her.

And so they went till at a corner a hurried little man with a moon-face ran into them,

hat first,—for he was brushing it again.

Now both Johnny and Bessy wore their best clothes, and both looked happy and well, so at a glance Uncle Isaac guessed that things had gone aright at Harbour Lane after all. Just as distress troubled and repelled him, so good fortune pleased his amiable genius and attracted his regards. So though he was still a little flushed and uneasy, he was glad of the encounter. He had been unwell, it seemed, and—and busy, and all that. But how was trade at the shop?

Johnny and Bessy told the tale of the new ship-yard gate, and of the cold bacon and the pickles and the new prosperity. Uncle Isaac was greatly pleased. He was sorry, very sorry, he said, that he had not been able to call lately, but he would delay no longer—he would be round that very evening. And, indeed, he came, and immensely approved of the bacon. And he came again, and approved immensely of the cheese and the pickles and whatever else there was for supper, and again after that, and usually carried something home for trial in the calmer mood of the morning. And thus family ties were made whole, and avuncular love continued.

“Jest to think,” Uncle Isaac would say with a wave of his fork, “what a quantity o’ blessin’s you owe to my advice, Nan! What was my words o’ counsel to you prefarrotory? ‘Enterprise,’ sez I. ‘Enterprise is what you want,’ I sez; there’s alwis money in Enterprise! An’ what’s the result? Enterprise, representin’ biled ’ock o’ bacon, is done the trick wonderful. But, in regards to enterprise, why not call it ’am?”

XVI.

With the spring the steady application of paint in Harbour Lane burst into a fury. Everywhere the houses and the flagstaffs and the fences took new coats of many colours, changing as the season went, and the paint-pot traffic fell into a vaster confusion. As tops were “in” among the boys, the smell of paint grew day by day,

and when the marble season began little else could be smelt. With July came Fairlop Friday, and Bessy wondered at the passing of a great model of a rigged ship on wheels, drawn by horses, and filled with jubilant shipwrights on their way to Epping Forest, in accord with yearly custom. She had grown to consider the forest as a place so far off (though indeed she knew the distance in mere miles) that it came almost as a surprise to see people starting out to drive there in a few hours with so slow a vehicle, and to return the same night.

Bob Smallpiece had written once or twice (he kept an eye on the empty cottage, and looked out for a tenant), but he had never made a visit, as Nan May had asked him. The last news was that his bedridden old mother was worse, and not expected to live.

The trade went well—better than ever, indeed, and scarce a month passed but Nan May put a sovereign or two in the post-office savings bank; and Uncle Isaac began secretly to look upon the shop in Harbour Lane as a convenient retreat for his later years. Already he took as many meals there as possible, for, as he said, he could get no proper attention in his new lodgings. Of his old friend Mr. Butson he had seen nothing for months. For Butson, he knew, had lost his berth on the steamboat, and had fallen on evil times—and Uncle Isaac never intruded on private griefs of this description.

But late in the year, when the anniversary of Johnny's apprenticeship was nearing, and when Johnny himself was near a head taller—for he grew quickly now—Uncle Isaac saw Butson from afar as he crossed the docks, and Butson saw him. There was no escape, but Uncle Isaac, with a grin and a wave of the hand, tried to pass on hurriedly, as though urgent business claimed his time. But Mr. Butson rose from his bollard—bollards had been his most familiar furniture for months now—and intercepted him.

"You've 'ad about a year now to git that 'urry over," he said, with something not

unlike a sneer. “If you’re goin’ that way, I’ll come along too. Got any ’bacca?”

Uncle Isaac, with a bounteous air that scarce covered his reluctance, pulled out a screw of paper, and Mr. Butson filled his pipe. For some little way he smoked in silence, for tobacco was an uncommon luxury with him just now, and he enjoyed a succession of puffs with no interruption. Then he said, “Workin’ at Turton’s now?”

“No,” Uncle Isaac replied, with a slight cough. “I—no, I ain’t workin’ there.”

“Thought not. Looked out for y’ often. An’ you moved too.” Butson smoked again for a space, and then went on. “I’ve ’ad a pretty awful year,” he said. “Why I was very near goin’ stokin’ once or twice.” (He had not quite gone, because the chief engineer always sent him ashore.) “Nice thing, that, for a man o’ my bringin’-up.”

They walked on. Truly the bad year had left its marks on Mr. Butson. The soles were three-quarters gone from his boots, and the uppers were cracked. He wore a mixture of ordinary and working clothes, frayed and greasy and torn, and he shivered under a flimsy dungaree jacket, buttoned so close to the neck as to hint an absence of shirt. His bowler hat was weather-beaten and cracked, and the brim behind was beginning to leave the crown because of rain-rot.

Presently Uncle Isaac, impelled to say something, asked, “Bin out all the time?”

“Very near. Got a job on a ’draulic, but the chap began jawin’ me about somethin’. I wasn’t goin’ to stand that, so I just walked out.”

“Nothin’ else?”

“Not much. One or two things I got on to, but they didn’t last. Know the laundry over the Cut? Well they took me on there to run the engine, an’ sacked me in a week. Said I was asleep! Measly swine. Much the same at other places. Seemed to want to treat me like—like any common feller. But I showed ’em different to that!”

“Ah!” commented Uncle Isaac absently. He was wondering which way to lead the walk, and how to take leave of his companion. But his invention was at a stand, and

presently the other went on.

“Well,” he said, “you ain’t got so much to say as you used. Know any job you can put me on to?”

“No, I don’t,” replied Uncle Isaac with gloomy simplicity. “Trade’s bad—very bad. I bin workin’ short time meself, an’ standin’ auf day after day. Stood auf to-day.”

“Well then, lend us a bob.”

Uncle Isaac started, and made the space between them a foot wider. “Reely, Mr. Butson, I—”

“All right, make it two bob then, if you’d rather. You’ve ’ad more ’n that out o’ me one time an’ another.”

“But—but I tell you I’m unfort’net meself. I bin standin’ auf day after day—”

“Seems to me you’re tryin’ to stand auf as much as ye can now. Look ’ere.” Mr. Butson stood and faced Uncle Isaac. “I’m broke, clean broke, an’ worse. I’m ’ungry.”

“It’s—it’s very bad,” said Uncle Isaac. “But why not go t’ yer rich relations?”

Butson frowned. “Never mind them,” he said. “I’d rather try an’ tap your small property. What am I to do? I’m at the end of me tether, an’ I’ve tried everything.”

“Ah—Enterprise is what you want,” Uncle Isaac said, being at a loss what else to recommend. “Enterprise. I’ve recommended Enterprise before, with wonderful results—wonderful. An’—an’ ’ow about marryin’? There’s the lan’lady at the Mariner’s Arms. She was alwis very friendly, an’ that’s a life as ought to suit ye.”

“G-r-r-r!” Mr. Butson turned his head with a growl and took to walking again, Uncle Isaac by his side. “She’d want to make a potman of me, an’—an’—well that ain’t much catch, any’ow. If you won’t lend me a bob, stand me a feed o’ some sort. Ain’t ’ad yer tea, ’ave ye?”

Plainly something must be sacrificed to Butson, and it struck Uncle Isaac that the

cheapest article would be some of Nan May's bacon. So he said, "Well, I was thinkin' o' poppin' round to my niece's to tea. I'm sure she'd make ye very welcome."

"Awright. Same niece as give us tea over in the Forest that time?"

"Yus. She's round in 'arbour Lane."

The lamplighter scuffled past into the thickening dusk, leaving his sparse trail of light-spots along the dock wall. The two men came through streets where little sitting-rooms, lighted as yet by fires alone, cheered Butson with promise of the meal to come; and when at last he stood in Nan May's shop, now no place of empty boxes, but ranged close with bacon, cheese, candles, sausages, brawn, spiced beef, many eggs and a multitude of sundries, there was some shadow of the old strut and sulky swagger, hanging oddly about the broken-up Butson of these later days.

Uncle Isaac did it with an air, for an air was an inexpensive embellishment that won him consideration. "Good-evenin', Nan. I've took the liberty (which I'm sure you'll call it a pleasure) to introduce a of friend to tea which we well remember with 'appier circumstances. Mr. Butson is come to see you."

Duller eyes than Nan May's would have seen Butson's fallen condition at a glance, and it afflicted her to know that while fortune had favoured her it had stricken him so sorely. She led them in, offering Butson a cordiality in some sort exaggerated by her anxiety not to seem to see his poor clothes, nor to treat him a whit the worse for his ill-luck. As for Mr. Butson, he found a good fire and a clean hearth, with an armchair beside it, in a better room than he had seen for long. Old Mr. May's photograph hung over the mantelpiece, and below it was the sole remaining butterfly trophy, a small glass case, set when the old man was young. The ragged books that were Bessy's solace stood on a sideboard top, and Bessy herself, disturbed in reading, was putting one of them carefully in its place. The kettle sang on the hob. And when Johnny came from work he was astonished to find a tea-party of great

animation.

Johnny was a big lad now (though he was scarce sixteen years of age), and Mr. Butson condescended to shake hands with him, to condole with him on the choice of the wretched trade that had so ill supported himself, and to exchange a remark or two on the engineering topics of the week.

But chiefly Mr. Butson attended to the meal. Nan May had never seen two men together eat such a meal as his. Plainly he was famished. She was full of pity for this unfortunate, so well brought up (thought the simple soul), so cruelly neglected by his well-to-do relations. She cut more slices of bacon, and more, and still more of bread and butter, quietly placing them to his hand, till at last he was satisfied.

Mr. Butson was refreshed, filled his pipe again from Uncle Isaac's paper, and gave some attention to the conversation. But the conversation took to itself the property of rarely travelling far from Mr. Butson and his troubles. He had no false modesty about them. He had parted with almost all his clothes, and hadn't a shirt to his back. His tools were in pawn, and a man felt discouraged from looking for a job when his tools were "put away," and he had no money to redeem them. But he would starve sooner than apply to his unnatural relations; he would take the help of strangers first.

When at last Mr. Butson took leave, and went shivering into the gusty night, Uncle Isaac was careful to let him go alone, and to remain, himself, in the shop parlour till his friend was clear away. But Nan May ran down the street after her departed guest. There were a few hurried words of entreaty in the woman's voice: "Here, Mr. Butson. Do! you really must!"—and she scurried back breathless and a trifle shamefaced. She reached across the counter and shut the till ere she came into the shop parlour.

Uncle Isaac Iooked up sharply in her face as she entered, but went on with his pipe.

XVII.

This visit was but the first of many from Mr. Butson: until after a very few months he came as regularly as Uncle Isaac himself. He recovered his old appearance a little at a time, one new article of clothing coming after another; but he seemed to have no luck in his quest for a job—or very little. What small success he found was ever brought to naught by the captiousness—even the rudeness—of those in direction, or their unreasonable exactions in the way of work. To simple Nan May he seemed the most shamefully ill-used of exemplars.

Johnny and Bessy were less enthusiastic. Bessy said nothing, but avoided Mr. Butson as much as possible, sitting in the shop when he was in the back parlour. Johnny went for walks in the evening, and grumbled, wondering why his mother encouraged this stranger—"cadging suppers," as he uncivilly put it. Nan May was hurt at the expression, and feared that the workshop was spoiling Johnny's manners.

News came from Bob Smallpiece that his poor old mother was dead at last, and buried in the high churchyard where Johnny's grandfather lay. Also that Bob would come to London now, for a visit, at the first opportunity. Now it was a fact that Bob Smallpiece, for a year or two, had been inclined to marry; though it was a thing he might never have thought of if he had seen less of Mrs. May. But he was a man of practical temperament, making up in his commonsense for a great lack of agility of mind. There were certain obstacles, he saw—obstacles that must remove of themselves or not at all. First, his old mother. It would not seem fair to bring a wife to nurse a bedridden old woman—at anyrate it was scarce an attraction. More, the old woman herself had a dread of it. She feared the chance of being thought a burden by a newcomer, and would often beg Bob not to marry till she were gone; sometimes with the assurance that she would not be long now. Then—to say nothing of old Mr. May—there had been the children, who, familiar as he was with them, afflicted him, in this particular matter alone, with an odd shyness. Again, when the old man died, the May family must needs come to London, if only that Johnny might go to his trade; while Bob Smallpiece must stay at the forest. But he was ever

patient and philosophical.

Now that some difficulties were gone, another arose. Nan May, all unaware of his slow designs, was settled in London, with ties of business. But perhaps, after all, the business was not flourishing—might be a burden better laid down. And as to Johnny—he was earning wages of some sort now, and at most his apprenticeship would be out when he was twenty-one.

Bob Smallpiece had reserved one piece of news till he could deliver it in person. This was that at last he had let the cottage, at three-and-sixpence a week, to a decent woodman and his wife. And so, wearing a new neckcloth, and with three weeks' rent in his pocket, Bob Smallpiece appeared in Harbour Lane one spring morning, a vast astonishment of leather and velveteen, such as had never before brought a Blackwall housewife to attention in the midst of her dusting and sweeping. No name was painted over the shop, but no stranger could pass its red and blue and green without stopping to look; least of all Bob Smallpiece, in quest of the place itself. Nan May saw him, and ran to the door; and Bessy, with her crutch and her book, met him half-way to the back-parlour, gay and laughing.

Bob regarded the well-filled shop, the neat room, with some mixture of feelings. Prosperity was excellent in its own way, but it made the new obstacle more formidable. Further, Mrs. May, though she was pleased to hear that the cottage was let, and grateful enough for his trouble in letting it, was not so overjoyed as she might have been if the weekly three-and-sixpence had come at a time of pinching; more, she handled the half-sovereign almost as disrespectfully as the sixpence, and dropped it into a part of her purse where it fell among other gold. Poor Bob saw the obstacle not only bigger, but double. Not merely was Nan May tied to London by her trade and by Johnny's apprenticeship, but she was a well-to-do tradeswoman, with whom a poor forest-keeper could expect no more than respectful acquaintance. He half feared she might even offer to pay him for his trouble with the cottage, and

grew red and hot with the apprehension. But this affliction was spared him though Nan did venture to ask if his care of her property had involved out-of-pocket expenses; a suggestion which Bob repudiated desperately.

Neither Bessy nor her mother could understand why their visitor's manner was so constrained and awkward, nor why he announced that he "must be going" after sitting for twenty minutes. But that, of course, was not to be allowed. Johnny would be home in half an hour, and there would be some dinner. So Bob Smallpiece, who wanted to get away somewhere by himself and think things over, remained, and made his part of the conversation as well as he could.

Johnny came, smudgy and hungry, surprised to find that his old friend, big man as he was, seemed to be scarcely so big as when he saw him last, eighteen months ago. For Johnny himself was grown surprisingly, and seemed like to stand as high as Bob Smallpiece's shoulder by his seventeenth birthday. Bob found more to talk of now that Johnny had come, and he ate even better than Johnny himself, for nothing spoiled the keeper's appetite. When could they all come to the forest again for a day? Nan May shook her head. She had no days free but Sundays—she might come some day, perhaps; some Sunday in the vague future. But Johnny might get a day off at a slack time, and he and Bessy would come. Bessy brimmed over with delight at the prospect. Every day, since she had left it, the forest had seemed a more wonderful and a more distant dream; every day some forgotten circumstance, some moment of delight, some long-dead bunch of wildflowers, trifles all, and daily commonplaces once, had come back to lend one more touch to the fairy picture her memory made ever more radiant as the simple facts fell farther into the past. And Johnny, little burdened with pictures of fancy (for he put his imagination away from him now, as a childishness unworthy an engineer), nevertheless thought that as soon as a certain large job was completed at Maidment and Hurst's the gaffer would doubtless let him lose a day. So it was settled. And when Johnny hurried off to his work, Bob Smallpiece took the opportunity to leave too; for he must go and see his

sister, he said.

He went, and saw his sister, and took tea with her; and his sister found him even duller than Nan May had done. For in truth Bob Smallpiece was in a mire of doubt and hesitation. In a frame of mind so foreign to his simple habit he grew fretful, and left things to chance and impulse. With no definite design in the world, he wandered back to Harbour Lane after tea, and there met, for the first time, Uncle Isaac and Mr. Butson. This company proved uncongenial; and indeed the distinguished Butson was indisposed to be cordial with an Essex bumpkin in a velveteen uniform. So, though Nan May was all kindness, Bob Smallpiece soon took himself off to the train, where his savage moodiness might not be seen. The whole thing was past hope now; though he might have found it hard to tell precisely what had occurred since midday to worsen the look of affairs.

XVIII.

Not for six weeks, at least, Johnny judged, could he beg the day's holiday that was to take him and Bessy back to the forest; and it might be more. That would be in July—or even August—and probably the weather would be more trustworthy then. As for Bessy, she counted the days on the almanack, and tapped the yellow-faced old barometer that had been gran'dad's, a dozen times a day. Johnny laughed at her impatience, and invented endless weather prophecies "just from America" putting the weather for the whole of July at every possible shade of unpleasantness, from blizzards to floods and thunderstorms.

