

Fenn George Manville

Original Penny Readings: A Series of Short Sketches



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Chapter One.

Paying the Footing

Now, it don't matter a bit what sort of clay a pot's made of, if when it's been tried in the fire it turns out sound and rings well when it's struck. If I'm only common red ware, without even a bit of glaze on me, and yet answer the purpose well for which I'm made, why I'm a good pot, ain't I, even if I only hold water? But what I hate is this – to see the pots that we come against every day of our lives all on the grumble and murmur system, and never satisfied. The pot of common clay wishes he was glazed, and the glazed pot wishes he was blue crockery, and the blue crock pot wishes he was gilt, and the gilt pot ain't satisfied because he ain't china; and one and all are regularly blind to the good they have themselves, and think their neighbours have all the pleasures of this world. They're so blind that they can't see the flaws in some of the china. "Oh! if I had only been that beautiful vase!" says the common yellow basin that the missus washes the tea-things up

in – “Oh! if I had only been that beautiful vase!” says the basin, alluding to a piece of china as stands on our mantel-piece – a vase that I picked up cheap at a sale. Why, the jolly old useful basin can’t see the cracks, and flaws, and chips in our aristocratic friend; he can’t see the vein-like marks, where he has been put together with diamond cement, nor that half-dozen brass rivets let into him with plaster of Paris. There, go to, brother yellow basin; and look alive, and learn that old saying about all not being gold that glitters. Aristocratic china is very pretty to look at – very ornamental; but if we put some hot water into the mended vase, and tried to wash up in it, where would it be, eh? Tell me that; while you, brother yellow basin, can bear any amount of hard or hot usage; and then, after a wipe out, stand on your side, dry, and with the consciousness of being of some use in this world; while the bit of china – well, it is werry pretty to look at, certainly. It’s werry nice to look at your heavy swell – the idle man of large means, who gives the whole of his mind to his tie or his looking-glass; the man with such beautiful whiskers, and such nice white hands; and when you’ve done looking at him you can say he’s werry ornamental, werry chinaish, but he ain’t much good after all. But there; instead of grumbling about having to work for your living, just thank God for it. Look at your dirty, black, horny fists: stretch ’em out and feel proud of them, and then moisten ’em, and lay hold of whatever tool you work with, and go at it with the thought strong on you that man had mind, hands, and power given him to work with; and though toil be hard

sometimes, why, the rest after 's all the sweeter; while over even such poor fare as bread and cheese and an onion there's greater relish and enjoyment than the china vase gets over his *entrées*, which often want spice and *sauce-piquante* to help them down. Man wasn't meant to be only ornamental; so don't grumble any more about being a yellow basin.

But don't mistake me in what I mean; don't think I turn up my nose at china: it's right enough in it's way, and at times vastly superior to your common crockery. I honour and feel proud of the china pots which, having no occasion to work, throw aside idleness, and with the advantages of power and position, work, and work hard – work with their heads, and do great things – men who live not to eat, but eat to live and benefit their fellows in some way. Don't mistake my meaning, for I don't want to make a man look with contempt on those above him; but learn to see how that, whatever his position in life, he can do some good, and that he is of service; and above all things, learn to see that your yellow basin – your working man – is of quite as much value in this world of ours as the china ornaments of society, whose aim and end is often to – there I'm almost ashamed to say it – to kill time.

“Thou saidst they was good crows, Tommy; and they was nobbut booblin,” says the old Lincolnshire man who wanted a rook pie, and bought his rooks without seeing them, when they proved poor half-fledged birds; and what lots of us believes what others say, – takes things for granted; and after all only

gets “booblins” for our dinner. If men would only judge for themselves – look before they leap – turn the china ornament up and look at the cracks and rivets, or, even if it is sound, consider how frail, fragile, and useless it is – they would be a little more satisfied with their own lot in life, and not be so given to grumbling. Things are precious hard sometimes, but that’s no reason why we should make them harder by our own folly. We see and know enough of the misery of our great towns, and I mean to say that we have ourselves to thank for a good – no, I mean a bad – half of it. Now, just take away – I wish we could – just take away out of London all the dirt, all the drunkenness, and all the other vice, and how do you think it would look then, eh? You can’t tell me; but I can tell you something: it would ruin half the doctors, half the undertakers, and three parts of the brewers, and gin-spinners, and publicans; and that being rather a strong dose for any man to digest at one sitting, I’ll let you think it over without putting any more on that subject. I won’t go on preaching about the everlasting pipe that men make a common tunnel or chimney to carry off all the sense in their heads through the abuse of tobacco; nor yet say anything about drowning the good feelings of his heart by the abuse of beer; for I want to get to the way in which yellow basins get jarring together, as if they were never happy till the fresh one that comes amongst them is cracked, and on the way to join the rest of the potsherds over whose dust we walk during our journey of life.