The days went quietly—they were even dull. Mr. Butson did what he could to make himself agreeable, and several times praised a set of callipers that Johnny had made—a set of callipers that Johnny, in fact, thought very well of himself. So that he seemed not such a bad fellow, perhaps, after all, though a bit of a sponge.

There was nothing to cause it, to all seeming, but it was a fact that just now Nan

May grew thoughtful and absent of manner. She would pause in the midst of needlework, as though to think; and more than once at such a time, Bessy, looking up from her own work, saw that her mother's troubled gaze was fixed on herself. Nan May put away the anxious look as well as she might, and bent to her work again; but Bessy wondered.

Johnny, too, fancied that his mother was scarce so cheerful as was her wont, though he thought of it less than Bessy. But one Sunday afternoon, meeting her by her bedroom door, he took her cheeks between his palms, and looked hard in her face. "Mother," he said, "I believe you've been crying! What's up?"

She put a hand on each of his wrists, and made a shift to smile. "That's nonsense," she said, and tried to pull his hands down. "You're gettin' too strong for your poor old mother to keep you in order!"

But she brightened, always, when Mr. Butson came in the evening; though Mr. Butson's conversation scarce seemed of so inspiriting a character as to account wholly for the change. Still, it interested her. It was mostly about his grievances at the hands of the world; and Nan May was a ready sympathiser.

It was very near to the day (at last fixed) for the excursion, when Bessy woke in the night at the striking of a match. Her mother was lighting a candle, her back toward the bed. She took the candle and passed out, into Johnny's room at the back. Bessy listened, but she heard no talk; heard nothing, indeed, but Johnny's heavy breathing, so still was the night. Presently her mother returned, and stood over her, still with the candle; gazing on her face, it seemed to Bessy—as well as she could see through her half-closed eyes—much as she had gazed when she paused in her needlework, though now her cheeks were wet with tears. With that Bessy opened wide her eyes, and "Mother!" she said. "What's the matter? Are you ill?"

Nan May turned and blew out the light. "No, Bess, no; I'm all right," she said, and crept into bed. "It's not—not much. I woke up, that's all—with a bad dream." She

kissed the girl, and put her arm about her neck. “You’ve always been a good girl, Bessy,” she went on. “You wouldn’t turn against me, would you?”

“Why no, mother! But—”

“Not whatever happened?”

“No—of course not,” she kissed her mother again. “But why?”

“It’s nothing. Only the dream—just the dream, Bess. Go to sleep.”

XIX.

The longed-for holiday came with a fine Monday morning, and Bessy, in a muslin frock that her mother had helped to make for the occasion, was impatient, an hour too soon, because Johnny lingered in bed; enjoying the luxury of “losing a quarter” without paying the penalty.

But Johnny was ready for breakfast before eight, and, seeing the shop-door open, ran to take down the shutters, a thing his mother commonly did herself, because of his absence at work. “I always put ’em up, and for once I’ll take ’em down,” he said, prancing in with the first. “Look out, mother, or I’ll bowl you over!”

“O no, Johnny,” she said, “leave ’em. I’ll only have to—” and at that she stopped.

“Only have to what?” Johnny asked, going for another. “Only have to serve the customers, eh, ’cause the shop’s open? Of course you will—it ain’t your holiday, you know—it’s ours! Look out again! Shoo!”

Bessy rattled at the old barometer still, though for half an hour it had refused to move its hand a shade; and she asked Johnny for the fiftieth time if he were perfectly sure that the proper train wasn’t earlier than they were supposing. And when at last Johnny admitted that it was time to start, Nan May kissed them and bade them good-bye with so wistful an earnestness that Johnny was moved to pleasantry. “All right, mother,” he said, “we’re coming back some day you know!”

They were scarce half-way to the railway-station when Bessy said: “Johnny, I don’t think mother’s been very well lately. There’ll be another train soon; shall we go back an’—an’ just see if she’s all right, first?”

Johnny laughed. “That’s a good idea!” he said. “An’ then I s’pose we’d better miss the next, an’ go back to see how she’s getting on then, an’ the one after that, eh? Mother’s all right. She’s been thinking a bit about—you know, gran’dad an’ all that; and because we’re goin’ to the forest it reminds her of it. Come on—don’t begin the day with dumps!”

There was interest for both of them in the railway journey. They changed trains at Stepney, and after a station or two more came in distant sight of a part of the road they had traversed, on Bank’s cart, when they came to London, two winters back. There was the great, low, desolate wilderness, treeless and void of any green thing, seen now from nearer the midst, with the road bounding it in the distance; and here was the chemical manure-factory, close at hand this time, with its stink at short-hitting range, so that every window in the train went up with a bang, and everybody in the long third-class carriage coughed, or grimaced, or spat, or swore, according to sex and habit.

Then, out beyond Stratford, through Leyton and Leytonstone, they saw that the town had grown much in twenty months, and was still growing. Close, regular streets of little houses, all of one pattern, stared in raw brick, or rose, with a forlorn air of crumbling sponginess, amid sparse sticks of scaffolding. Bessy wondered how the butterflies were faring in the forest, and how much farther they had been driven since she left it. Then the wide country began to spin past, and pleasant single houses, and patches of wood. The hills about Chigwell stood bright and green across the Roding valley, as the low ground ran away between, and the high forest land came up at the other side of the line. Till the train stood in Loughton Station.

Through the village Bessy, flushed and eager, stumped and swung at a pace that kept

Johnny walking his best. Staple Hill was the nearest corner of the forest, and for Staple Hill they made direct. Once past the street-end it rose before them, round and gay, deep and green in the wood that clothed it. Boys were fishing in the pond at its foot, and the stream ran merrily under the dusty road.

“Come, Johnny!” Bessy cried. “Straight over the hill!” Nor did she check her pace till the wide boughs shaded them, and her crutch went softly on the mossy earth among old leaves. Then she stood and laughed aloud, and was near crying. “Smell it, Johnny!” she cried, “smell it! Isn’t it heavenly?”

They went up the slope, across tiny glades, and between thick clumps of undergrowth gay with dog-roses, Bessy’s eyes and ears alert for everything, tree, bird, or flower; now spying out some noisy jay that upbraided their intrusion, now standing to hark for a distant woodpecker. Johnny enjoyed the walk too, but with a soberer delight; as became an engineer taking a day’s relaxation amid the scenes of childish play now half forgotten.

Down the other side of the hill they went, and over the winding stream at the bottom. Truly it seemed a tiny stream now, and Johnny wondered that he should ever have been proud of jumping it. He found a bend where the water rushed through a narrow channel by the side of a bed of clean-washed gravel, and got Bess across, though she scrambled down and up with little help, such was her enthusiasm.

Then the trees grew sparser, and over the deep-grown flat of Debden Slade Bessy stopped again and again to recognise some well-remembered wild-flower; and little brown butterflies skimmed over the rushes and tall grass, the sun mounted higher, and everything was brisk and bright and sweet-smelling. Brother and sister climbed the hill before them slowly, often staying to look back over the great prospect of rolling woodland, ever widening as they rose. Till at last they stood at the point of the ridge, in the gap through the earthwork made by ancient Britons.

This beyond all others was the spot that Bessy had loved best. This ragged ring of

crumbling rampart and ditch, grown thick with fantastic hornbeams, pollarded out of all common shape; its inner space a crowded wonder of tall bracken, with rare patches of heather; its outer angles watching over the silent woods below, and dominating the hills that ranked beyond; this was the place where best an old book from the shelf would fill a sunny afternoon. For the camp was a romance in itself, a romance of closer presence than anything printed on paper. Here, two thousand years ago, the long-haired savages had stood, in real fact, with spears and axes, brandishing defiance to foes on the hillside. Here they had entrenched themselves against the Roman legions—they and their chief, fierce Cassivellaunus: more, to her, than a name in an old history-book. For had not she seen the wild prince a hundred times in her day-dreams, stalking under the oaks—with the sheeted Druids? Till the wood grew alive with phantoms, and she hid her face in her book.

And now she sat here again, in the green shade, and looked out over the thousand tree-tops, merry with the sunlight. How long had she left it all? What was that fancy of a ride to London, of ship-yards, and of a chandler's-shop? But Johnny whistled to a robin on a twig, and she turned and looked at him, to see that here was the engineer, indeed, and the painter of the chandler's-shop. Still, which was the dream, that or this?

Left alone, Bessy would have sat here all the day. But there were other places not to be forgotten, as Johnny reminded her. Over the heather they went, then, to Monk Wood, where the trees were greater and the flowers were more abundant than anywhere else in the forest; and they did not leave it till Johnny insisted on dinner. Now this dinner was a great excitement; for at setting out Johnny had repelled every suggestion of sandwiches in a bag, and now dauntlessly marched into an inn on the main road and ordered whatever was ready, with two glasses of beer. Bessy, overwhelmed by the audacity of the act, nevertheless preserved her appetite, and even drank a little of the beer. And the adventure cost Johnny four shillings.

“Mother’s having her dinner alone,” said Bessy in a flutter of timid delight. “She doesn’t guess we’re having ours at the Red Deer!”

Hence it was not far, by the lanes, to the high churchyard, for the flowers gathered in Monk Wood were for gran’dad’s grave, and it was a duty of the day to mark the condition of the little headstone. All was well with it, and it surprised them to find the grass cut neatly, and a little clump of pansies growing on the mound. Bessy suspected Bob Smallpiece.

And so went a perfect day. Their tea they took in Bob Smallpiece’s lodge. The keeper admitted having “gone over” old Mr. May’s grave with the grass shears—just once or twice. He avoided making any definite reply to Johnny’s and Bessy’s invitations to come to Harbour Lane again. Perhaps he’d come again, he said, some day. Meanwhile, had they seen the cottage? As they had not, they set out all three together, and looked at it.

The new tenancy had made little change. Down the glen the white walls first peeped from among the trunks, and then the red tiles, just as ever. The woodman was at work mending the old fence—it was always being mended somewhere. The turbulent little garden still tumbled and surged against it, threatening to lay it flat at any moment. Very naturally, the woodman and his wife, though perfectly civil, took less personal interest in Johnny and Bessy than Johnny and Bessy took in them and the cottage, so that it was not long ere a last look was taken at the old fence, and Bob Smallpiece went off another way on his walk of duty.

Shadows grew long, and thickets dark. To revisit every remembered nook had been impossible, but they had seen and lingered in all them that had most delighted Bessy in old times—all but Wormleyton Pits. Johnny had turned that way once, thoughtlessly; but “No,” Bessy said—almost whispered—with her hand on his arm, “not that way, Johnny!”

And now they turned their backs on the fast darkening forest and took a steep lane

for the village below. The sweet smells, that go up at the first blink of the evening star, met them on the breeze; and when they turned for their last look toward the woods, the trees on the hill-top, tall sentinels of the host beyond, barred the red west and nodded them and the sun goodbye.

Out of the stony lane, Loughton was lighted, and at the end of a dusty road was a small constellation of gas-lamps and railway signals. Now it was plain that both were a little tired—Bessy perhaps more than a little. But the train gave a welcome rest, and there were no passengers to see, even if she slept, for they were alone in their compartment. They had passed two stations, when Johnny, who had been standing to look out at the opposite window, turned and saw that his sister was dozing, with her head bent forward and her face hidden by the crutch-handle. It was so wholly her figure as she sat in the cab at the old man's funeral, that Johnny started, and sat where he stood, though he had never once called the thing to mind since that day. And he took the crutch gently away, to look at her face. But it was calm and untroubled; and he put his hand at the farther side of it and pressed it to his shoulder; for plainly she was tired out, and there were no cushions in the carriage.

It was nearing ten o'clock when at last they turned into Harbour Lane. From a back street came the old watchman's cry, "Pa-a-ast nine o'clock!" as he went his round in search of orders to wake early risers; and lights in bedroom windows told of early risers already seeking sleep. Nobody was in the shop, but as they came in, Johnny thought he saw his mother's face vanish from beside the muslin curtain that obscured the glass in the back-parlour door.

They passed through the shop, and into the back parlour. Their mother and Mr. Butson sat facing them, side by side. Mr. Butson had a new suit of clothes, and their mother wore her best, and smiles and tears were in her face. Something had happened. What was it? Bessy and Johnny, scarce within the door, stood and stared.

"Johnny—Bessy—" Nan faltered, looking from one to the other. "Have

you—enjoyed your holiday? . . . Won't you—kiss me, Johnny?"

She rose and made a step toward them. But something struck them still, and they looked, wondering, from Nan to Butson, and back to their mother again. . . . What was it?

Johnny moved first, and kissed his mother, absently, gazing at Mr. Butson the while. Mr. Butson, who was smoking, said nothing, but lay back in his chair and considered the ash of his cigar.

Nan's anxiety was plain to see. She put a hand on Johnny's shoulder and an arm on Bessy's neck. "I,—we—you won't be vexed because I didn't tell you, will you?" she said, pale, but trying to smile, "I—we—Mr. Butson . . . Johnny, Bessy—don't look so!" Tears ran down her cheeks, and she bent her head on Johnny's other shoulder. "We've been married to-day!"

XX.

The shock left Johnny and Bessy numb, and, though Bessy was quicker, the change took Johnny two or three days to realise—even to understand. His first distinct impression was one of injury and resentment. He had been tricked—hoodwinked. His mother—even his mother had deceived him and Bessy. Why? Why not tell them first?

She would have told them, he was sure; she told them everything. Butson had persuaded her to keep them in ignorance till the thing was done, lest they should rebel, and perhaps bring her to a change of mood. And Johnny's guess was a good one. . . . Forthwith his resentment became something more; hate, mere hate for this man who had come between him and his mother—this cadger of suppers thrusting himself into their intimate life. . . .

And yet—perhaps this was simple anger at the slight and the deception; jealousy at finding a stranger as dear to his mother as himself was. Butson might turn out none

so bad a fellow. He was very decent over the callipers, for instance. . . . Curse the callipers! Johnny's anger was not to be reasoned down. On Sunday he had his own mother. Now there was nothing but Butson's wife.

More, the man was his father—his stepfather; chief authority in the house, with respect and obedience due to him. That seemed intolerable. For a moment Johnny had mad notions of leaving home altogether, and shifting for himself—going aboard ship, abroad, anywhere. But that would be to leave Bess alone—and his mother; his mother might need him yet.

He told Long Hicks, as they tramped to work over the locks and bridges in the bright morning, early and still; and it surprised him to see Hicks's tacit concern at the news. The long man reddened and stuttered, and checked himself suddenly at an imminent outburst of speech. But that was all; he offered no opinion and made no remark; and as he was given to suppressed excitement on small occasion, Johnny presently forgot it.

As for Bessy, her distress, quiet as it was, was beyond telling. Her association with her mother had been so intimate that this change was stark bereavement; and for Butson and his coarse pretence her feeling was sheer repulsion.

Neither boy nor girl had the habit of dissimulation, and though they said little, it needed small discernment to guess something of their sentiments. Poor Nan was dismayed to perceive that they did not take to Butson instant on the news of the novel relationship. Indeed, it perplexed her. For in her simple view he was a resplendent person of finer mould, sore hit by a cruel world, and entitled to the respectful sympathy, at least and coldest, of the merest stranger. More, nobody could be more completely devoted than he to the interests of Johnny and Bessy; he had most vehemently assured her of it, again and again. But after all, the thing was sudden; they must realise his true worth soon. Though meantime she was distressed extremely.

Butson saw plainly enough, but for the present cared not at all. He had won his game, and for a little time unwonted plenty and comfort satisfied him. Though he was not insensible that this was a place wherein he must do something more to make himself absolute master.

Uncle Isaac got the news on Tuesday evening, when he came for supper. For a week or ten days he had been little seen at Harbour Lane, because of an urgent job involving overtime, a thing not to be neglected in these lean years. He had suspected nothing, moreover, supposing Butson to be so often attracted to Nan's by the mere prospect of supper.

Now, when he was told, he was near as astonished as Johnny had been. He sat at random—fortunately on a chair—and opened mouth and eyes. But ere his mouth closed he had resolved on his own course. The thing was done, and past undoing.

He sprang to his feet, and seized one of Butson's hands—the nearest—in both his own. "Mr. Butson!" he said: "Butson! Me ole friend 'Enery—me dearest 'opes an' wishes is rewarded. Nan, you're done most dootiful the confidentialest o' my intentions. For what was my confidential intentions? 'Ere, I says, confidential to meself, 'ere is my niece, a young woman as I wish every possible good fortun' to, though I sez it meself: a very sootable young woman o' some little property with two children an' a business. Two children an' a business was my reflection. What's more, 'ere's my very respected friend Butson—than which none more so—fash'nable by 'abit an' connexions, with no children an' no business. Them considerations bein' thus what follers? What's the cause an' pediment to 'oly matrimony? Far be it from me, sez I, to dictate. But I'll take 'im in to tea, any'ow. An' I'll do whatever else is ne'ssry. Yus, I'll do it, sez I, as is my dooty. I'll work it if it's mortal possible. Whether grateful or not I'll do it. An' I done it."