I want to talk about “paying your footing;” for there was a

paragraph in a paper only a few days ago that brought up a good many old thoughts on old subjects. Now, this paragraph gave an account of a poor chap – at Sheffield, I think – being ill-used by his fellow-workmen for not paying his footing.

Now, I'll just ask any decent, honest, hard-working man, whether he can imagine anything that comes nearer to dead robbery than making a poor fellow, just took on at any trade, pull out perhaps his last coin to find beer for a pack of thoughtless fellows who don't want it, and who would be better without it. I've opened my mouth on this subject before, but it will bear touching again; for I think it a disgrace to the British workman to keep up such dirty, mean old practices. I'm not preaching total abstinence or anything of the kind; let every man take his own road. I for one love a good glass of ale at proper time and place; but sooner than drink at the expense of a poor, hard-up fellow-worker, I'd drink water to the death.

I've seen it all again and again – in busy London, and in the sweet country, where you can draw a hearty breath laden with vigour between every stroke of hammer, or trowel, or brush – and I say that the sooner the custom is kicked out of the workshop the better. If it must be kept up, and men won't turn it out, why, then, let them put the boot on the other foot, and treat the new comer.

Nice young fellow comes into our shop once, fresh out of the country. Times had been very flat, and he looked terribly seedy. He'd come out of one of your little offices where a man's printer, and bookbinder, and all; and he was one of your fellows as would

take a book, paste end leaves on, and then leather away with a twelve-pound hammer at the beating stone till the impression was all gone, and it was solid as a board, take and nip it in the press, then sew the back, fit up his bands in the sewing frame, and stitch the whole book; end leaves again, and a bit o' paste in your first section; then glue your back, round him, ravel out your bands, lace on your boards, and then sharpen up the plough-knife, and cut all the edges smooth as glass; sprinkle or marble, red edge or gilt and burnish – what you will; and then, how's it to be, cloth? Well, then, cut out, and glue on. Half-calf? Cut up your leather, pare and trim your corners and back bit; and then, when the open cartridge paper back is dry, and the head bands firm, pop on your leather, then again your marble paper; paste down the end leaves; nip the book in the plough press, and there you are, ready for gilding the back and lettering to taste; or you may paste down your end leaves when you've done.

But that ain't our way in town; ours is mostly cheap publication work, done in fancy cloth; and a country hand might well feel strange to see gals doing all the folding and stitching; one set of men at the glue-pot, another set trimming edges with a great carving-knife, another set rounding backs, another set cutting millboards, others making the fancy cloth covers, others lettering and gilding with a machine, and so on – division of labour, you know – when there the books are, stacks of them – big stacks too; while if it wasn't for this scheming and working the oracle the binding would never be done.

Well, this young fellow was working aside me; and he was put on at the trimming – which is the cutting the edges of new books to be bound in cloth; for if they were pressed too hard the ink would set off on to the opposite sides; while this being considered as only the first binding till they get thoroughly dry, only the front and bottom of the book is cut. You do the rest with your paper-knives. Well, we're paid piecework – fair money, you know – so much a dozen or score, so that a man has what he earns; and with my hands all corny and hard, I was letting go at a good rate, while my poor mate aside me was fresh at that work, and doing precious little good beyond blistering his hands and making his fingers sore; and I could see with half an eye as his bill would only be a small one o' Saturday.

Now, the rule in most shops in London is, take care of yourself, and let others look out o' their own side; but I never found myself any the worse off for helping a lame dog over a stile: so I kept on giving my mate a lift in the shape of a word here or there, so that he got on a little better, but very slowly; for a man can't fall into the knack of it all at once. But he'd a good heart, and that "will do it" sorter stuff that makes men get on in the world and rise above their fellows; and he stuck at it till I saw him tear a strip off his handkerchief and bind it round his chafed finger, so that the blood shouldn't soil the books; and though he didn't say much, I could see by his looks as he thanked me.

Towards afternoon, while the foreman was out of the way, one of the men comes up for this new chap's footing; and being a big

shop, where good wages were made, it was five shillings. I didn't take much notice, for it warn't my business; but I saw the young fellow colour up and hesitate, and stammer, as he says, —

“You must let me off till wages are paid;” but my gentleman begins to bluster, and he says, —

“That comes o' working aside Tom Hodson, a scaly humbug as never paid his own footings; but we ain't a-going to stand any more o' that sort o' thing; and if you can't come the reg'lar, you'll soon find the place too hot to hold you.”

I felt as if I should have liked to give my man one for his nob, but went on with my work; and after a bit more rowing, they left the young chap alone; for I could see how the wind lay — he hadn't got the money, and no wonder; but all that afternoon and next morning the chaps were pitching sneers and jeers about from one to another; about the workus, and a lot more of it, till, being quite a young chap, I could see more than once the tears in his eyes. Everybody cut him, and when he asked a civil question no one would answer; and after tea the second night, when I got back, there was a regular chorus of laughter, for the young chap was standing red and angry by his lot of books, where some one had been shying a lot o' dirty water over them, so as would spoil perhaps four shillings' worth of sheets, and get the poor chap into a row as well as having to pay for them.