Uncle Isaac punched his left palm with his right fist, and looked from husband to wife, with the eye of the righteous defying censure. Nan flushed and smiled, and

indeed she was relieved. No consideration of her unaccustomed secrecy had given her more doubt than that it must shut her off from Uncle Isaac's advice; loss enough in itself, and probably an offence to him.

"This," Uncle Isaac went on, taking his chair once more and drawing it up to the table: "this is a great an' 'appy occasion, an' as sich it should be kep' up. Nan, is there sich a thing as a drop o' sperrits in the 'ouse?"

There was most of a small jar of whisky—the first purchase Mr. Butson had caused on his change of condition. It was brought, with tumblers, and Uncle Isaac celebrated the occasion with full honours and much fragmentary declamation. He drank the health of bride and bridegroom, first separately and then together. He drank the health of the family, completed and adorned by the addition of Butson. He drank success to the shop; long life to all the parties concerned; happiness to each of them. And a certain forgetfulness ensuing, he began his toast-list afresh, in conscientious precaution lest something had been omitted.

"See there, Bess; see there, me gal," he exclaimed, with some thickness of utterance, turning to Bessy (whose one desire was to remain unnoticed), and making a semicircular swing of the arm in Butson's direction. "Yer father! Noo s-stepfather! Local p'rentis! As a cripple an' a burden it's your dooty to be grateful for the c-circumstance. Bein' a widderer o' long ex-experience meself I'm grateful for s-surroundin' priv'leges, which it is your dooty t' respeck. See? Dooty t' respeck an' obey; likewise honour. 'C-cos if shillun don' 'speck an' 'bey whash good C-catechism? Eh?" Uncle Isaac's voice grew loud and fierce. "Whash become C-catechishm I say? Nullavoid. Ca'chishm's nullavoid." . . . Here, pausing to look round at Mr. and Mrs. Butson, he lost his argument altogether, and stared owlishly at the wall. . . . "'Owsomedever, the 'casion bein' the state an' pediment o' 'oly matrimony, 'cordin' to confidential 'tentions, nothin' remains but ashk you all join me 'n drinkin'—d-drinkin'—er—er—lil' drop more."

Uncle Isaac subsided with his face on the table, and his eyes closed. So that it grew necessary for Mr. Butson to shake him and bring him to a perpendicular. Whereupon, being duly invested with his hat, he was safely set in his way on the narrow pavement of Harbour Lane.

XXI.

Twice or thrice more Uncle Isaac came to supper, though he was dimly aware that his visits were in some way less successful than had been their wont; insomuch that he took nothing home with him for breakfast, nor even went so far as to hint his desire, in Butson's presence. For Butson welcomed him not at all, and his manner grew shorter at each meeting, and this with full intent. Because Mr. Butson perceived that, as first step toward being master in his own house, he must get rid of Uncle Isaac.

Mere curtness of manner—even gruffness—would never drive Uncle Isaac from his prey. It operated only to make him more voluble, more strenuously blandiloquent. Till one evening after supper, as he lay back in his chair sucking noisily at lips and teeth, he resolved to venture a step in the matter of the lapsed grants in aid of breakfast. Johnny and Bessy were out of the house (they went out more often now), Nan was serving in the shop, and Mr. Butson sat with his back partly turned, and smoked, in uncivil silence.

"Ah!" quoth Uncle Isaac, with a side-glance at his ungracious host, "that's a uncommon nice tin o' spiced beef we just 'ad a cut auf. Uncommon."

Mr. Butson made no answer.

"It's a great credit to your business instinks, that tin o' spiced beef. I almost wish I 'ad took another slice or so, now." As a fact, Uncle Isaac had not been offered a further helping—perhaps because he had already taken three. "I almost wish I 'ad. . . . Never mind. It'll do another time. . . . Come now, I've 'alf a mind to get Nan to

wrop it up for my breakfast!”

The suggestion was made as of a novel and striking idea, but Mr. Butson showed no flash of enthusiasm. He swung his chair slowly round on one leg till he faced Uncle Isaac. Then he put his cigar carefully on the mantelpiece and said:—“Look ’ere, Mr. Mundy!”

The sudden severity of the voice drew Uncle Isaac’s eyes from the ceiling and his feet from under the table simultaneously.

“Look ’ere, Mr. Mundy! You’re bin so very kind as to celebrate this ’ere weddin’ o’ mine with four good ’eavy suppers an’ about a pint o’ whisky at my expense. I’m very grateful for that, an’ I won’t trouble you no more. See? This is the end o’ the celebration. I’m goin’ to eat my supper in future, me an’ my wife, without your assistance; an’ breakfast too. Understand?”

Uncle Isaac’s feet retreated under his chair, and his eyes advanced to an alarming protrusion.

“See what I mean?” Butson went on, with growing offence in his voice. “Jest you buy yer own suppers an’ eat ’em at ’ome, or else go without.”

Speech was denied Uncle Isaac. He blinked and choked. What did it mean? Was it a dream? Was he Uncle Isaac, respected and deferred to, the man of judgment and influence, and was he told, thus outrageously, to buy his own supper?

“Yus,” said Butson, as though in answer to his thoughts. “I mean it!”

Whereat Uncle Isaac, with a gasp and a roll of the eyes, found his tongue. “Mr. Butson!” he said, in a voice of dignified but grieved surprise. “Mr. Butson! I—I think I must ’a ’eard wrong. Otherwise I might put it as you may be sorry for sich words.”

“P’raps,” remarked Butson, cynically laconic.

“In which case,” replied Uncle Isaac the adroit, “it is freely took as auffered, an’

nothin’ more need be said atween of friends after sich ’ansome apologies give an’ took, and reconciliation resooms its ’armony accordin’.”

Butson glared. “G-r-r-r!” he growled. “Apologies! What I say I mean. You’ve done very well at cheap suppers an’ what not ’ere, and to-night you’ve ’ad yer last. I’m master ’ere now. An’ you can git out as soon as ye like.”

“What?”

“Git out. Y’ought to be ashamed o’ yourself,” cried the disinterested Butson indignantly, “comin cadgin’ suppers!”

“Git out? Me? Suppers? Why, ’Enery Butson, I brought you ’ere out o’ the gutter! Out o’ the gutter, an’ fed ye!”

“Ah—a lot you fed me, and mighty anxious to do it, wasn’t ye? You clear out o’ ’ere!”

“O I’ll go! an’ I’ll see about countermandin’ a paper or two ’fore I go to bed, too. An’ my small property—”

“Yer small property!” put in Butson, with slow scorn. “Yer small property! Where is it? What is it? . . . Want to know my opinion o’ you? You’re a old ’umbug. That’s what you are. A old ’umbug.”

Uncle Isaac grew furious and purple. “’Umbug?” he said. “’Umbug? Them words to me, as saved ye from starvation? ’Umbug yerself. You an’ yer connexions, an’ mayors an’ what not! Why, ye dunno yer own trade! I wouldn’t trust ye to grind a cawfy-mill!”

With that the shop-door opened, and Nan stood between them. She had heard high voices, and at the first cessation of custom she came to see. “Uncle! Henry! What is it?” she asked, with alarm in her face.

“This is what it is,” said Butson, now near as purple as Uncle Isaac. “This ’ere uncle o’ yours, Mrs. Butson, or whatever ’e is, ain’t comin’ ’ere cadgin’ ’is grub any

more; not so long as I got a say in it ’e ain’t. See? So now you better say good-bye to ’im if ye want to, ’cos ’e’s goin’, quick.”

“O yus,” said Uncle Isaac, speaking to his niece, but glaring at Butson, “I’m goin’, Mrs. Butson. An’ much better may you be for it. After what I done for you an’ all. Sort o’ gratitood I might ’a’ expected!”

“O uncle!” exclaimed the distracted Nan. “Why, whatever’s the matter? I know you’ve always been very good. Henry! What’s it all about?”

“About puttin’ a end to this ’ere bloodsuckin’, that’s all!”

“Bloodsuckin’!” exclaimed Uncle Isaac. “Yus, you know somethin’ about that! Pity ye don’t know yer trade ’alf as well! Then p’raps you’d earn yer livin’, ’stead o’ spongin’ on people an’ deloodin’ a fool of a woman to keep ye lazy!”

“Go on! go on!” commanded Butson, with increasing wrath.

“No, uncle, stop a minute,” entreated poor Nan. “Don’t, Henry, don’t let’s quarrel!”

“Go on!”

“O yus, I’ll go. P’raps you’d like to call the p’lice?”

Butson caught breath at the word, and something crossed his face like a chance reflection from a white screen. But he repeated, “Go on!” with a gesture toward the door.

“Yus, yus!” said Uncle Isaac, with his hat on his head. “I’m goin’! An’ not sorry neither. Ho! You’re a bright sort for a local p’rentis, you are!” (Uncle Isaac may have been at odds with the phrase in loco parentis). “A uncommon neat pattern!” And he walked out into the dark street, a small model of offended dignity.

“O Henry,” cried Nan in tears, “what have you done?”

“I’ve done,” answered Butson, reaching for his cigar, “jist what I meant to do. That’s all. ’Cos it suited me. See?”

Nan felt the coarse overbearance of his stare, and dropped her gaze beneath it. And

with that misgiving fell upon her: the shadow her punishment flung before it.

XXII.

Mr. Henry Butson had fallen on good fortune. No more would he endure the humiliation of begging a job of an unsympathetic gaffer. In future his life would be one of ease, free from ignoble exertion and unshamed by dungaree overalls. And he made it so. For a little while, his wife seemed to indulge in an absurd expectation that he would resume his search for occupation of one sort or another. Once she even hinted it, but he soon demolished that fancy, and in terms that prevented any more hints. He had little patience with such foolishness, indeed. The matter was simple enough. Why did a man work? Merely to get shelter and food and clothes and comfort, and hair-oil, whatever he wanted to drink and smoke, and his necessary pocket-money. A man who could get these things without working would be a fool to work; more, he would behave inhumanly to his fellow man by excluding him from a job. As for himself, he got what he needed easily enough, without the trouble of even taking down the shop-shutters: a vulgar act repellent to his nature.

So he rose at ten, or eleven, or twelve, as the case might be, and donned fine raiment; the most fashionable suit procurable from the most fashionable shop in Aldgate. He began at Aldgate; but in time he grew more fastidious, and went to a tailor in Leadenhall Street, a tailor whose daily task was to satisfy the tastes of the most particular among the ship-brokers' clerks of St. Mary Axe. His toilet complete, his curls well oiled, Mr. Butson descended to a breakfast of solitary state—Nan's had been hurried over hours ago. The rest of the day was given as occasion prompted. When the weather was fine, nothing pleased him better, nor more excellently agreed with his genteel propensities, than to go for a stroll up West. When Harbour Lane was quiet and empty (he seemed to choose such times for going out) he would slip round to the station, and by train and omnibus gain the happy

region. He was careful to take with him enough money to secure some share of the polite gratifications proper to the quarter, and minutely acquainted himself with the manners and customs of all the bars in the Strand and about Piccadilly Circus. And although he was a little astonished when first he was charged eighteenpence for an American drink, he was careful not to show it, and afterwards secretly congratulated himself on the refined instinct that had pitched on so princely a beverage in the dark, so to speak. He took air, too, in Hyde Park, to the great honour of his whiskers, and much improved his manner of leaning on a rail and of sitting in a green chair. In the evening he tried, perhaps, a music hall, but always some of the bars, and arrived home at night rather late, sometimes a trifle unsteady, and usually in a bad temper. Bad temper was natural, indeed, in the circumstances; after so many hours' indulgence in the delights of fashionable society it revolted his elegant nature to have to return at last to a vulgar little chandler's-shop in a riverside street, where a wife in a print bodice and a white apron was sitting up for him; sometimes even crying—for nothing at all—as if the circumstances were not depressing enough for him already.

These little excursions cost money, of course, but then what was the good of keeping an ignoble little shop if you couldn't get money out of it? And the shop did very well. Mrs. Butson and the girl—the cripple—were boiling bacon (the smell was disgusting) all day long, and they sold it as fast as it was cold. And other things sold excellently too. From the time when she took the shutters down in the morning to the time when the lad Johnny put them up at night, Mrs. Butson was unceasingly at work serving—unless she were boiling—and scarce had five minutes for her meals; and often the girl had to leave the bacon and help in the shop too. Very well—all that meant profit. The woman couldn't make him believe that it didn't, merely because the wretched details of trade failed to interest him. That was the way of people in that class of life—there was a touch of the miser about all of them. No matter how the money came in, they persisted in their narrow views as to spending

it. And there was other income, in addition. The lad Johnny—he was almost a man to look at—brought his mother eight shillings a week at the time of the wedding, and then ten shillings, and then twelve; more, it would increase two shillings a year; but in truth his mother was unduly extravagant in buying him clothes. Still at anyrate there was something, and there might be more if only Mrs. Butson would turn the girl out to earn a little, instead of letting her waste her time reading, and confirming her in habits of idleness. And there was the rent from the cottage. This came every week by postal order from Bob Smallpiece, and since it was fitting that a husband should open letters sent his wife by a single man, Mr. Butson cashed the orders without troubling her in the matter at all.

So that indeed he was not at all wasteful, considering both his income and the society he moved in—for he was not slow in making acquaintances among the affable gentility of the bars. In fact he would have done it cheaper still but for the pestilent uncertainty of Spring Handicaps. It would seem impossible for him to put half a sovereign on any horse without dooming it to something very near the last place. The distinguished society of the bars was profoundly astonished, indeed distressed, at his ill-luck; but gave him more excellent information for future events; information, however, that brought even worse luck with it.

His wife showed no sympathy for his troubles—and of course there are vexations and disappointments (such as those of the Spring Handicaps) which are inseparable from fashionable life—but rather aggravated them with hole-and-corner snivelling, and ridiculous attempts at persuading him to a mean and inglorious way of life. She even hinted vulgar suspicion of his west-end friends, and suggested that he should associate with a long fool called Hicks, living next door—a common working man. For a long time—many months in fact—he bore it with what patience he might, retaliating only in such terms as seemed necessary to close her mouth, and to convince her of his contempt for her low habit of mind, and indeed, for herself; and when at last it grew plain that personal punching was what was needed, he was so

considerate as not to punch her about the face, where marks would advertise the state of his domestic affairs; careful, also, to operate not other than quietly, when they were alone, on the same grounds of decency. And he knew that she would tell nobody, for at least she had self-respect enough for that.

Of these things Johnny knew nothing, and Bessy only a little. Both were glad that their stepfather was so much from home, and though Johnny's sentiment toward him was a mere sullen contempt, the lad made no parade of the fact,—rather aimed indeed at keeping things quiet for his mother's sake. But Bessy fretted in secret.

XXIII.

Johnny's months went uneventfully. At Maidment and Hurst's he applied himself zealously to his trade—the more because home was a dull place now—and he was as smart a lad as any in the shop of his age, or perhaps of a few months older. He could turn back an eyelid, too, and whip away an iron filing, or a speck of emery grit, with such address and certainty as might astonish a surgeon. The operation was one that every engineer's apprentice grew apt at, and exceptional dexterity like Johnny's was a matter of pride, a distinction zealously striven for, an accomplishment to exercise at every opportunity. Johnny felt that he had passed with honours on the memorable day when Cottam, the gaffer, roared to him from the other end of the shop to come and attend to his eye, afflicted with a sharp grain of brass. "No—not you," quoth Mr. Cottam, in answer to instant offers of help from those hard by. "This 'ere'll stick like a nail in a barn door. Where's young May? D'y'ear? Where's young Jack May?"

Much of his practical knowledge Johnny owed to Long Hicks. That recluse, whose sole friend hitherto had been his accordion, now declared for a second hobby, which was to turn Johnny into the best workman at Maidment and Hurst's before his time was out. "You've got all the chances," said Long Hicks. "You're servin' yer time on

small work—alwis best for trainin' a first-rate man. I'm reckoned a good fitter, but I served time mostly on big work, or I'd 'a' bin better."

He recommended Johnny to qualify as a marine engineer when his apprenticeship was over, even if he intended to live a shore life. "You get yer c'tificates, an' then you're all right," he would say. "An' the better c'tificates you get the better you'll do, afloat or ashore. So as soon as your time's out, off you go an' serve your year at sea as fourth or fifth of a good boat, if you can get the job. The rest'll be easy as winkin' to a quick young chap like you. You can draw nice an' neat—I can put a thing down acc'rate enough, but I can't draw it neat—and what with one thing an' another I b'lieve you could pass your second now. I ought to 'a' done it, p'raps, but I lose me 'ed at anythin' like a 'xamination. An' I never 'ad over-much schoolin'. Them compound multiplications 'ud 'ave me over ev'ry time. I s'pose you don't think nothin' of a compound multiplication?"

Johnny admitted that he had gone a long way beyond that rule of arithmetic.