Now, when we went to tea that night, I'd on the quiet asked him how he stood, and lent him the money, thinking it would be better paid, for they'd always have had a spite against him else;

and now seeing this I felt quite mad and spoke up: —

“Looks like one of that cowardly hound Bill Smith’s tricks,” I says; and Bill, being a great hairy, six-foot-two fellow, puts on the bully, and comes across the shop to me as if he was going to punch my head.

“If you can’t pay *your* footing,” he says to me, “don’t think as we’re a-goin’ to take it in mouth; so just shut up,” he says, “and mind your own business;” and then, afore I knew what was up, that slight little fellow with cheeks flaming, and eyes flashing, had got hold of Bill, big as he was, and with his fingers inside his handkerchief, shook away at him like a terrier does a rat — shook him till his teeth chattered; and the great cowardly bounceable chap roared for mercy, and at last went down upon his knees, while, with his teeth set, that young fellow shook him till the whole shop roared again with laughter.

“Give it him, little ’un,” says one; “Stick to him, young ’un,” says another; while big Bill Smith looked as if he was being murdered, till the young chap sent him over against a plough-tub, where he knocked against a glue-kettle, and the half-warm stuff came trickling over his doughy white face, and he lay afraid to move.

“There’s your beggarly footing,” says the young chap, shying down two half-crowns on the big bench; and then, without another word, he walked to his place and tried to go on with his work.

I never did see a set of men look more foolish in my life than

ours did that night; and first one and then another slipped into his work, till all were busy; while them two half-crowns lay on the table winking and shining in the gaslight, and not a man had the face to come forward to pick them up and send for the beer.

Last of all, it was getting towards seven, when, now quite cool, the young chap beckons one of the boys and sends him out for two gallons and a half of sixpenny; and when it came, goes himself and pours for the whole shop, even offering the pot to Bill Smith; but he wouldn't take it, but growled out something, when the whole shop laughed at him again, and the rest of that evening he got chaffed awfully.

Next morning I'd been thinking how to get some fresh sheets stitched in the young chap's books, so as to be as little expense as possible, and when I got to the shop he was there looking at his heap, when I found that though working men do wrong sometimes, there's the real English grit in them; and here, before we came, if the chaps hadn't walked off the damaged copies, shared them amongst 'em, and put fresh ones from their own heaps, so as it never cost my young mate a shilling.

But it's a bad system, men. Have your beer if you like, but don't ask a poor hard-up fellow to rob self, wife, and child to pay his footing.

Chapter Two.

Aboard a Light-Ship

Goes in for salvage, sir; and when a ship's going on to the sands, where she must be knocked to pieces in no time, and a party of our company goes off and saves her, why we deserves it, don't we? That's our place, you see; and them's old names of ships and bits o' wreck nailed up again it. We keeps oars, and masts, and sails in there; ropes, and anchors, and things as don't want to be lying out on the beach; and then, too, it serves for a shelter and lookout place. Them's our boats – them two – yawls we call 'em; and I mean to say that, lifeboat, or other boat, you'll never find aught to come anigh 'em for seaworthiness. There's a build! there's fine lines! Why, she goes over the water like a duck; and when we've a lot of our chaps in, some o' them sand-bags and irons at the bottom for ballast, the two masts, and a couple o' lug sails up, it'll be such a storm as I ain't seen yet as'll keep us from going out. Why, we've gone out, when in five minutes – ah! less than that – you couldn't see the shore – nought but wild sea and spray all round; but there, we're used to it, you see; and when we get to a ship in trouble, and save her, why, there's some satisfaction in it. And, after all, 'tain't half so bad as being in a light-ship.

Light-ship? yes, there's one out yonder. No, not that – that's

one o' the harbour lights. Out more to sea. There, you can't see her now; but if you take a look you'll see her directly. Not the ship, o' course, but the light. There; that's her, bo. Don't you see her? That's a revolving light. Goes round and round, you know, so that sometimes you see it, and sometimes you don't; and that's on the top of a mast aboard a light-ship, moored head and stern on the sands, two mile out; and sooner than spend a night aboard her when there's a storm on, I'd go out to fifty wrecks.

Pretty sight that, ain't it? Surprises many people as comes to the sea-side. Seems as if the sea's on fire, don't it? There now, watch that boat as the oars dip – quite gives flashes o' light. But that ain't nothing, that ain't, to what I've seen abroad. I was in one of the Queen's frigates out in the Pacific, and when we lay in the harbour at Callao one night, the officers had a ball on board, and we chaps had plenty to do taking the ladies backwards and forwards. Well, when it was over we in the first cutter were taking a party ashore – officers and ladies – when they were singing, and so on, and they made us pull slowly, for it was just as if the whole bay was afire, and when we dipped the flash was enough to light up all our faces with the soft pale light.

But you should be out in the light-ship there for a night when there's a heavy sea on and the waves makes a clean breach over you. It's a dull life out there at any time, for there's not much to do – only the light to keep trimmed and the glass and reflectors well polished. When I was there we used to pass the time away making models of ships and rigging them, or doing any little nick-nack

jobs as took our fancies. Four of us used to be there at a time; and when the dark winter's night was setting in, and the wind and sea getting up, you couldn't help feeling melancholy and low. The place we were in, you see, was a dangerous one, and one where there had been no end of wrecks; while in more than one place you could see the timbers of a half broke-up ship, lying stuck in the sands. Then, as it got dark, and you stood on deck, you could almost fancy the tall white waves were the ghosts of them as had gone down and been lost there – hundreds upon hundreds of them; and that puts me in mind of one night when a full-rigged ship came on the sands.

It was a horribly rough afternoon, with a heavy gale blowing; cold, and dark, and dismal it looked all round, and there we were watching this here ship trying hard to give the sands a wide berth, but all to no good, for there she was slowly drifting down nearer and nearer – now lost to sight almost in the fog and spray, and now when it lifted, plain again before us, till she seemed close in amongst the heavy surf.

At times our light-ship, heavily moored and strong-built as she was, pitched and strained dreadful, so that it seemed as she must drag or break away, while every now and then a wave would come with such a shock that the heavy timbers quivered again; and of us four men there, every one would have gladly been ashore, and out of those fierce roaring breakers. But no one showed the white feather, and there we were, as I said, watching the big ship, till just as the gloomy winter's night set in, and the gale came

shouting by as though the storm meant to make a night of it, we saw the ship for a moment, lost sight of her again, and then, just as there was a bit of an opening in the fog, there she came with a regular leap stern on to the sands, and “snap, snap,” two of her masts went overboard in an instant.

We had to hold on pretty tightly ourselves, I can tell you, and the water that came aboard at times almost choked us; but with such a scene as that before us, not a man could have gone below, and we stood straining our eyes and trying to make out what was going on.

She was too far off for us to make out anything very plainly; but as we looked, up went a rocket, rush into the air, and, leaving its fiery train behind, broke into a shower of sparks. Then there was another and another sent up, and in the flashes of light we could make out as one mast crowded with people still stood, while a regular shudder went through one to think what it would be if that fell.

What seemed so cruel was that though we were only a quarter of a mile off we couldn't help the poor creatures; all the good we were was to keep our light burning brightly to warn ships off, but once they were on the sands, with a heavy sea running, the stoutest shoremen shook their heads, and when the lifeboat was run out knew well enough that the chances were ever so much against the lives being all saved.

“Hooray!” says Bob Gunnis all at once; “here they come.”
“Where?” I says; “and who's coming?”

Looking where he pointed, for the wind swept his words away, I held on my tarpaulin hat, and peered out to leeward, where every now and then I could just see the white and blue sides of the lifeboat with her sail up, and seeming to dance like a gull on the top of the water. Now she'd be quite hid in the dim misty clouds that kept flying across, half rain, half spray. Now she'd be seen plainer and nearer, coming on between us and the wreck; and then it would come over so dark again we could make nothing out. But the lightly-painted boat and her white sail soon showed again quite pale and ghost-like, now getting fast on towards the vessel; though I couldn't help giving my head a shake as I held on and looked.

“What water is there where she lies?” I says to Bob Gunnis – for, you see, he was a chap as knew to a foot what water there was anywhere for far enough round.

“Let's see,” he says, “it's about low water now, or should be if there warn't this gale on, but she won't go down no lower anyhow. Let's see, there'll be just enough to float the lifeboat over, and that's all; while if they give a scrape or a bump once it won't be no wonder.”

And now we could just make out the lifeboat lay out for a bit, and then let go her kedge and drop down towards the ship, as seemed at times to be completely buried under water. It made your eyes ache to watch, for the spray came dashing into your face, while the lanthorn looked quite dull and dripping, with the water splashing and beating against it.

All at once we had a grand view of the lifeboat, for she lay just where the light from our lanthorn fell. All four of us saw her as we hung together by the bulwarks, and then there seemed something wrong, for she was lifted on a great wave; and then one's heart seemed to come in one's mouth, for she capsized.

I remember it all so well – the white frothy water, with the strong light from our lanthorn upon it, and the pale, ghostly-looking boat capsizing, while we held our breath to see her come right again; but she didn't, but lay tossing in the water, for there was not depth enough for the mast to pass under, or else the boat, being made self-righting, would have come up again all right.

Just then, the light turning round, all was darkness again, and whether it was fancy, or only the wind rushing by, there came one of the wildest and most awful shrieks I ever heard in my life. Then the light worked round again, and shone down towards where the lifeboat and the ship lay; but we could see nothing but the tremendous sea beating upon the sands, boiling up and rising like mountains of foam, whilst our light-ship rolled and plunged and tugged at her moorings, so that we could not keep our feet.