"Yus," Hicks answered. "I've got beyond it, too, teachin' meself. I know 'ow to do 'em well enough. But Lord! what a strain they are! Tons, 'undredweights, quarters, pounds, ounces, an' grains, an' multiply 'em by five 'undred an' twenty-seven thousan' six 'undred an' eighty-three. There ain't no end to a job like that, an' yer brain on the stretch all the time, 'cos a tick out'll make it about a million tons wrong in the end. It 'ud send me foamin' mad, at a 'xamination an' all, with a chap waitin' for the sum! Phew!" And Long Hicks's forehead went clammy at the fancy.

"But there," he proceeded, "you're all right. You'll knock auf your second's examination easy as marbles; an' then you'll do yer chief's 'an extry chief's all in one, an' then you'll do the Board o' Trade, an' be a guarantee chief or anythin' ye like! You will, by George!" and the lank man gazed in Johnny's face (Johnny was sitting on Hicks's bed) with much respect and admiration, being fully persuaded, in the enthusiasm of the moment, that the lad had already as good as achieved the

triumphs he prophesied.

But there was work to do, and Johnny did it. Mechanical drawing, when its novelty had worn off, was less delightful than the fancy-free draughtsmanship he had practised as a schoolboy, and it had an arid twang of decimals and vulgar fractions. Still, for a time there was a charm in the gradual unfolding of the inner principles of his work, and in the disclosure, piece by piece, of the cunning complication that stood ministrant on the main simplicity of a great steam engine; till the beauty of the thing in its completeness came in sight, with something of surprise in it. Though this, too, grew a commonplace as familiarity cheapened it, and then his work was work merely. And so it went till half the time of his apprenticeship was over, and he was eighteen, and a sinewy young fellow.

Sometimes he drew at home, and sometimes in Hicks's room. Hicks had a few books—editions a little out of date, some of them, but all useful—and these were at Johnny's service: Seaton's Manual, Reed's Handbook, Donaldson's Drawing and Rough Sketching, and the like. Hicks's room was inconvenient for drawing, but nothing would tempt Hicks next door, and once or twice Mr. Butson had come home when Johnny's drawing-board and implements littered the table in the shop-parlour, and made objections.

"My eye!" exclaimed Hicks, one evening, in face of a crank-shaft elevation and sections, as Johnny held it up on the board; "why that's a drawin' good enough to put in a frame! I tell ye what, me lad. With a bit more practice, an' a bit o' the reg'lar professional touch, you'll be good enough for a draughtsman's job. Lord! you'll be a master some day, an' I'll come an' get a job of you! Look 'ere, no more o' this gropin' about alone. Round you go to the Institute, an' chip into the Mechanical Drawin' class. That's your game. They'll put you up to the reg'lar drawin'-auffice capers."

Thus urged, Johnny went to the Institute. This was an evening school, founded by a

ship-builder twenty years earlier. Here a few lads, earnest as Johnny, came to work and to learn, and a great many more, differently disposed, came to dabble. There was a gymnasium, too, and a cricket-club, and plenty of boxing. And girls came, to learn cookery and dressmaking: and there were sometimes superior visitors from other parts, oozing with inexpensive patronage, who spoke of Johnny and his companions as the Degraded Classes, who were to be Raised from the Depths.

And so in the Institute Johnny drew, and learned the proper drawing-office manner of projection. Learned also the muscle-grinder and the long-arm balance on the horizontal bar, and more particularly learned to pop in a straight left, to duck and counter, and to give and take a furious pounding for three minutes on end without losing wind or good-humour. So that his attention was diverted from home, and for long he saw nothing of the misery his mother suffered in secret, nothing of the meek endurance of Bessy; and for the more reason because both studied to keep him ignorant, and to show him cheerful faces.

But there came an evening when his eyes were opened—in some degree, at least. Perhaps something especially perverse had happened in a Spring Handicap (Spring Handicaps were just beginning), perhaps it was some other of the vexations that beset a gentlemanly career: but certainly Mr. Henry Butson came into Harbour Lane in no amiable mood. At the corner, where a public-house shed light across the street, he ran into a stout bare-armed girl in a faded ultramarine hat, and made to push her roughly aside. But the girl stood her ground, and planted an untender elbow near the spot where his watch-chain hung resplendent. “Garn!” she cried, “bought the street, ’ave yer?” And then as he sought to pass on: “D’y’ear! Ye got yer collar an’ yer chain; where’s yer muzzle?”

Nowise mollified by this outrage, Mr. Butson came scowling in at the shop door, and taking no notice of Nan, who stood at the counter, entered the back parlour and slammed the door behind him. It was barely nine o’clock, and so early a return was

uncommon.

Bessy sat by the fireside, sewing. Mr. Butson was angry with the world, sorely needing someone to bully, and Bessy was providentially convenient. He put a cigar into his mouth and strode across to the shelf in the corner, shoving the girl and her chair and her crutch out of his way in a heap. The shelf carried Bessy's tattered delight of old books; and, dragging a random handful of leaves from among them, while a confused bunch fell on the floor, he twisted up one leaf and thrust it into the gas flame.

Bessy seized his arm. "O don't!" she pleaded. "Please don't! Not out of the book! There's a lot I made on the mantelpiece! Don't, O don't!"

Indeed a glass vase stood full of pipe-lights. But he jerked his elbow into her face, knocking her backward, and swore savagely. He lit his pipe with the precious leaf, and then, because Bessy wept, he took another handful from the shelf and pitched it on the fire. At this, pleading the harder, she limped forward to snatch them off, but Mr. Butson, with a timely fling of the foot, checked her sound leg, and brought her headlong on the fender.

"Yus," he roared, furious at the contumacy, "you take 'em auf, when I put 'em on! Go on, an' see what I'll do to ye? Damn lazy skewshanked 'eifer!" He took her by the shoulder as she made to rise, and pushed her forward. "Go an' earn yer livin', y'idle slut!"

Nan, in the shop, heard from the beginning, and trembled. Her impulse to interfere she checked as she might, for she well knew that would worsen Bessy's plight; but it was choking hard.

In the midst Johnny burst in from the street, whistling. "Why, mother," he said, "what's up? Ill? You look—what's that?"

"No—nothing, Johnny. Don't go in. I'll go. Stay—"

But there was a cry and a noise of falling. Johnny flung open the parlour door and

stood aghast.

. . . Butson pushed the girl forward. “Go an’ earn yer livin’, y’ idle slut! Get out o’ this!”

For a second Johnny stared. Then he reached Butson at a spring and knocked him backward with a swing of his right fist. The crutch lay behind the man’s heels and tripped him, so that he sat backward on the floor, mightily astonished. Johnny snatched the poker and waved it close about Butson’s head.

“Don’t you move!” he cried, white with passion. “Don’t you try to get up, or I’ll beat your head in!”

Mr. Butson raised his arm to save his skull, but caught a blow across the bone that sent it numb to his side.

“Johnny—don’t!” cried Nan, snatching at his arm. “O Henry! pray don’t—”

“Get away, mother,” said Johnny, “or I’ll have to hit his head! You blackguard coward! You—you’re a meaner hound even than I took you for! You’ll touch my sister—a lame girl—will you?” At the thought he struck, but again Nan caught at him, and only Mr. Butson’s shoulder suffered.

“Don’t, Johnny!” his mother entreated. “Think o’ the neighbours! They can hear next door!”

So they could, and for the sake of trade the proprieties of Harbour Lane must be respected. To have a row in the house was a scandal unpardonable in Harbour Lane. In the height of his anger Johnny remembered, and instinctively dropped his voice. “Very well,” he said, “then call a p’liceman—I’ll lock him up!”

Johnny’s anger kept his reason half astray yet, or he would have remembered that to have a member of the household taken off by a policeman would be more disgraceful than twenty rows. But Mr. Butson’s consternation, though momentary, was plain.

"Johnny, Johnny," pleaded poor Nan, "think of the disgrace! Do let's make it up—for my sake, Johnny!"

Bessy was crying in a corner, and Nan was choking and sobbing. Johnny wavered, and the poker stopped in mid-air. Butson took heart of grace and moved to get up, though he kept his eye on the poker. "Better take 'im away," he growled to Nan, "if ye don't want me to smash 'im!"

Straightway the poker waved again, and Mr. Butson changed his mind as to getting up. "Smash me?" Johnny asked. "Smash me, eh? Keep a civil tongue, or you shall have it now! See?" and he thrust the point against Mr. Butson's nose, leaving a black smear. "Don't think I care for you! If this was anywhere else I'd ha' broken your head in twenty places! Now you sit there an' listen to me, Mr. Butson. What you are we know. You came here starving, with about half a suit o' boiler clothes in the world, and my mother fed you—out o' charity, an' worse luck. She fed you, and she put clothes on your lazy carcase, and you cadged and begged as a mongrel dog wouldn't. Stop where you are, or you'll have it!" This with another flourish of the poker and another smear on the nose. Mr. Butson sat up again, a figure of ignominy.

"You talked my mother over, and you married her, and you've lived on her ever since, like a gentleman—or like what you think's a gentleman—you, not worth boy's pay on a mud-barge! Now see here! I'm not a boy now—or at anyrate I'm not a little one. I'm within half a head as tall as you. I'm not so strong as you now perhaps, and I know I'm not as big. But some day I shall be stronger, because you're rotting yourself with idleness and booze, and then I'll give you a bigger hiding than you can carry, for what I saw just now! You look forward to that! Until then, if you put your hand within a foot of my sister again, I'll brain you with this poker, or I'll stick something into you,—I'll go for you with whatever I can lay hold of! Now you remember that!"

Johnny's voice was loud again, and once more Nan appealed.

"All right, mother," he answered, more quietly, "but I'll make him understand. I shall keep a little more at home in the evenings now, my fine fellow, and I shall take all this table to draw on, whether you like it or not, unless my sister or my mother want to use it. I've got more right here than you. And if I go out I'll ask about your behaviour when I come in. I've kept quiet and knuckled under to you, for the sake of peace, and so as not to worry mother. There's been enough o' that. If you want rows you shall have 'em! I'll make you as frightened of me as you are of the p'lice. Ah! you know what I mean!" Johnny had no idea of what he meant himself, but he had been sharp enough to observe the effect of his earlier allusion to the police, and he followed it up. "You know what I mean! You'd look a deal more at home in gaol than here, in a white shirt, eating other people's victuals!"

Mr. Butson decided that bluster would not do just at present. He wondered if Johnny really did know anything, and how much. But surely not, or he would go a good deal farther. Anyway, best be cautious. So Mr. Butson growled, "Oh, all right. Damn lot o' fuss to make over nothin'. I don't want no words."

And Bessy, still crying, took hold of her brother's arm and said, "Don't say any more, Johnny, please. I—I—p'raps I oughtn't to ha' done what I did!"

"What you did!" Johnny answered, not so cheaply appeased. "You do what you like, Bess—I'll see he don't interfere. He says he don't want any words—he shan't have 'em. He'll have something harder if he touches you! Let go my arm a minute. Go on, you can get up now!" This to Butson, with the black nose. "You'd better go an' wash yourself. But none o' your tricks! If you try to lay hold o' me from behind, or anything like that, you'll get it, with anything I can catch hold of! So now you know!"

And Mr. Henry Butson, growling indistinctly, went out to wash his face, closely watched by Johnny, poker in hand.

Next door, on one side, heads were thrust out at the back-door to listen to the

unwonted noise of quarrelling at the chandler's; and on the other side other heads were thrust out at the front door. Because the law of irregularity in the building of Harbour Lane decreed a back-garden to the one house and a front-garden to the other.

XXIV.

His home in Harbour Lane grew less sufferable than ever to Mr. Butson's tastes. His contempt remained for the sordid surroundings, the vulgar trade, the simple wife—for everything about the place in fact, with the reasonable exceptions of the money he extracted from it and the food he ate there; and now there was the new affliction of an unsubmissive stepson. A stepson, moreover, who watched, and who kept alert ears for any expedient assertion of authority whereat he might raise mutiny; a most objectionable stepson in every way, far too big, and growing bigger every day; who would not forget bygones, and who had a nasty, suggestive way of handling the poker—a large poker, an unnecessarily heavy poker for a sitting-room. And he seemed to suspect things too, and talked unpleasantly of the police; a thing that turned one hot and cold together. So Mr. Butson went more up West, and sought longer solace in the society of the bars.

As for Johnny, finding Butson ceasing, so far as he could see, from active offence, he gave thought to other things; though watching still. His drawing was among the other matters that claimed his care; but chief of them all was a different thing altogether.

For at the Institute he had found the girl he first saw on the dark morning when he set out to be an engineer. He had seen her since—once as he was on his way to a ship-launch, and twice a little later; then not at all for eighteen months at least, till he began to forget. But now that he saw her again and found her a woman—or grown as much a woman as he was grown a man—he wondered that he could ever have

forgotten for a moment; more, when he had seen her twice or thrice, and knew the turn of her head and the nearing of her step, he was desperately persuaded that nothing in the world, nor time nor tide, could make him forget again. So that he resolved to learn to dance.

But the little society that danced at the Institute saw nothing of her, this radiant unforgettable. She came twice a week to the dressmaking class; wherein she acted as monitor or assistant to the teacher, being, as Johnny later discovered—by vast exertions—a dressmaker herself, in her daily work. She made no friendships, walked sedately apart, and was in some sort a mystery; being for these reasons regarded as "stuck-up" by the girls of the class, and so made a target for many small needle-thrusts of spite. Johnny had a secret notion that she remembered him; because she would pass him with so extreme an unconsciousness in her manner, so very blank an unacquaintance in her eyes. Neat and grey in her dress, she had ever a placid gravity of air, almost odd by contrast with the unceasing smirk and giggle of the rest of the girls of the Institute. And her name—another happy discovery, attained at great expense of artless diplomacy—was Nora Sansom.

And now for awhile the practice of orthographic projection suffered from neglect and abstraction of mind. Long Hicks, all ignorant of the cause, was mightily concerned, and expostulated, with a face of perplexed surprise, much poking of fingers through the hair, and jerking at the locks thus separated. But it was a great matter that tugged so secretly at Johnny's mind, and daily harder at his heart-strings, till he blushed in solitude to find himself so weak a creature. Nora Sansom did not come to the dancing. She knew nobody that he knew. She was unapproachable as—as a Chinese Empress. How to approach Nora Sansom? And at the thought he gulped and tingled, and was more than a little terrified. He was not brought to a stand by contemplation of any distinct interposing labyrinth of conventional observance, such as he who can see can pick his way through in strict form; but by a difficulty palpable to instinct rather than figured in mind: an intangible barrier that

vexed Johnny to madness, so that he hammered the Institute punching-ball with blind fury. And again, because the world was now grown so many heavens wider, he would sit and dream of things beyond its farthest margin yet. And between plan and section, crank-shaft and piston, he would wake to find himself designing monograms of the letters N. S. and J. M. Altogether becoming a sad young fool, such as none of us ever was in the like circumstances.

But an angel—two angels, to be exact, both of them rather stout—came one night to Johnny's aid. They came all unwitting, in a cab, being man and wife, and their simple design was to see for themselves the Upraising of the Hopeless Residuum. They had been told, though they scarce believed, that at the Institute, far East—much farther East than Whitechapel, and therefore, without doubt, deeper sunk in dirt and iniquity—the young men and women danced together under regular ball-room conventions, neither bawling choruses nor pounding one another with quart pots. It was even said that partners were introduced in proper form before dancing—a thing so ludicrous in its incongruity as to give no choice but laughter. So the two doubters from the West End (it was only Bayswater, really) took a cab, to see these things for themselves.

But, having taken no pains to inform themselves of the order of things at the Institute, they arrived on an evening when there was no dancing. This was very annoying, and they said so, with acerbity. They were, indeed, so very indignant at the disconformity of the arrangements to their caprice, and so extremely and so obviously important, and the lady waggled her gilt-handled lorgnon with such offended majesty, that it was discussed among those in direction whether or not something might be done to appease them. And in the end, after a few hasty inquiries, the classes were broken up for the evening and an off-hand dance was declared, to the music extracted from the Institute piano and the fiddle of a blushing young amateur.

The girls came in gay and chattering from the dressmaking class, and the lads rushed to exchange gymnasium-flannels for the clothes they had come in—all unconscious that they were to be made a show of. They who kept their dancing-shoes on the premises triumphed in their foresight, and Johnny was among them. As for him, he had seen Nora Sansom coming in with the others, alone and a little shy, and he resolved to seize occasion with both hands.

And he did so very gallantly, with less trepidation than at a calmer moment he would have judged possible. First a quadrille was called, and Johnny's courage rose—for as yet he had no great confidence in his dancing in general, but he did know the figures of a quadrille, having learned them by rote, as most boys learn Euclid. He laid hands on the mild young shopman who had unexpectedly found himself appointed master of ceremonies, and in two minutes he was standing in a set with Nora Sansom at his side. The sheer pride of it disorganised his memory, so that it was lucky they were a side couple, or there would have been a rout in the first figure. Johnny's partner knew very little or nothing of dancing, but she was quick to learn, and Johnny, a rank beginner himself, had a proud advantage in his knowledge of the figures—unstable as it was. So that the thing went very joyfully, and the girl's eyes grew brighter and her face gayer each moment to the end. For her life had been starved of merriment, and here was merriment in plenty, of the sort a girl loves.