Bound come the light again, and we strained our eyes to look, but there was nothing but the tumbling sea in one great froth; and then darkness, and light once more as the lanthorn revolved; and we then fancied that in the dark part, between where the light fell and our ship, we could make out the lifeboat drifting along on one side, with here and there something dark clinging to it; but we couldn't be sure, and even if they had floated close by

us, we could have done nothing to help them, for the sea on was something fearful.

There wasn't a man of us that night as didn't feel sure as the old light-ship would be dragging her anchors and going ashore somewhere, when, "Lord ha' mussy upon us," I says. Of course, it was watch and watch of a night; but, there, who could go and turn in with the sea thundering on deck, and washing over you – the chain cables groaning and creaking; the wind shrieking by, and the mast, atop of which stood the lanthorn, quivering and jarring and shaking, as though it would snap off by the deck? Sleep! No, not much of that; for we all stayed on deck, talking when there was a lull, and holding on so as to keep from being swept overboard.

Ah! it's a nice berth – tenter of a light-ship, moored at the end of the dangerous sands – a place too bad for other vessels to come; so, fair weather or foul, there you are, to keep your light bright and trimmed so that you may warn other folks off.

We could see the lights ashore now and then, and knew how the folks would be looking out for the lifeboat, and the very thought of it all gave one a shudder, for it seemed that they were all lost – ship's crew and lifeboat's crew – while we four had been looking idly on.

I'd crept along to the bows of the ship, and was trying to peer out into the thick haze ahead, when all at once I gave a start, for I seemed to hear a cry like some one hailing very faintly.

I looked out again and again on both sides, and then settled as

it was fancy, for the noise of the wind and water was deafening; but just as I'd made up my mind that it was nothing I hears the cry again, and this time it made me shiver, for I knew that any one of the ship's crew, or the lifeboat's crew, must have been swept away half an hour before. So, as I said, I gave quite a shiver and crept back to where my mates stood, and shouts in Bob Gunnis's ear, "There's some one a hailing of us!"

"Don't be a fool," he says, quite crusty; but I stuck out as there was, and then he crept forward too, and stood listening. "Now then," he says, "where's your hailin' now? Why, it was the – "

"Help!" came a faint cry from somewhere ahead, and Bob stopped short with his mouth open, and his hand over his eyes, gazing out to sea.

"Say, mate," he says, ketching hold of my arm, and whispering in my ear, with his mouth quite close – "say, mate, let's get back; 'taint nat'ral."

Well, feeling a bit queer after hearing that wild cry from somewhere off the water, and knowing that nothing could live in the sea then on, we thought it was what Alick Frazer, another of our chaps, called "No canny," and we crept back along the bulwarks to where t'other two stood, and "I say, bo," says Bob to Alick, "you can hear 'em drowning out there now;" and Bob was obliged to shout it all.

"Ah!" says Alick, "and so we shall every storm night as comes, laddie; and I'll no stay in the ship if we do."

"Help!" came the cry again off the water – such a long low

cry, heard in the lull, that it seemed to go through us all, and we stood there trembling and afraid to move.

“Tain’t human,” says Alick – “it’s a sperrit;” but somehow or other we all went up to the ship’s head again, and stood trying to make something out as the light turned round. All just in front of us was dark, for it was some little way out before the light struck the water; but we could see nothing; and shaking our heads, we were about going back again, when a sea came aboard with a rush, and made us hold on for dear life; and then directly after came very faintly the cry, “Help!” so close at hand that it seemed on board.

“Why, there’s a chap on the chain?” cried Bob Gunnis excitedly. “Look here, mates,” he cried; and there right below, and evidently lashed on to the big mooring cable, we could make out a figure, sometimes clear of the water, and sometimes with it washing clean over him.

“Ahoy!” I sings out; but there was no answer, and during the next minute as we stood there no cry for help came, for it seemed the poor fellow was beat out.

“Well,” I says, “we must fetch him aboard somehow.”

“Ah!” says Bob Gunnis, “that’s werry easy said, mate; p’raps you’ll go down the cable and do it.”

That was home certainly, for with the sea, as we kept shipping, it was hard enough to hold your own in the shelter of the bulwarks, without going over the bows, where you would have to hang on, and get the full rush. “Well, but,” I say, “some one

must go;" and I shouted it out, and looked at the other two. But they wouldn't see it, and Bob Gunnis only said it was bad enough there as we were; so I goes down below, feeling all of a shiver as if something was going to happen, and they shouted at me, but I came up again, and shoved the hatch on, and then crept forward with some inch rope in my hand; makes one end fast round my waist, and gives them the rest to pay out; and then gets ready to go over the bows and slip down the cable.

I waited till a sea had struck us, and then climbed over and began to swarm down the cold, slippery iron links; and not being far, I soon got hold of the poor fellow hanging there; then the sea came right over us, and it seemed as if I was going to be torn away; but I held on, and then as it went down I got lower, and held tight hold of the poor chap – both arms round him, and fancying how it would be if my knot wasn't fast, or the rope parted. I shouted for them to haul us aboard; but they couldn't have heard me, for while I was watching the black bows of the ship, another wave come over us, and I was almost drowned before it sank. But now they began to haul on tight, and dragged so that the rope cut awfully, for I found that the poor chap didn't move; and loosing one hand as they slackened a moment, I could feel as he had lashed himself to the cable, and then the rope tightened again, and before I could shout I was being dragged away, and the next moment they had me over the side.

But I was a bit up now, and, opening my knife, I tried the knot, got my breath, and went over again, slid down the chain,

and getting where I was afore, managed to cut through the poor fellow's lashings; and then holding on tightly, shouted to them to haul; but as I shouted, the sea washed right over us, and dashed us bang up against the ship's bows, so that I was half stunned; but I held on, and then as the wave was sucking us back, and I felt that it was all over, the rope tightened, the fellows hauled in fast, and once more I was aboard, and this time not alone – though, mind you, it was no easy task to get us over the side, for I couldn't help them a bit.

After a bit I was able to crawl down the hatchway, and as they were trying to pour rum into the poor fellow's mouth, I lay down in the cabin, for my head felt heavy and stupid, and there I was watching them as by the light of the swinging lanthorn they did what they could for the poor fellow; and at last, lying there listening to the sea beating up against the side, I fell into a half-stupid sort of sleep – part owing to the way my head was struck, and partly from being worn-out.

Next morning when I woke, wet and shivering, the dull light through the skylight showed me as the poor fellow lay on the other side, and there was no one else in the cabin. Close aside him was a life-belt; so I knew that he had been one of the lifeboat crew, and, not wanting to disturb him, I was going to creep out, when I thought I'd have a look to see who it was I'd saved, and so I crept back a bit, and stooped down, when my heart seemed to stop, for I saw as it was my own brother – and he was dead!

Can't help feeling a bit soft about it, sir, though it's years ago

now. Poor chap! he volunteered, as the crew were short-handed, and was one of the many lost, for only two or three got ashore.

Plucky young chap, he was; but the sea was too much for him; and, Lord, sir, you'd be surprised how many the sea takes every year.

Chapter Three.

K9 – A Queer Dog

Ideas for new sketches are like mushrooms in the London fields – scarce articles, and difficult to find unless you force them in a bed. But then the forced article will not bear comparison with that of spontaneous growth, while you find that, as you have made your bed, so on it you must lie. So you lie, on the strength of your forced article, and the natural consequence is that the public will not believe you when you tell them a story. We have had specimens lately of what the earnest will dare in search of the novel, but in spite of Longfellow's imperative words, we can't all be heroes. Be that as it may, though, after a long search, I found this mental mushroom in the field of adventure. It was nearly hidden by the surrounding growth, but peeped forth white and shiny like a bald-crowned head, with the side crop brushed carefully across in streaks. It was a reverse of circumstances certainly, but the idea was new, so I took a policeman into custody; while as a proof of the daring contained in the apparently simple act, think of a man to whom reputation is dear, and read the following.

I had long had my eye upon the policeman, for no one could gaze upon his face without feeling that those impressive features had a large fund of interesting matter concealed behind.

“There must be something more than whiskers,” I said, and then I considered what a sensation novelist he would make if but of a literary bent. Truth is stranger than fiction; and what truths we should get from the man so often sworn to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” However, failing the policeman’s turning *littérateur*, I thought a little of his experience might be made available, and therefore the above-named custodian act was performed.

Now the public – that is to say, the reading public – cannot guess at a tithe of the difficulties to be encountered in making the policeman speak; he looks upon every question as though it were, with entrapping ideas, put to him by a sharp cross-examining counsel, and is reticent to a degree. He is a regular Quaker – he only speaks when the spirit moveth him; and the only effective spirit for moving him is Kinahan’s LL, which seems to soothe the perturbed current of his thoughts, makes him cease to regard the administering hand as that of prosecutor, prisoner, or witness in an important case, and altogether it reduces him to one’s own level, if he will allow the expression.

Bobby sat one evening in my study – as my wife insists upon calling the little shabby room over the back kitchen – and for awhile he seemed such a Tartar that I regretted having caught him. I almost shrank beneath his hard stare, and began to wonder whether I had done anything that would necessitate the use of the “darbies” he was fidgeting about in his pocket, especially when his eyes were so intently fixed upon my wrists, which lay

upon the table before me in rather an exposed state, from the fact of the tweed jacket I wore not being one of the “warranted shrunk.” It was enough to make any one shudder and draw the sleeves lower down, and my performance of this act appeared to make my visitor so suspicious that I verily believe he would have interposed to prevent my exit any time during the course of his call.