Four or five dances were all there were, for the place shut at ten. To dance them all with Nora Sansom were impossible and scandalous, for everybody was very "particular" at the Institute. But Johnny went as far as two and a "sit out," and extracted a half-promise that she would come and dance some other time. More, he walked two streets of the way home with her, and the way was paved with clouds of glory. Why he might go no farther he could not guess, but there he was dismissed, quite unmistakably, though pleasantly enough.

Fair, very fair were the poor little streets in the moonlight as Johnny walked home,

and very sweet the air. It was a good world, a kind world, a world as one may see it who has emptied a bottle of good champagne. Johnny would have shaken hands with anybody on the way—probably even with Butson if he had met him; but nobody made the offer, and even the baked-chestnut man—he was still there, by the high wall—growled merely when Johnny gave him good night. And so Johnny went to dreams of gentle grey eyes in a dimpled face with brown hair about it. For few of the song-book beauties were Nora Sansom's. Her hair was neither golden nor black, but simple brown like the hair of most other people, and her eyes were mere grey; yet Johnny dreamed.

As for the two angels from Bayswater who caused all these things to come to pass, they looked at the dancing from the gallery, and said that it was really very creditable, considering; quite surprising, indeed, for people of that class, and they hoped it didn't lead to immorality. And they went home virtuously conscious of having done their duty toward the Submerged. But the lady left her gilt-handled lorgnon in the cab, whereof the gentleman hadn't thought to take the number. And the lady said a great many times before they went to bed (and after) that it was Just Like a Man.

XXV.

The weeks went, and the time neared when dancing at the Institute would end for the season—would end with a bang and a dazzle in a "long night," when dancing would be kept up shamelessly till something nearer one o'clock than twelve. Johnny counted, first the weeks, then the days, and last the hours. Not because of the dancing, although that was amusing, but because he was to take Nora Sansom with his double ticket. For herself, she may have counted days and hours, or may not; but true it was that she sat up late on several nights, with nun's veiling and ribbons, making a dress for the occasion—the first fine frock that had been hers. And every

night she hid it carefully.

Each dressmaking-class night of late it had been Johnny's privilege to guard her home-going to the end of that second street—never farther. Twice she had come to dancing, and by that small practice was already Johnny's superior at the exercise; for a big-shouldered novice of eleven stone two is a slower pupil than any girl of eighteen in the world. And they were very welcome one to the other, and acquaintance bettered day by day. Once Johnny ventured a question about the adventure of the morning, now more than three years ago, but learned little from Miss Sansom's answer. The lady who was ill was her relation, she said, and she found her; and then she talked of something else.

And so till the evening before the "long night." It was the rule at the Institute to honour the long night with gloves and white ties, by way of compromise with evening dress; and Johnny bought his gloves with discretion and selected his tie with care. Then he went to the Institute, took a turn or two at the bars, climbed up the rope, and gave another member a lesson with the gloves. Thus refreshed, he dressed himself in his walking clothes, making sure that the tie and the gloves were safe in his pocket, and set out for home. There was no dressmaking class that night, so that he need not wait. But outside and plainly waiting for him, was Nora Sansom herself. Johnny thought she had been crying: as in fact she had.

"Oh, Mr. May," she said. "I'm very sorry, but—I thought you might be here, and—and—I'm afraid I shan't be able to come to-morrow!"

"Not come! But—but why?"

"I'm sorry—I'm very sorry, Mr. May; but I can't tell you—really."

There was a quiver of the lip, and her voice was a little uneven, as though there were danger of more tears. But Johnny was not disappointed merely; he was also angry, and it was hard to conceal the fact. So he said nothing, but turned and walked a few steps by her side.

"I—hope you won't mind," she pursued, uneasy at his silence. "I'm very much disappointed—very much indeed." And it was plain that she was. "But there'll be a good many there. And you'll have plenty of partners." This last she found a hard thing to say.

"I don't care how many'll be there," Johnny replied. "I shan't go."

It was said curtly, almost angrily, but Nora Sansom heard it with an odd little tremor of pleasure. Though she merely said, "But why not? There's no reason why you should be disappointed too."

"Anyhow, I'm not going," he said; and after a pause added: "Perhaps you might ha' gone if I hadn't asked you!"

"Oh, I shouldn't!" she answered, with tears in eyes and voice. "You know I shouldn't! I never go anywhere!"

Johnny instantly felt himself a brute. "No," he said. "I know you don't. I didn't mean anything unkind. But I won't go."

"Do you really mean it?"

"Of course. I'm not going without you." He might have said something more, but a little group of people came straggling past. And the girl, with her eyes on this group, said the first thing that came to her tongue.

"Where will you go then?"

"Oh anywhere. I don't know. Walk about, perhaps."

She looked shyly up in his face, and down again. "I might go for a walk," she said.

Johnny's heart gave a great beat. "Alone?" he asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps."

But she would be questioned into nothing definite. If she took a walk, she might go in such and such a direction, passing this or that place at seven o'clock, or half-past. That was all. And now she must hurry away, for she had already been too long.

What mattered the dance to Johnny now? A fig for the dance. Let them dance that liked, and let them dance the floor through if it pleased them. But how was it that Nora Sansom could take a walk to-morrow evening, yet could not come to the Institute? That was difficult to understand. Still, hang the dance!

For Nora it would be harder to speak. Howbeit indeed the destruction of the looked-for evening's gladness, in her first fine frock, had been a bitter thing. But that day her hiding-place had been discovered, and now the dress that had cost such thoughtful design and such hopeful labour was lying, rolled and ticketed, on a pawnbroker's shelf.

XXVI.

That they must come to Blackwall Pier was assured. For there were no streets, no crowds, no rumbling waggons; there were the wide sky and the unresting river, the breeze, the ships, and the endless train of brown-sailed barges. No unseamanlike garden-seats dishonoured the quay then, and strolling lovers sat on bollards or chains, or sat not at all.

Here came Johnny and Nora Sansom when the shrinking arc of daylight was far and yellow in the west, and the Kentish hills away to the left grew dusk and mysterious. The tide ran high, and tugs were busy. A nest of them, with steam up, lay under the wharf wall to the right of the pier-barge, waiting for work; some were already lighted, and, on the rest, men were trimming the lamps or running them up, while a cheerful glow came from each tiny cabin and engine-room. Rascal boys flitted about the quays and gangways—the boys that are always near boats and water, ever failing to get drowned, and ever dodging the pestered men who try to prevent it.

The first star of the evening steadied and brightened, and soon was lost amid other stars. Below, the river set its constellations as silently, one after another, trembling and blinking; and meteor tugs shot across its firmament, in white and green and red.

Along shore the old Artichoke Tavern, gables and piles, darkened and melted away, and then lit into a little Orion, a bright cluster in the bespangled riverside. Ever some new sail came like a ghost up reach out of the gloom, rounded the point, and faded away; and by times some distant voice was heard in measured cry over water.

They said little; for what need to talk? They loitered awhile near the locks, and saw the turning Trinity light with its long, solemn wink, heard a great steamer hoot, far down Woolwich reach. Now the yellow in the sky was far and dull indeed, and a myriad of stars trembled over the brimming river. A tug puffed and sobbed, and swung out from the group under the wharf, beating a glistering tail of spray, and steaming off at the head of a train of lighters. Out from the dark of Woolwich Reach came a sailing-ship under bare spars, drawn by another tug. In the middle of the river the ship dropped anchor, and the tug fell back to wait, keeping its place under gentle steam.

They walked on the wharf, by the iron cranes, and far to the end, under the windows of the abandoned Brunswick Hotel. Here they were quite alone, and here they sat together on a broad and flat-topped old bollard.

Presently said Johnny, “Are you sorry for the dance now—Nora?” And lost his breath at the name.

Nora—he called her Nora; was she afraid or was she glad? What was this before her? But with her eyes she saw only the twinkling river, with the lights and the stars.

Presently she answered. “I was very sorry,” she said slowly . . . “of course.”

“But now—Nora?”

Still she saw but the river and the lights; but she was glad; timid, too, but very glad. Johnny’s hand stole to her side, took hers, and kept it. . . . “No,” she said, “not sorry—now.”

“Say Johnny.”

What was before her mattered nothing; he sat by her—held her hand. . . . “Not sorry now—Johnny!”

Why came tears so readily to her eyes? Truly they had long worn their path. But this—this was joy. . . . He bent his head, and kissed her. The wise old Trinity light winked very slowly, and winked again.

So they sat and talked; sometimes whispered. Vows, promises, nonsense all—what mattered the words to so wonderful a tune? And the eternal stars, a million ages away, were nearer, all nearer, than the world of common life about them. What was for her she knew now and saw—she also: a new heaven and a new earth.

Over the water from the ship came, swinging and slow, a stave of the chanty:—

“I’m a flying-fish sailor straight home from Hong-Kong— Aye! Aye! Blow the man down! Blow the man down, bully, blow the man down— O give us some time to blow the man down!

Ye’re a dirty Black-Baller just in from New York— Aye! Aye! Blow the man down! Blow the man down, bully, blow the man down— O give us some time to blow the man down!”

Time went, but time was not for them. Where the tug-engineer, thrusting up his head for a little fresh air, saw but a prentice-lad and his sweetheart on a bollard, there sat Man and Woman, enthroned and exultant in face of the worlds.

The ship swung round on the tide, bringing her lights square and her stem for the opening lock. The chanty went wailing to its end:—

“Blow the man down, bully, blow the man down— To my Aye! Aye! Blow the man down! Singapore Harbour to gay London town— O give us some time to blow the man down!”

The tug headed for the dock and the ship went in her wake with slow state, a gallant shadow amid the blue.

Soon the tide stood, and stood, and then began its ebb. For a space there was a deeper stillness as the dim wharves hung in mid-mist, and water and sky were one. Then the air stirred and chilled, stars grew sharper, and the Thames turned its traffic seaward.

XXVII.

Happiness never stayed long with Nora Sansom. Little, indeed, had been her portion, and it was a poor sort at best. But this new joy was so great that it must needs be short of life; and in truth she saw good reason. From the moment of parting with Johnny doubts had troubled her; and doubts grew to distress—even to misery. She saw no end—no end but sorrow. She had been carried away; she had forgotten. And in measure as her sober senses awoke she saw that all this gladness could but end in heart-break and bereavement. Better, then, end all quickly and have done with the pang. But herein she misjudged her strength.

Doubts and perplexities assailed Johnny also, though for a time they grew to nothing sharper. He would have gone home straightway, proud and joyful, if a little sheepish, to tell his mother the tale of that evening. But Nora had implored him to say nothing yet. She wanted time to think things over, she said. And she left him at the familiar corner, two streets beyond the Institute, begging him to come no farther, for this time, at anyrate. Next evening was the evening of the dressmaking class. He saw her for a few minutes, on her way through those two familiar streets, and he thought she looked unwell.

A few nights later he saw her again. Plainly she had been crying. When they came to a deserted street of shut-up wharves he asked her why.

“Only—only I’ve been thinking!” she said.

“What about?”

“About you, Johnny—about you and me. We—I think—we’re very young, aren’t

we?”

That had not struck him as a difficulty. “Well,” he said, “I don’t know about that. I s’pose we are, like others. But I shall be out o’ my time in two years and a half, or not much more, and then—”

“Yes, then,” she said, catching at the word, “p’raps then it will be different—and—I mean we shall be older and know better, Johnny. And—now—we can often see one another and talk like friends—and—” She looked up to read his eyes, trembling.

Something cold took Johnny by the throat, and checked his voice. “But—what—you don’t mean—that?”

“Yes,” she said, though it was bitter hard. “It’ll be best—I’m sure, Johnny!”

Johnny gulped, and his voice hardened. “Oh!” he said, “if you want to throw me over you might say so, in straight English!”

“Oh—don’t talk like that, Johnny!” she pleaded, and laid her hand on his arm. “It’s unkind! You know it’s unkind!”

“No—it’s only plain an’ honest. I don’t understand this half-and-half business—seeing each other ‘like friends’ an’ all that.”

One more effort she made to hold her position—but her strength was near gone. “It’ll be better, Johnny—truly it will! You—you might meet someone you’d like better, and—”

“That’s my look-out; time to talk about that when it comes. The other night you let me kiss you, and you kissed me back—told me you loved me. Now you don’t. Maybe you’ve met someone you like better.”

She held out no more. Her head fell on his shoulder, and she broke into an agony of tears. “O Johnny, Johnny, that is cruel! You don’t know how cruel it is! I shall never like anybody better than you—never half so much. Don’t be unkind! I’ve not one friend in the world but you, and I do love you more than anything.”

With that Johnny was ready to kick himself for a ruffian. He looked about, but nobody else was in the shadowy street. He kissed Nora, he called himself hard names, and he quieted her, though she still sobbed. And there was no more talk of mere friendship. She had tried her compromise, and had broken down. But presently Johnny ventured to ask if she foresaw any difficulty with her parents.

“Father’s dead,” she said simply. “He’s been dead for years.” This was the first word of her family matters that Johnny had heard. Should he come to see her mother? The question struck her like a blow.

“No—no, Johnny,” she said. “Not yet—no, you mustn’t. I can’t tell you why—I can’t really; at anyrate not now.” Then after a pause, “O Johnny, I’m in such trouble! Such trouble, Johnny!” And she wept again.

But tell her trouble she would not. At anyrate not then. And in the end she left Johnny much mystified, and near as miserable as herself, because of his blind helplessness in this unrevealed affliction.

Inexpert in mysteries, he was all incomprehension. What was this trouble that he must not be told of? He did not even know where Nora lived. Why shouldn’t she tell him? Why did she never let him see her as far as home? This much he knew: that she had a mother, but had lost her father by death. And this he had but just learned from her under stress of tears. He was not to see her mother—at least not yet. And Nora was in sore trouble, but refused to say what the trouble was. That night he moped and brooded. And at Maidment and Hurst’s next morning—it was Saturday—Mr. Cottam the gaffer swore, and made remarks about the expedience of being thoroughly awake before dinner-time. More, at one o’clock Johnny passed the pay-box without taking his money, and turned back for it, when reminded, amid the chaff of his shopmates, many offers of portership, and some suggestions to scramble the slighted cash.

Not far from the yard-gate he saw a small crowd of people about a public-house; and

as he neared he perceived Mother Born-drunk in the midst of it. The publican had refused to serve her—indeed, had turned her out—and now she swayed about his door and proclaimed him at large.

"'Shultin' a lady!" she screamed hoarsely. "Can't go in plashe 'thout bein' 'shulted. 'Shulted by low common public-'oush. I won't 'ave it!"

"Don't you stand it, ducky!" sang out a boy. "You give 'em what for!"

For a moment she seemed inclined to turn her wrath on her natural enemy, the boy, but her eye fell on a black bottle with a broken neck, lying in the gutter. "Gi' 'em what for?" she hiccupped, stooping for the bottle, "Yesh, I'll gi' 'em what for!" and with that flung the bottle at the largest window in sight.

There was a crash, a black hole in the midst of the plate glass, and a vast "spider" of cracks to its farthest corners. Mother Born-drunk stood and stared, perhaps a little sobered. Then a barman ran out, tucking in his apron, and took her by the arm. There were yells and screams and struggles, and cheers from blackguard boys; and Mother Born-drunk was hauled off, screaming and sliding and stumbling, between a policeman and the publican.

Johnny told his mother, when he reached home, that her old acquaintance Emma Pacey was like to endure a spell of gaol. But what occupied his mind was Nora's trouble, and he forgot Mother Born-drunk for three or four days.

Then came the next evening of the dressmaking class at the Institute, and he went, never doubting to meet Nora as she came away. At the door the housekeeper, who was also hall-porter, beckoned, and gave him a letter, left earlier in the day. It was addressed to him by name, in a weak and straggling female hand, and for a moment he stared at it, not a little surprised. When he tore open the envelope he found a blotchy, tear-stained rag of a letter, and read this:—

"My Dearest Johnny,—It is all over now and I do hope you will forgive me for not telling you before. This is to say good-bye and God bless you and pray forget all

about me. It was wrong of me to let it go so far but I did love you so Johnny, and I could not help it and then I didn't know what to do. I can never come to the classes again with all this disgrace and everything printed in the newspapers and I must get work somewhere where they don't know me. I would rather die, but I must look after her as well as I can, Johnny, because she is my mother. Burn this at once and forget all about me and some day you will meet some nice girl belonging to a respectable family and nothing to be ashamed of. Don't try to find me—that will only make us both miserable. Good-bye and please forgive me.

Yours affectionately, Nora Sansom."

What was this? What did it all mean? He stood in the gymnasium dressing-room to read it, and when he looked up, the gaslight danced and the lockers spun about him. The one clear thing was that Nora said good-bye, and was gone.