My friend partook of my hospitality, and then began to speak, when I opened a book and seized a pencil, but, —

“No, thanky, sir,” he cried; “not if I knows it. The regular reporters is bad enough; only what can’t be cured must be endoored. But none o’ that, thanky. P’raps you’ll put that book away.”

Of course I did so, and felt that I must imitate the special correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and trust to my memory.

“Now yer see, sir, I could say a deal; but then I says to myself — ‘It’s my dooty to tell you as anything you now says may be used in evidence agen you at yer trial.’ Wherefore, don’t you see, I takes notice of the caution?”

I’d give something to be able to transfer to paper the solemn wink he gave me, but that is impossible, and we both talked on indifferent subjects until my visitor had had another mix, when thoughtfully poking at the sugar, he said, —

“You see, sir, we do sometimes have cases on hand as makes a feller quite savage; and then people as looks on will make it ten times wuss for the pleeceman by siding with them as is took.

Here we gets kicked and butted, knocked down and trod upon; clothes tore, hats once, 'elmets now, crushed; hair pulled out by the roots, and all sorts o' nice delicate attentions o' that sort, which naterally puts a feller out, and makes him cut up rough; then the crowd round cries out 'shame,' or, 'oh, poor feller,' or what not, and makes the poor feller as has half killed a couple o' pleecemen wuss than he was afore. Pleecemen oughter to keep their tempers says the papers, arter what they calls a 'police outrage,' jest as if the force was recruited out of all that's amiable. We ain't angels, sir, not a bit of it; and it's a wonder we don't get more outer temper than we does. Jest you go to take a chap inter custody and advise him to come quietly; and then offer to take him all decent and orderly. Jest you go and do that, and let him turn round and give you a spank in the mouth, as cuts yer lip open and knocks a tooth loose – jest see how angelified you'll feel then; and try what a job it is not to pull yer staff out and half knock his blessed head off. Why, if Lord Shaftesbury hisself had on the bracelet that night I know he'd give my gentleman one or two ugly twists. Wun knows wun oughter keep cool, but yer see a feller ain't made o' cast iron, which would be a blessin' to some of our fellers' legs – being a hard material. After taking a rough sometimes I've seen our chaps with legs black, blue, and bleeding with kicks, while 'ceptin' a little touzlin' and sech, the prisoner hasn't had a spot on him. Yes, it's all werry fine, 'Keep yer temper,' – 'Don't be put out,' – 'Take it all coolly,' – be pitched outer winder and then 'come up smilin',' as *Bell's Life* says. Get

kicked in the stummick, and then make a bow; but that you'd be sure to do, for you'd get reg'larly doubled up. Never mind havin' yer whiskers pulled, and bein' skretched a bit, it's all included in yer eighteen bob or pound a week; and, above all – keep yer temper.

“A niste job two on us had in Oxford-street, I think it was, one day. It was over a horinge chap as had been making an obstruction in the busiest part o' the thoroughfare. We'd been at him for about a week, arstin' him civilly to drop it; for the vestry had been laying the case before the magistrate, and we had our orders. You see it was a good pitch; and this chap used to do a roaring bit o' business, and of course it warn't pleasant to give it up; but then he'd no call to be there, yer know, for he was interfering with the traffic; so in course we had to put a stop to it.

“Well, yer know, it had come to that pitch at last that if he wouldn't go why we was to take him, and Dick Smith was the one that was in for it along with me. We neither on us liked it, for this was a civil-spoken chap in a suit o' cords, a bird's-eye handkercher, and a fur cap. He'd got a smart way, too, o' doing his hair, which was black and turned under at the two sides afore his ears; and besides he was only trying to get a honest living; but dooty's dooty, yer know, sir, and we ain't got much chance o' pickin' and choosin'. So I says to Dick, as we goes along —

“Now, then, Dick,' I says, 'which is it to be, the cove or his barrer?'

“Oh!' says Dick, 'I'm blest if I'm a-goin' to wheel the barrer

through the public streets. Look well for a pleece-constable in uniform, wouldn't it?'

"Well,' I says, rather chuff, 'some one's got it to do, and I ain't a-goin' to have it shoved on to me. Tell yer what we'll do – we'll toss up.'

"All right,' says Dick, 'so we will.'

"So I fetches out a copper, the on'y one we could furridge out between us, and to Dick I says, 'Now, then, sudden death?'

"Not a bit of it,' says he, 'I'll go off lingerin' – best two out o' three.'

"Werry well,' I says, 'anything for peace and quietness.' And so we tossed.

"Heads,' says Dick.

"Woman it is,' says I. 'One to me;' and then I passes the brown over to Dick, and he spins up.

"Lovely woman,' says I, and lovely woman it was.

"Blowed if here ain't two Bobbies a tossin',' says one o' them niste boys as yer meets with in London.