Presently his faculties assorted themselves, and he read the letter again; and then once more. It was "all over" and she asked him to forgive her for not telling him before. Telling him what? She told him nothing now. She would never come to the Institute again, and he didn't know her address, and he mustn't try to find her. But then there was "everything printed in the newspapers." Of course, he must look at the newspapers; why so long realising that? He went to the reading-room and applied himself to the pile of papers and magazines that littered the table. One paper after another he searched and searched again, but saw nothing that he could connect with Nora, by any stretch of imagination. Till he found a stray sheet of the day before, with rings of coffee-stain on it. The "police intelligence" lay uppermost, and in the midst of the column the name Emma Sansom, in italic letters, caught his eye. She was forty-one, and was charged with drunkenness and wilful damage. A sentence more, and everything stood displayed, as by a flash of lightning; for he had witnessed the offence himself, on Saturday. Emma Sansom was the married name of Emma Pacey, whom the boys called Mother Born-drunk; and the woman was

Nora's mother!

Now it was plain—all, from the very beginning, when the child wandered in the night seeking her strayed and drunken mother, and inquired for her with the shamed excuse that she was ill. This was why he was not to call to see Nora's mother; and it was for this that Nora hindered him from seeing her home.

There was the shameful report, all at length. The publican's tale was simple and plain enough. He had declined to serve the prisoner because she was drunk, and as she refused to leave, he had her turned out, though, he said, she made no particular resistance. Shortly afterward he heard a crash, and found a broken bottle and a great deal of broken glass in the bar. He had gone outside, and saw the prisoner being held by his barman. His plate-glass window was smashed, and it was worth ten pounds. There was little more evidence. The police told his worship that the prisoner had been fined small sums for drunkenness before, but she was usually inoffensive, except for collecting crowds of boys. This was the first charge against her involving damage. She was the widow of a ship's officer lost at sea, and she had a small annuity, but was chiefly supported of late by her daughter—a dressmaker—a very respectable young woman. The daughter was present (the reporter called her "a prepossessing young female in great distress"), and she wished to be allowed to pay the damage in small instalments. But in the end her mother was sent to prison for a month in default of payment of fine and damage. For indeed the daughter was a minor, and her undertaking was worthless.

One thing Johnny looked for eagerly, but did not find—the prisoner's address. Whether consideration for the daughter had prompted the reporter to that suppression, or whether it was due to accident, Johnny could not guess. In other reports in the same column some addresses were given and some not. But straightway Johnny went to beg the housekeeper that he might rummage the store of old papers for those of the day before. For to desert Nora now, in her trouble, was a

thing wholly inconceivable; and so far from burning the letter, he put it, envelope and all, in his safest pocket, and felt there, more than once, to be assured of its safety.

But the address was in none of the papers. In fact the report was in no more than three, and in one of those it was but five lines long. What should he do? He could not even write her one line of comfort. And he had been going on with his work placidly all Monday while Nora had been standing up in a police-court, weeping and imploring mercy for her wretched mother! If he had known he could scarce have done anything to aid her. But helplessness was no consolation—rather the cruellest of aggravations.

Well, there stood the matter, and raving would not help it, nor would beating the table—nor even the head—with the fist. He must somehow devise a way to reach Nora.

XXVIII.

He resolved, first, to try the Institute. Nora's name and address must be on the class registers; but what business had he with the girl's class registers? As diplomatist his failure was lamentable. He could invent no reasonable excuses, and ignoble defeat was his fate at the hands of the rigid lady who managed the girls department of the Institute. Then he took to prowling about all the streets that lay beyond that second corner that had marked the end of their evening walks, watching for her; searching also, desperately, for some impossible sign about a house that might suggest that she lived in it. Thus he spent the daylight of two evenings watching a little muslin-hung window, because the muslin was tied with a ribbon of a sort he remembered her to have worn, and because he chose to fancy a neatness and a daintiness about the tying that might well be hers. But on the second evening as dusk fell the window opened, and a hairy, red-bearded man in blue shirt sleeves put out his head and leaned on the

sill to smoke his pipe and watch the red sky. Johnny swung away savagely, and called himself a fool for his pains; and indeed, he could ill afford to waste time, for Maidment and Hurst claimed him till five each day, and a few hours in the evening were all that remained; more, Nora would change her lodgings—perhaps had done so already.

After this he screwed his courage so high as to go to the police-station where the charge against Nora's mother must have been taken, and to ask for her address. But the cast-iron-faced inspector in charge took his name and address instead, as a beginning, and then would tell him nothing. And at last, maddened and reckless, he went to the publican, and demanded the information of him. Now if Johnny had had a little more worldly experience, a little more cunning, and a great deal more coolness, he would have done this at first, and, beginning by ordering a drink, he would have opened a casual conversation, led it to the matter of the window, and in the end would have gained his point quietly and easily. But as it was, he did none of these things. He ordered no drink, and he made a blunt request, taking little thought of its manner, none of the publican's point of view, and perhaps forgetting that the man was in no way responsible for the rebuffs already endured. The publican, for his part, was already in a bad temper, because of the clumsy tapping of a barrel and ensuing "cheek" of the potman. So he answered Johnny's demand by asking if he had come to pay for the window; and receiving the negative reply he had expected, he urgently recommended the intruder's departure "outside": in such terms as gave no choice but compliance.

So that now, in extremity, Johnny resolved on a last expedient: one that had been vaguely in his mind for a day or two, though he had yet scarce had courage to consider it seriously. This was, to tell his mother the whole thing; and to induce her, if he might, to ask the address at the Institute—perhaps on some pretext of dressmaking business. He was not hopeful, for he well knew that any hint of traffic with the family of one such as Nora's mother would be a horror to her. But he could

see nothing else, and to sit still were intolerable. Moreover he guessed that his mother must suspect something from his preoccupation, and his neglect of his drawing. Though indeed poor Nan was most at pains, just then, to conceal troubles of her own.

Mr. Butson, in fact, began to chafe under the restraints of narrow circumstances. Not that he was poorer than had been his habit—indeed he was much better off—but that his needs had expanded with his prosperity and with his successes in society. And it was just now that his wife began to attempt retrenchment. Probably she was encouraged by the outrageous revolt of her son, a revolt which had made advisable a certain degree of caution on the part of himself, the head of the household. She spoke of a rumour that the ship-yard opposite might close, as so many other Thames ship-yards had closed of late years. That, she said, would mean ruin for the shop, and she must try to save what little she might, meantime. An absurdity, of course, in Mr. Butson's view. He felt no interest in the rumours of old women about ship-yards, and petty measurement of the sordid chances of trade irritated him. If his wife found one source of profit running dry, she must look out and tap another, that was all. So long as he got what he wanted he troubled little about the manner of its getting. But now he ran near having less than he wanted, and his wife was growing even less accommodating. She went so far as to hint of withholding the paltry sum the lad earned; he should have it himself, she thought, to buy his clothes, and to save toward the end of his apprenticeship. More than this, Mr. Butson much suspected that Johnny had actually had his own money for some while past, and that Mrs. Butson had descended to the mean subterfuge of representing as his earnings a sum which in reality she extracted each week from the till; an act of pure embezzlement. And then there was the cottage in Epping Forest. She wouldn't sell it now, though she wanted to sell when she first left it. What good was there in keeping it? True there was three-and-sixpence a week of rent, but that was nothing; it would go in a round of drinks, or in half a round, in any distinguished bar; and there were

deductions even from the three-and-sixpence. Sold, the cottage might produce a respectable sum—perhaps a hundred pounds—at anyrate eighty. The figures stirred his blood. What a magnificent dash a man might cut with eighty pounds! And a fortune might be made out of it, too, if it were used wisely, and not buried away in a wretched three-and-sixpenny cottage. Properly invested on judicious flat-race Certainties, it would double itself about twice a week. So he made it very plain to Nan that the sale of the cottage for what it would fetch and the handing over of the proceeds was a plan he insisted on. But the stupid woman wouldn't see it. It was plain that she was beginning to over-estimate her importance in the establishment, by reason that of late she had not been sufficiently sworn at, shoved, thumped, and twisted and pinched on the arms. That was the worst of kindness to a woman—she took advantage.

So that he was obliged to begin to thump again. There was no need to do it so that Johnny might know, and so cause a low disturbance. In fact, Johnny took little notice of things at home just now, no longer made inquiries, nor lifted the poker with so impudent a stare; and he was scarce indoors at all. Wherefore Mr. Butson punched and ruffianed—being careful to leave no disreputable marks in visible spots, such as black eyes—and sometimes he kicked; and he demanded more money and more, but all the while insisted on the sale of the cottage. The monstrous laws of conveyance made it impossible for him to lay hands on the deeds and sell the place himself, or he would have done it, of course. And he made it advisable, too, for Bessy to avoid him—and that had a better effect than any direct attack on Nan. Till at last the woman was so far reduced that she was near a very dangerous rebellion indeed—nearer than Mr. Butson suspected. For she began to think of attempting a separation by magistrate's order, shameful as it would be in the neighbourhood. Though she feared greatly.

So it was when Johnny turned toward home on an evening a little before nine o'clock, sick of blind searching, and ready to tell his mother the story of Nora

Sansom, first to last. At Harbour Lane corner he saw Butson walking off, and wondered to see him about Blackwall so early in the evening.

Nobody was in the shop, and Johnny went through so quietly that he surprised his mother and Bessy, in the shop-parlour, crying bitterly. Nan sat on a chair and Bessy bent over her, and no concealment was possible. Johnny was seized by a dire surmise. “Mother! What’s this?” he said. “What’s he been doing?”

Nan bent lower, but answered nothing. Johnny looked toward Bessy, almost sternly. “He—he’s beaten mother again,” Bessy blurted, between sobs.

“Beaten mother! Again!” Johnny’s face was white, and his nostrils stood wide and round. “Beaten mother! Again!”

“He’s always doing it now,” Bessy sobbed. “And wanting more money. I’d a good mind to tell you before, but—but—”

“Beaten mother!” The room swam before Johnny’s eyes. “Why—”

Nan rose to close the door. “No, Johnny,” she said meekly. “I’m a bit upset, but don’t let it upset you. Don’t you—”

“What’s the matter with your leg? You’re limping!”

“He kicked her! I saw him kick at her ankle!” Bessy burst out, pouring forth the tale unrestrained. “I tried to stop him and—and—”

“And then he hit you?” asked Johnny, not so white in the cheeks now, but whiter than ever about the mouth.

“Yes; but it was mother most!” and Bessy wept afresh.

Perhaps his evenings of disappointment had chastened Johnny’s impatience. He knew that the man was out of reach now, and he forced his fury down. In ten minutes he knew the whole thing, between Bessy’s outpourings and Nan’s tearful admissions.

“When is he coming back?”

They did not know—probably he would be late, as usual. “But don’t go doing anything hasty, Johnny,” Nan implored; “I’m so afraid of you doing something rash! It’s not much, really—I’m a bit upset, but—”

“I’ll have to think about this,” Johnny said, with such calmness that Nan felt somewhat reassured, though Bessy was inwardly afraid. “I’m going out for an hour.”

He strode away to the Institute, walking by instinct, and seeing nothing till he was under the lettered lamp. He went to the dressing-room and hurried into his flannels. In the gymnasium the instructor, a brawny sergeant of grenadiers, was watching some lads on the horizontal bar. Johnny approached him with a hesitating request for a “free spar.”

“Free spar, my lad?” said the sergeant. “What’s up? Gettin’ cheeky? Want to give me a hidin’?”

“No, sergeant,” Johnny answered. “Not such a fool as that. But I never had a free spar with a man much heavier than myself, and—and I just want to try, that’s all!”

There was a comprehending twinkle about the sergeant’s eyes. “Right,” he said; “you’re givin’ me near two stone—that’s if you’re a bit over eleven. Fetch the gloves.”

At another time Johnny would never have conceived the impudence of asking the sergeant—once champion of the army—for a free spar. Even a “light” spar with the sergeant was something of an undertaking, wherein one was apt to have both hands full, and a bit over. But the lad had his reasons now.

He dashed at the professor with a straight lead, and soon the blows were going like hail on a window-pane. The sergeant stood like a rock, and Johnny’s every rush was beaten back as by hammer-blows on the head. But he came again fresh and eager, and buzzed his master merrily about the head, getting in a very respectable number of straight drives, such as would knock an ordinary man down, though the sergeant

never winked; and bringing off one on the “mark” that did knock out a grunt, much as a punch in that region will knock one out of a squeaking doll.

“Steady,” the sergeant called after two long rounds had been sparred. “You’ll get stiff if you keep on at that rate, my lad, and that’s not what you want, I reckon!” This last with a grin. “You haven’t been boxin’ regular you know, just lately.”

“But you’re all right,” he added, as they walked aside. “Your work keeps you in good condition. Not quite so quick as you would ha’ been if you’d been sparrin’ every evening, o’course. But quick enough for your job, I expect.” And again Johnny saw the cunning twinkle.

It was about closing time, and when Johnny had changed his clothes, he found the sergeant leaving also. He thanked him and bade him good-night.

“Good-night, May,” the sergeant called, and turned into the street. But he swung back along the footpath after Johnny, and asked, “Is it to-morrow?”

“What, sergeant?”

“Oh, I ain’t a sergeant—I’m a stranger. There’s a sergeant goes to that moral establishment p’raps,” with a nod at the Institute, “but he behaves strictly proper. I’m just a chap out in the street that would like to see the fight, that’s all. When is it?”

“I don’t quite know that myself,” Johnny answered.

“Oh—like that, is it? Hum.” The sergeant was thoughtful for a moment—perhaps incredulous. Then he said, “Well, can’t be helped, I suppose. Anyway, keep your left goin’ strong, but don’t lead quite so reckless, with your head up an’ no guard. You’re good enough. An’ the bigger he is, the more to hit!”

XXIX.

Mr. Butson was perhaps a shade relieved when he returned home that night and

found all quiet, and Johnny in bed. He had half expected that his inopportune return might have caused trouble. But the night after, as he came from the railway station, a little earlier than usual, Johnny stopped him in the street.

“I want to speak to you,” he said. “Just come round by the dock wall.”

His manner was quiet and businesslike, but Mr. Butson wondered. “Why?” he asked. “Can’t you tell me here?”

“No, I can’t. There are too many people about. It’s money in your pocket if you come.”

Mr. Butson went. What it meant he could not imagine, but Johnny usually told the truth, and he said it would be money in his pocket—a desirable disposition of the article. The dock wall was just round a corner. A tall, raking wall at one side of a sparsely lit road that was empty at night, and a lower wall at the other; the road reached by a flight of steps rising from the street, and a gateway in the low wall.

“Well, what is it now?” Mr. Butson asked, suspiciously, as Johnny stopped under a gas-lamp and looked right and left along the deserted road.

“Only just this,” Johnny replied, with simple distinctness. “You wanted mother to give you my money every week, though in fact she’s been letting me keep it. Well, here’s my last week’s money”—he shook it in his hand—“and I’ll give it you if you’ll stand up here and fight me.”

“What? Fight you? You?” Mr. Butson laughed; but he felt a secret uneasiness.

“Yes, me. You’d rather fight a woman, no doubt, or a lame girl. But I’m going to give you a change, and make you fight me—here.” Johnny flung his jacket on the ground and his hat on it.

“Don’t be such a young fool,” quoth Mr. Butson loftily. “Put on your jacket an’ come home.”

“Yes—presently,” Johnny replied grimly. “Presently I’ll go home, and take you with

me. Come, you're ready enough to punch my mother, without being asked; or my sister. Come and punch me, and take pay for it!"

Mr. Butson was a little uncomfortable. "I suppose," he sneered, "you've got a knife or a poker or somethin' about you like what you threatened me with before!"

"I haven't even brought a stick. You're the sort o' coward I expected, though you're bigger than me and heavier. Come—" he struck the man a heavy smack on the mouth. "Now fight!"

Butson snarled, and cut at the lad's head with the handle of his walking stick. But Johnny's arm straightened like a flash, and Butson rolled over.

"What I thought you'd do," remarked Johnny, seizing his wrist and twisting the stick away. "Now get up. Come on!"

Mr. Butson sat and gasped. He fingered his nose gently, and found it very tender, and bleeding. He seemed to have met a thunderbolt in the dark. He turned slowly over on his knees, and so got on his feet.

"Hit me—come, hit me!" called Johnny, sparring at him. "Fancy I'm only my mother, you cur! Come, I'm hitting you—see! So!" He seized the man by the ear, twisted it, and rapped him about the face. The treatment would have roused a sheep. Butson sprang at Johnny, grappled with him, and for a moment bore him back. Johnny asked nothing better. He broke ground, checked the rush with half-arm hits, and stopped it with a quick double left, flush in the face.

It was mere slaughter; Johnny was too hard, too scientific, too full of cool hatred. The wretched Butson, bigger and heavier as he might be, was flaccid from soft living, and science he had none. But he fought like a rat in a corner—recking nothing of rule, but kicking, biting, striking, wrestling madly; though to small purpose: for his enemy, deadly calm and deadly quick, saw every movement ere it was made, and battered with savage precision.

"Whenever you've had enough," said Johnny, as Butson staggered, and leaned

against the wall, “you can stop it, you know, by calling the p’lice. You like the p’lice. There’s always one of ’em in the next street, an’ you’ve only to shout. I shall hammer you till ye do!”

And he hammered. A blow on the ear drove Butson’s head against the wall, and a swing from the other fist brought it away again. He flung himself on the ground.

“Get up!” cried Johnny. “Get up. What, you won’t? All right, you went down by yourself, you know—so’s to be let alone. But I’m coming down too!” and with that he lay beside Butson and struck once more and struck again.

“Chuck it!” groaned Butson. “I’m done! Oh! leave me alone!”

“Leave you alone?” answered Johnny, rising and reaching for his jacket. “Not I. You didn’t leave my mother alone a soon as she asked you, did you? I’ll never pass you again without clouting your head. Come home!”

He hauled the bruised wretch up by the collar, crammed his hat on his head and cut him across the calves with his own walking stick. “Go on! March!”

“Can’t you leave me alone now?” whined Butson. “You done enough, ain’t ye?”

“No—not near enough. An’ you’ll have a lot more if you don’t do as I tell you. I said I’d take you home, an’ I will. Go on!”

Two or three dark streets led to Harbour Lane, but they were short. It was past closing time, and when they reached the shop the lights were turned down and the door shut. Nan opened to Johnny’s knock, and he thrust Butson in before him. “Here he is,” said Johnny, “not thrashed half enough!”

Dusty and bleeding, his face nigh unrecognisable under cuts and bruises, Butson sat on a box, a figure of shame. Nan screamed and ran to him.

“I did it where the neighbours wouldn’t hear,” Johnny explained, “and if he’d been a man he’d have drowned himself rather than come here, after the way I’ve treated him. He’s a poor cur, an’ I’ll buy a whip for him. There’s the money I promised

you” he went on, putting it on the box. “It’s the first you’ve earned for years, and the last you’ll have here, if I can manage it!”

But Nan was crying over that dishonourable head, and wiping it with her handkerchief.

XXX.

“Why what’s that?” said Long Hicks on the way to work in the morning. “Got cuts all over yer hands!”

“Yes,” Johnny answered laconically. “Fighting.”

“Fightin’!” Long Hicks looked mighty reproachful. “Jest you be careful what company you’re gettin’ into,” he said severely. “You’re neglectin’ yer drawin’ and everything lately, an’ now—fightin’!”

“I ain’t ashamed of it,” Johnny replied gloomily. “An’ I’ve got other things to think about now, besides drawing.”

Hicks stared, stuttered a little, and rubbed his cap over his head. He wondered whether or not he ought to ask questions.

They went a little way in silence, and then Johnny said: “It’s him; Butson.”

“No!” exclaimed Hicks, checking in his stride, and staring at Johnny again. “What! Bin fightin’ Butson?”

Johnny poured out the whole story; and as he told Hicks’s eyes widened, his face flushed and paled, his hands opened and closed convulsively, and again and again he blew and stuttered incomprehensibly.

“Job is, to drive the brute away,” Johnny concluded wearily. “He’ll stop as long as he’s fed. An’ mother thinks it’s a disgrace to get a separation—goin’ before a magistrate an’ all. I’m only tellin’ you because I know you won’t jaw about it among the neighbours.”

That day Long Hicks got leave of absence for the rest of the week, mightily astonishing Mr. Cottam by the application, for Hicks had never been known to take a holiday before.

"'Awright," the gaffer growled, "seein' as we're slack. There's one or two standin' auf for a bit a'ready. But what's up with you wantin' time auf? Gittin' frisky? Runnin' arter the gals?"

And indeed Long Hicks spent his holiday much like a man who is running after something, or somebody. He took a walking tour of intricate plan, winding and turning among the small streets, up street and down, but tending northward; through Bromley, Bow and Old Ford, and so toward Homerton and the marshes.

Meantime Johnny walked to and from his work alone, and brooded. He could not altogether understand his mother's attitude toward Butson. She had been willing, even anxious, to get rid of him by any process that would involve no disgrace among the neighbours, and no peril to the trade of the shop; he had made her life miserable; yet now she tended the brute's cuts and bumps as though he didn't deserve them, and she cried more than ever. As for Johnny himself, he spared Butson nothing. Rather he drew a hideous solace from any torture wherewith he might afflict him.

"When are you going to clear out?" he would say. "You'd rather be kept than work, but you don't like being thrashed, do you? Thrashed by a boy, eh? You'll enjoy work a deal better than the life I'll lead you here, I can tell you. I'll make you glad to drown yourself, mean funk as you are, before I'm done with you! Don't be too careful with that eye: the sooner it's well, the sooner I'll bung it up again!"

Bessy marvelled at this development of morose savagery on her brother's part. With her, though he spoke little, he was kinder than ever, but it was his pastime to bully Butson: who skulked miserably in the house, being in no fit state for public exhibition.

As to his search for Nora Sansom, Johnny was vaguely surprised to find himself

almost indifferent. It would have been useless to worry his mother about it now, and though he spent an hour or two in aimless tramping about the streets, it was with the uppermost feeling that he should rather be at home, bullying Butson. He had no notion why, being little given to introspection; and he was as it were unconscious of his inner conviction that after all Nora could not be entirely lost. While Butson's punishment was the immediate concern, and as the thing stood, the creature seemed scarce to have been punished at all.

XXXI.

Long Hicks's holiday had lasted three days, and Mr. Butson's minor bruises were turning green. It was at the stroke of five in the afternoon, and Bessy was minding shop. From the ship-yard opposite a score or so of men came, in dirty dungaree (for it was Friday), vanguard of the tramping hundreds that issued each day, regular as the clock before the timekeeper's box. Bessy rose on her crutch, and peeped between a cheese and a packet of candles, out of window. Friday was not a day when many men came in on their way home, because by that time the week's money was run low, and luxuries were barred. Bessy scarce expected a customer, and it would seem that none was coming.

Peeping so, she grew aware of a stout red-faced woman approaching at a rapid scuttle; and then, almost as the woman reached the door, she saw Hicks at her heels, his face a long figure of dismay.

The woman burst into the shop with a rasping shriek. "I want my 'usband!" she screamed. "Where's my 'usband?"

"Come away!" called Hicks, deadly pale, and nervously snatching at her shoulder. "Come away! You know what you promised!"

"Take yer 'and auf me, ye long fool! Where's my 'usband? Is it you what's got 'im?" She turned on Bessy and bawled the words in her face.

“No—no it ain’t!” cried Hicks, near beside himself. “Come away, an’—an’ we’ll talk about it outside!”

“Talk! O yus, I’ll give ’im talk!” The woman’s every syllable was a harsh yell, racking to the brain, and already it had drawn a group about the door. “I’ll give ’im talk, an’ ’er too! Would anyone believe,” she went on, turning toward the door and haranguing the crowd, that grew at every word, “as ’ow a woman calling ’erself respectable, an’ keepin’ a shop like any lady, ’ud take away a respectable woman’s ’usband—a lazy good-for-nothin’ scoundril as run away an’ left me thirteen year ago last Whitsun!”

Boys sprang from everywhere, and pelted in to swell the crowd, drawn by the increasing screams. Many of the men, who knew the shop so well, stopped to learn what the trouble was; and soon every window in Harbour Lane displayed a woman’s head, or two.

“My ’usband! Where’s my ’usband? Show me the woman as took my ’usband!”

Nan came and stood in the back parlour doorway, frightened but uncomprehending. The woman turned. “You! You is it?” she shrieked, oversetting a pile of tins and boxes, and clawing the air above her. “Gimme back my ’usband, you shameless creechor! Where ’a’ ye got ’im? Where’s my ’usband?”

Hicks put his arm about the woman’s waist and swung her back. He was angry now. “Get out!” he said, “I didn’t bring you to make a row like that! You swore you wouldn’t!”

Finding his arm too strong for her, the woman turned on Hicks and set to clawing at his face, never ceasing to scream for her husband. And then Johnny came pushing in at the door, having run from the far street-corner at sight of the crowd.

Hicks, as well as he could for dodging and catching at the woman’s wrists, made violent facial signals to Johnny, who stared, understanding none of them. But he heard the woman’s howls for her husband, and he caught at her arm. “Who is your

husband?" he said. "What's his name?"

"What's 'is name? Why Butson—'enery Butson's 'is name! Gimme my 'usband! My 'usband! Let me go, you villain!"

It was like an unexpected blow on the head to Johnny, but, save for a moment, it stunned not at all—rather roused him. "I'll fetch him!" he cried, and sprang into the house.

Here was release—the man had another wife! He would drag the wretch down to her, and then give him to the police. No wonder he feared the police! The load was lifted at last—Butson's punishment was come indeed! Fiercely glad, and thinking of nothing but this, Johnny swung into each room in turn.

But there was no Butson. His pipe lay broken on the front bedroom fender, and his coat hung behind the door; but there was no other sign.

Johnny dashed into the back yard. That, too, was empty. But in the yard behind, the old lighterman, paint-pot in one hand and brush in the other, just as he had broken off in the touching up of his mast, stood, and blinked, and stared, with his mouth open. His house-doors, back and front, stood wide, because of wet paint, and one could see through to the next street. It was by those doorways that Mr. Butson had vanished a minute ago, after scrambling over the wall, hatless, and in his shirt sleeves. And the old lighterman thought it a great liberty, and told Johnny so, with some dignity.

Johnny rushed back to the shop. "Gone!" he cried. "Bolted out at the back!"

He might have offered chase, but his mother lay in a swoon, and Bessy hung over her, hysterical. "Shove that woman out," he said, and he and Hicks, between them, thrust the bawling termagant into the street and closed the door.

Without, she raged still, and grew hoarser, till a policeman came to quiet her; and in the end she marched off with him, talking at a loud scream all the way. And Harbour Lane flamed with the news of Nan's shameless bigamy.

XXXII.

Long Hicks raved and tore at his hair, striding about the shop, and cursing himself with whatever words he could find. Johnny was excited still, but he grew thoughtful. There was more in this business, he saw now, than the mere happy riddance of Butson. What of the future? His mother was prostrated, and lay moaning on her bed. No one was there to tend her but Bessy, and there was no likelihood of help; they had no intimacy with neighbours, and indeed the stark morality of Harbour Lane womankind would have cut it off if they had. For already poor Nan was tried and condemned (as was the expeditious manner of Harbour Lane in such a matter), and no woman could dare so much as brush skirts with her.

"It's my fault—all of it!" said the unhappy Hicks. "I shouldn't 'a' bin such a fool! But how was I to know she'd go on like that, after what she'd agreed to? Oh, damme, I shouldn't 'a' meddled!"

Johnny calmed him as well as he might, pulled him into a chair in the shop parlour, and sought to know the meaning of his self-reproaches. "Why not meddle?" Johnny asked. "When you found her kicking up that row—"

"Ah, but I didn't, I didn't!" protested Hicks, rolling his head despairingly and punching his thigh. "I brought her here! It's all my fault! I thought I was doin' somethin' clever, an' I was silly fool! O, I'd like to shoot meself!"

"Brought her here? Well, tell us about it—no good punching yourself. When did you find out he was married?"

"Knew it years ago; didn't know the woman was alive, though. Thought she must 'a' bin dead when you told me he'd married your mother."

Some light broke on Johnny. "And you took these days off to look for her—was that it?"

"That's it. An' I was a fool—made things wuss instead o' better!"

“Never mind about that—anything’s better than having that brute here. What changed your mind about her being dead?”

“Oh, I dunno. I’ll tell you all there is to it. Long time ago when I was workin’ at Bishop’s an’ lodgin’ in Lime’us, my lan’lady she knew Butson an’ ’is wife too, an’ she told me they led a pretty cat an’ dog life, an’ one day Butson hops the twig. Well his missus wasn’t sorry to lose ’im, an’ she sets to washin’ an’ ironin’ to keep ’erself an’ the kid. But when Butson gets out of a job (’e was never in one long) ’e goes snivellin’ round to ’er, an’ wants to go back, an’ be kep’. Well the missis makes it pretty ’ot for ’im, you may guess; but she stands ’im for a week or two, givin’ it ’im pretty thick all the time, till Butson ’e cuts away again, an’ never comes back. His missis never bothered about ’im—said she was well quit. This was all before I went to live at Lime’us, but she used to be pals with my lan’lady. I kep’ a bottle o’ whisky then, case of a friend comin’, an’ them two give it what for, between ’em, on the quiet.”

“And did you know her then—his wife?”

“On’y by sight, an’ not to say to speak to, me bein’ a quiet sort. I knew Butson since—in the shops; most took ’im for a bachelor. Well, I wasn’t at Lime’us very long; I came away to this part an’ see no more of ’er—though o’ course I see ’im, often. When you told me ’e’d married your mother it took me aback a bit at first. But then, thinks I, I expect the first one’s dead—must be. But after that, the other day, when you told me what a right down bad ’un ’e was, I begun to think wuss of ’im. I knew ’e’d bin livin’ idle, but I didn’t guess ’e treated ’er so bad. An’ when you talked o’ wantin’ to get rid of ’im, I got a notion. If ’e’s bad enough for what ’e’s done, thinks I, ’e’s bad enough for anythink. P’raps ’is fust wife ’s alive after all, an’ if she is, why the job’s done! Anyway, I puts it, I’ll risk a day or two auf on it. An’ I did, an’ ’ere’s a nice old bloomin’ mess I made! Oh, I ought to be poleaxed!”

"Well of course there's been a row," Johnny said gloomily, "an' I expect it'll knock trade to pieces here, an' half kill mother. But you couldn't very well help a row in a thing like this."

"I bin three days findin" 'er. My old lan'lady's dead, an' I 'ad to try an' find 'er sister. Nobody knew where the sister was, but after a lot o' bother a old woman sends me to a cousin—in the workus. Cousin in the workus thinks the sister's dead too, but tells me to go an' ask at a newspaper-shop in Bromley. Newspaper-shop's shut up—people gone. Find the man as moved 'em, an' 'e sends me to Bow—another newspaper-shop. People there send me right back to Poplar; party o' the name o' Bushell. Party o' the name o' Bushell very friendly, an' sends me to Old Ford; then I went to Bow again, an' so I dodged about, up an' down, till I run across Mrs. Butson up on 'Omerton Marshes, keepin' a laundry. That was to-day, that was.

"Well, she took it mighty cool at first. When I told 'er I knew where 'er 'usband was, she told me I might keep my knowledge to myself, for she didn't want 'im. Very cool she was, till I told 'er 'e'd married again, an' at that she shut 'er jaw with a snap, an' glared at me. So I just told 'er what I knew, an' 'ow it 'ud be a charity to give 'im a scare on the quiet, an' send 'im away from 'ere, an' 'All right,' she says. 'Jest you show me where they live,' she says; 'I'll give 'im a scare!' 'Right,' says I, but I made conditions. She wus to wait at the street-corner, an' I was to send in a message for 'im to come out. Then we was to give 'im ten minutes to go an' git 'is clo'es, if 'e wanted any, make any excuse 'e liked, an' clear out; so as to do it all quiet an' peaceable, an' nobody the wiser. 'All right,' she says, 'jest you show me the place, that's all!' So I brought 'er. But when we got to the corner an' I told 'er which 'ouse, auf she went at a bolt, an'—an' set up all that row 'fore I could stop 'er! Who'd 'a' thought of 'er actin' contradictory like that?"

It was not altogether so dense a mystery to Johnny as it was to the simpler Hicks, twice his age, though more a boy than himself. But he assured Hicks that after all he

had done a good turn, and no price was too high for riddance of Butson. “Mother’ll be grateful to you, too, when she’s a bit quieter, an’ knows about it,” he said. And presently he added thoughtfully, “I think I ought to have guessed something o’ the sort, with his sneaking in an’ out so quiet, an’ being afraid o’ the p’lice. There’s lots o’ things I see through now, that I ought to have seen through before: not wantin’ the new name over the door, for one!”

. . . . .

Till the shutters were up that night, and the door well bolted, Nan May was urgent that that horrible woman must be kept out. And when at last she slept, in mere exhaustion, she awoke in a fit of trembling and choking, beseeching somebody to take the woman away.

Bessy, like Johnny, had a sense of relief, though she slept not at all, and dreaded vaguely. But withal she was conscious of some intangible remembrance of that red-faced woman with the harsh voice; and it was long—days—ere it returned to her that she had heard the voice high above the shouts of the beanfeasters in the Forest on the day when Uncle Isaac had brought Butson to the cottage.

XXXIII.

Mr. Dunkin’s notice to quit arrived early the next morning. The service of that notice was a duty he owed to society, morality, conscience, virtue, propriety, religion, and several other things, which he enumerated without hesitation. He could not have sat in his pew the next day with any comfort, knowing that such a duty remained unperformed; he would have felt a hypocrite.

The notice might have come before, for the trade had been good and steady; but Mr. Dunkin also had heard the whispers that the ship-yard might be shut, and he had hesitated long. Now, however, there was no alternative—if Mrs. May were left to flaunt her infamy the trade must decline under the scandal, and the place fall

worthless again. More, her expulsion at this time would seem less a seizure of the new branch than a popular vindication of righteousness.

Johnny was at home when the notice came. He had sent a message to Mr. Cottam, pleading urgent family affairs.

“Might have expected it,” Johnny said, giving the paper to Hicks, whom he had called into counsel. “Anyway mother swears she can’t show her face in the shop again. She seems almost afraid to come out of her bedroom, talks wild about disgracing her children, an’ wishes she was dead. She’s pretty bad, an’ as to the shop—that’s done up. Question is what to do now.”

Then Hicks rose to his feet, and met the occasion face to face. “We’ll do this thing between us,” he said, “and damn everybody! I ain’t a man o’ business, not special, but I got you all into this ’ere mess an’ I’ll see you out of it, or I’ll bust. Fust thing, this ’ere Mr. Dunkin’s game’s plain enough. ’Ere’s a very decent business goin’ on, an’ ’e takes this excuse to collar it ’isself. You ain’t took the shutters down yet, an’ we won’t take ’em down. We’ll stick up a big bill ‘Business come to a end,’ or such other words, an’ let the customers go where they like an’ ’ope they won’t come back. Then p’raps ’e’ll come along in a day or two an’ offer to buy the stock, thinkin’ ’e’ll get it for next to nothin’, you bein’ all at sixes an’ sevens. We won’t sell it—not one farden candle. But we won’t say so. No. We’ll fight cokum. We’ll ask ’im to think over it for another day or two an’ see if ’e can’t make it a quid or two more. ’E’ll let it slide all the week if we do it right, expectin’ to land us at the last minute an’ make us take anythink. But we’ll just be walkin’ the stuff all away very quiet in the evenin’s, in a barrer, an’ then ’e’ll come into a empty shop unexpected, an’ ’e won’t know what the customers is used to, an’ that’ll give ’im fits for another week or two. See?”

“But where shall we take the stuff?”

“Take it? Lord, anywhere!” replied Hicks, with a sweep of the hand. “There’s plenty

o’ empty shops ready to be took everywhere. Why the number I’ve seen these two or three days ’ud surprise ye! Some ain’t as good as others p’raps, but that we’ll settle in the week. It’s just beginnin’ again, that’s all, same as what ye did three or four year back! Lord, we’ll do it, I tell ye—do it flyin’!” Long Hicks waved his arms enthusiastically. “As to the—the ha’pence,” he went on, “p’raps your mother’s got some, p’raps she ain’t—don’t matter either way. I’m a single man, an’ bin in good work years, an’ I got a bit in the savin’s bank. All right! I ain’t goin’ to offer no favours, so don’t sing out! Sixpence in the pound’s all I get out o’ the Post Office, an’ that ain’t much. I’m open to make it a bit more—three per cent. if ye like—on loan; any security, or none—there’s plenty in the place in the Forest an’ the stock an’ all—’ave it yer own way. Business! ’Ard business! That’s all it is. An’ now we’ll clear decks. Fust, get your mother an’ sister out o’ this, somewhere out o’ Harbour Lane, where they ain’t known, an’ where they’ll quit frettin’.”

“Where?” Hicks’s impetuosity left Johnny’s wits lagging.

“Temp’ry lodgin’s. Needn’t be fur; next parish is as good as fifty mile auf, in London. Better. An’ by George! now I think of it, I see the very place when I was goin’ round. Party o’ the name o’ Bushell, in Poplar. ’Ouse too big for ’em—got a furnished bedroom to let; showed it me, case I might know anyone an’ send ’em, them ’avin’ done me a turn sendin’ me to Old Ford. What’s more, there’ll be two more rooms, unfurnished, next week, tenant goin’ out—young gal, a dressmaker. So we can take them too, if we get pushed, an’ run the sticks in there. There’s luck to begin with! Why, things’ll go like clockwork!”

Hicks rushed off to make sure of the lodging, and in half an hour was back with a four-wheeled cab.

“Get ’em down an’ pop ’em in sharp,” said Hicks. “I’ve told the cabby where to go. You go with ’em an’ make ’em comfortable, an’ I’ll wait ’ere till you come back. Mind—people at the ’ouse on’y know she’s in trouble ’cos ’er ’usband’s run away,

an’ I paid a week in advance. Go on—I’ll keep out o’ the way in the back till they’re clear auf; they don’t want to see me.”

Nan and Bessy wore veils, and hurried into the cab, while Johnny glowered fiercely at every face he could see turned toward them. To Johnny the streets seemed unreasonably familiar as the cab jolted through them—unreasonably like what they were a day ago, before this blow fell and knocked the world out of shape. They went out through Blackwall Cross, by the High Street, and past the Institute, where the familiar housekeeper—the housekeeper who had given him Nora’s farewell letter—stood on the steps with a broom; through the two streets, and past that corner where they had parted—it seemed years ago. As to when they might meet again, and how—that was not to be thought of now. His head was too full already.

XXXIV.

“Oh, give us some time to blow the man down!” roared Mr. Bushell, splashing and puffing amid much yellow soap and cold water in the wash-house, whither he had gone for a wash, on coming home from his tug. The voice thundered and rolled through the house, and on the first floor, strangers not used to it grew muddled in their conversation.

“Blow the man down, bully, blow the man down— To my Aye! Aye! Blow the man down! Singapore Harbour to gay London town— Oh, give us some time to blow the man down!”

Up on the first floor landing, “A-a-ah! pore dears!” said Mrs. Bushell, fat and sympathetic, looking up at Johnny, with her head aside and her hands clasped. “Pore dears! No, nobody shan’t disturb ’em! Lor, ’ow I do feel for ’em; an’ you too, Mr. May. Lucky you’re growed up to be a comfort to yer pore mar! There—I won’t say nothin’ about yer father! Runnin’ away so disgraceful an’ all. But I can’t think what parents is comin’ to, some of ’em. There’s the pore gal as is leavin’ the other two

rooms o' Monday, now—sich a quiet, well-be'aved young lady; we wouldn't 'a' let 'em stop a week if it wasn't for 'er sake, bein' so 'ard to find a respectable lodgin's with sich a mother. But there—'er mother worries the pore thing's life out—alwis drinkin'—an' now she's akchally in gaol for breakin' a public-'ouse winder! An' I sez—"

"Public-house window!" Johnny's breath came short and thick. "What's her name?"

"P'raps I shouldn't 'a' mentioned it to a stranger, but lor, I don't s'pose you know 'er, an' it's Sansom. But—"

"Where is she? Show me! In here? Is she in now?" Johnny made dashes at divers door-handles with one hand, while Mrs. Bushell, confounded and scandalised, restrained him desperately by the opposite arm. It took some impatient moments to make it plain to the landlady that he intended no violent assault, nor, on consideration, even the rudeness of dashing into a lady's rooms unannounced. Whereupon Mrs. Bushell went to a door and knocked, Johnny close at her heels. And presently the door opened.

"Nora!"

"Oh Johnny, Johnny, I wish you hadn't! . . . We shall only—" But with that the words died on the breast of Johnny's coat. Mrs. Bushell's eyes opened round, and then her mouth; and then Mrs. Bushell went off very quietly downstairs—eyes and mouth and face all round—and out into the wash-house; and "Blow the Man Down" stopped in the middle.

"Oh, but you know what I said, Johnny! We can't—you know we can't!"

"Nonsense! I shan't let you go now. I've got a disreputable mother now—or so they say. Have you heard of yours—since?"

"She's in the infirmary—very bad. Something's been forming on the liver for years, the doctor says; and when she couldn't get anything to drink she broke down at once. But what did you say about your mother?"

Johnny told her the tale. “And now,” he added in the end, “she’s in there, worn out an’ broken down, an’ not a woman in the world to comfort her but my sister. Come in, an’ help.” And they went in together.

XXXV.

At the end of a week Long Hicks stood astounded at his own performances. At the end of a year he was still astonished, and proud inordinately; and till the end of his life he will never forget the smallest particular of that week’s exploits. The policeman who came with a warrant for Butson, the young man from Mr. Dunkin, who came about the stock, the other young man that came the next time—he polished them all off, and half a dozen others, in the most dashing and businesslike manner. He found a new shop—found a score of shops, in fact, so that Nan May was fain to rouse herself and choose, lest some hopeless sepulchre of trade were rented without her knowledge. And this was good, for it gave her work to do and to think of, and once set going, she buckled to her task with all her old energy, and a world of riper experience. The shop was not so fortunately placed as that at Harbour Lane, and trade was never quite so good as it had been there when at its best. More, its place was in a dingy street, out of sight of the river and the ships. But it was a fairly busy thoroughfare, and things could be sold there, which was the main consideration. And it was Hicks’s triumph to stock this shop with the stock from Harbour Lane—conveyed secretly by night, on a truck, with many chucklings, after cunning putting-off of Mr. Dunkin. The tale whereof he would tell ever after with bashful glee, together with the tale of the sad emptiness and disorganisation of Mr. Dunkin’s new branch at its opening on Monday morning. And Uncle Isaac (who found his niece’s new shop ere long) assured the listener by frequent proclamation, that Mr. Hicks was a gentleman of vast business ability, and a genius at enterprise.

“Yus, a genius, that’s what I say, Mr. Cottam—a genius of uncommon talent.” It

was a wet afternoon, when Cottam and Hicks had taken ten minutes' shelter in the round-house by the quay-side: and presently were joined by Uncle Isaac, on his way across from the docks.

Mr. Cottam grunted. He had met Uncle Isaac twice before.

"Lord!" Uncle Isaac went on, gazing at the uneasy Hicks with steadfast admiration, "Lord! If 'e was on'y ambitious' 'e might be anythink! What a ornament 'e 'd be to a Diplomatic Corpse! Talk about Enterprise! Why at Enterprise an' any sort o' circumventions 'e's—'e's—why there, as I alwis say, 'e might be Ambashador to 'er Majesty's possessions!"

The shower flagged, and men came out on the quays. Mr. Cottam rose from the coil he had been sitting on, took his gaze out of space, and fixed it on the wall over Uncle Isaac's head. "Mr. Mundy!" he trumpeted, in the manner of a man beginning a speech to an expectant multitude; raising his forefinger to his shoulder and lowering it till it rested on Uncle Isaac's chest; "Mr. Mundy!"

Then he paused, and Uncle Isaac said, "Yus, Mr. Cottam."

The pause endured and grew impressive; till at last the foreman's face relaxed, his gaze descended till it met Uncle Isaac's, and he chuckled aloud, stabbing him playfully with the forefinger. "Why—what a windy ol' kidder you are!" said Mr. Cottam; and stamped off along the quay, croaking and chuckling all over.

XXXVI.

So with the days and the months Nan's sorrows fell from her, and their harder shapes were lost in her remembrance; and the new days brought a new peace—perhaps even a new dullness. For this was a dull place, this street of flat walls, and grime, and anxious passengers. But what mattered mere dullness of externals when she had hard work to do, and a son to take pride in?

For Nora’s sorrows, who shall speak? There was a hospital bed that she knew well, a pillow whereon a slaty face wasted and grew blank of meaning. And in the end there was a day of driving wet in a clayey cemetery, a day of loneliness, and wonder, and dull calm.

But that day went with the others, and that year went. The streets grew sloppy with winter, dusty with summer: and smoky geraniums struggled into bloom on window-sills, and died off. Miles away the Forest gowned itself anew in green, in brown and in white; and in green the exiles saw it, once a year: but all its dresses were spread for Bessy still, in her dreams.

Two years were gone, and Johnny was within five months of twenty-one, and the end of his apprenticeship, when on a brave August day he walked in the Forest alone. There would be no Forest excursion for him next year, for then, with good fortune, he would be upon the seas. For the firm had promised him the recommendation that would give him a year’s voyaging as fourth engineer.

Bessy and Nora were sharing the holiday, but they were left to rest at Bob Smallpiece’s cottage. Bob, vast, brown, and leathery, was much as ever. He had seen Johnny and Bessy once each year, but not their mother, since—well since he had gone to London to see his sister. He was not sure whether he should go up to London again soon, or not. Meantime he made tea for his visitors.

They had climbed the hill to gran’dad’s grave, and they had found it green and neat: they had seen another, fresh-closed, beside it, and wondered who was buried there; they had gathered flowers in Monk Wood, and they had stayed long in Loughton Camp; they had come again to the cottage on the glen-side, and Johnny had had to stoop at the door to save his hat, for indeed he was within two inches as big as Bob Smallpiece himself; and now Johnny, being alone, took the path to Wormleyton Pits. It was six years since he had gone that way last, and he might never go that way again.

Mainly his way lay as it had lain when he carried the basket of sloes, that night when his grandfather had hunted his last moth. Johnny had left childish fancies years behind him, and now the trees were trees merely, one much as the rest, though green and cheerful in the sunlight. But even as on that night his mind had run on London, the longed-for London that was his home now, and stale with familiarity, so now he turned over once more the mystery of the old man's cutting off: and with as little foreknowledge of the next chances in life's hatful.

Here branched the track by which he had made for Theydon; there was the tree under which he had last seen the old man's lantern-light; and then the slade opened, glorious with heather. Brambles and bushes about the pits were changed—this grown higher and wider, that withered off; and the pits—the smaller pits, at least, seemed shallow enough holes under the eyes of a man of near six feet. The deepest pit—the pit—was farthest; and Johnny could see a man, whose figure seemed vaguely familiar, sitting on its edge.

He picked his way across the broken ground and came to the pit on the side opposite to the stranger. There was the hole where the old man had taken his death-blow. Perhaps the bottom had risen an inch or so because of gravel-washings; but the big stone in the middle was still plain to see.

The man opposite was trimming wooden pegs with a pocket-knife. He wore corduroys, of a cut that Johnny held in remembrance. Johnny watched for a few seconds, and then the man turned up a leathery brown face, and Johnny knew him. It was Amos Honeywell, notable as a poacher, and chief of a family of poachers. Amos put a peg into his pocket and began on another.

"Well, Amos!" called Johnny across the pit; "you don't know me!"

The man looked up, and stared. "No," he said, "I dun't."

Johnny gave him his name.

"What?" answered Amos, putting away his peg unfinished. "Johnny May? The boy

as used to be along o' oad May the butterfly man, as died in a axdent in this 'ere very pit?"

"Yes—if it was an accident."

"Oh, it was that all right 'nough. But, why, ye're twice as tall: an' 'taren't so long, nayther." Amos paused, staring mightily at Johnny, and slapped his thigh. "Why," he said, "it's the curiousest thing in natur, seein' you now, an' here too. Did ye see e'er a funeral las' Wednesday?"

"No—where?"

"Up to chu'ch where yer gran'father's buried. But no—y'aren't livin' hereabout now, o' coase. Well it is the rarest conglomeration ever I see, me seein' you 'ere at this 'ere very pit, an' 'im buried on'y las' Wednesday, an' died in a accident too. Fell off a rick, he did."

"An' who was he?"

"Coopersale chap, he was, name o' Stiles. Lived here 'bout six year. But coase you wud'n' know 'bout him; 'twere he as did the accident."

"Did the accident? What d'ye mean?"

Amos Honeywell got up from his seat, and jerked his thumb toward the pit-bottom. "This here one," he said. "Yer gran'father."

"D' you mean he killed him?"

"Dun't much matter what ye call it now the chap's dead, but I wouldn't put it killed—not meanin'." Amos Honeywell came slouching along the pit-edge, talking as he came. "See, he was a Coopersale chap an' new here, an' knowed few. Well, he sees this here's a likely spot for a rabbit or so, an' he puts up a few pegs an' a wire or two, just arter dark: you know. In the middle of it he sees a strange oad chap comin' with a lantern, searchin'—searchin' what for? Why for wires, he thinks, o' coase. He hides in some brambles, but t'oad chap gets nigher an' nigher an'

presen'ly Stiles he sees he's about caught. So he ups on a sudden an' knocks the oad chap over, an' grabs the wires an' then he bolts. Oad chap goes over into pit of a lump, an' he falls awk'ard an'—an' well—there y'are!"

"And how long ha' you known this?"

"Knowed it? Knowed it all time, same as others."

"An' never said a word of it, nor told the police?"

"Why no," Amos answered, with honest indignation. "Wudn't hev us get the poer chap in trouble, wud ye?"

And this was the mystery: nothing of wonder at all, nothing but a casual crossing of ways: just a chance from the hatful, like all the rest of it. And Amos—well, he was right, too, by such lights as he could see.

. . . . . .

Light was low behind the hills, and dusk dimmed the keeper's honest face as he waved his friends goodbye. Yes, he would come to them in London, one of these days. Soon? Well, then, soon.

Together the three went down the scented lanes, where the white ghost-moths began to fly, and so into the world of new adventure.

THE END.

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