"Didn't I feel savage, though I had won; and for a moment I almost wished it had been that werry young gentleman as we had to take. But my boy gives a grin and a hop, skip, and a jump, and then cuts behind a gentleman's carriage as was passing, when the Johnny put out his foot and gave him a push, and down he goes into the mud"; which was, of course, pleasant to our outraged feelings, though it would have taken a great deal of mud to spoil that boy's clothes.

“Now then, Dick,’ I says, ‘let’s be off.’

“Wot’s the hurry?’ says Dick, who was a thinking of the barrer, I could see.

“Oh, come on,’ I says; for, thinks I to myself, ‘you’re on the right hand side of the way, my boy.’

“So off we goes, till we comes to the well-known spot, and there stood my chap, a-doing a raging trade.

“Now then, young feller,’ I says, ‘you must move on.’

“What for?’ says he.

“Obstructing the thoroughfare,’ says I.

“Taste ’em,’ he says, ‘they’re fust-rate to-day. Shove two or three in yer pocket for the young Bobbies.’

“Won’t do,’ I says; ‘we’ve got our orders, and off yer goes.’

“Get out,’ he says, ‘you’re chaffin’.

“Not a bit of it,’ I says; ‘so stow nonsense and go on quietly, there’s a good feller.’

“All right,’ he says, seeing as we was serious, ‘all right.’ And then he sells a horinge to this one, and a horinge to that one, and sixpenn’orth to another one; but not a hinch would he move. So we waits a bit, and then I gives him another gentle hint or two.

“All right,’ he says agin, ‘wait a bit.’

“Well, yer knows, sir, this went on for about half an hour, and a crowd gets collected, and every time as I speaks to him, ‘All right,’ he says, ‘wait a bit,’ and then the crowd laughed and the boys hoorayed.

“I thinks to myself ‘This here won’t do,’ but neither Dick nor

me wanted to begin, so I has one last try, and I says quietly, —
“Now, are you a-goin’ or not? Becos if you ain’t we must make yer.’

“All right,’ he says, ‘wait a bit,’ and the people bust out a laughin’ again, and the crowd gets bigger than ever.

“Now, then, Dick,’ I says to my mate, ‘come on,’ for I see as it was no use to be played with any longer.

“So Dick goes to the barrer, and I collars the chap, and the row began. Dick lays hold o’ the barrer handles quite savagely, and shoots a dozen o’ horinges off inter the road, when, of course, there was a regular scramble, and somebody calls out ‘Shame!’ Then my chap takes and throws hissself down, and gives my wrist such a screw as a’most sprained it, and then somebody else calls out ‘Shame!’

“Now you’d better come on quietly,’ I says to my chap. ‘You’ll do no good by making a row.’ And then I tries to get him up on his legs, when some one calls out ‘Shame!’ agin.

“What’s a shame?’ I says, which I didn’t oughter have done, for I knew my dooty better than they could tell me. Howsoever I says it, ‘What’s a shame?’ I says.

“Ill usin’ a honest man,’ says the crowd.

“I sees as it was no use to talk, so I gets well hold o’ my chap, and seeing, as he did, as his barrer was a moving off with Dick in the sharps, and the boys a hoorayin’, he gets up, and we was goin’ on all right, when some on ’em calls out ‘Shame!’ again, and that sets the chap off, and he throws hissself down, and, wuss luck,

throws me down too, when off goes my box, and in the scuffle my gent jumps up, puts his foot on it, and nearly gets away.

“Now this made me a bit warm, for I was hurt, and I didn’t mean to let him go at no price now. So, jest as he’d shook me off and was going to bolt, I gets hold of his leg as I lays on the ground, when he gives me the savagest kick right aside o’ the head, and nobody didn’t cry ‘shame’ then.

“Well, I wasn’t stunned, but I felt precious giddy. I jumps up, though, and lays hold of him – sticks to him, too, and sometimes we was down and sometimes up, and I know we rolled over in the mud half a dozen times.

“Last of all, in one of the struggles in all of which the crowd hindered me as much as it could, my chap goes down, spang, with his head on the pavement, and me atop of him, and there he lay stunned.

“‘Shame, shame!’ cries the crowd, ‘you’ve killed the poor fellow.’ And then they begins a shovin’ and a hustlin’ of me about, and I don’t know how it would have ended if one of our chaps hadn’t ha’ come up; and then Dick came back after gettin’ rid o’ the barrer. Then we had the stretcher fetched, and the end of it was Horinges got seven days for assaultin’ the police, and I got seven days, too – only mine was in the infirmary.

“You wouldn’t have ketched me tossin’ if I’d known.

“You see, people will be so precious fond o’ takin’ what they calls the weak side. They never stops to ask themselves whether it’s right or whether it’s wrong; but they goes at it like a bull at a

gate, and it's us as suffers. Many's the chap as has got away when the pleece has jest nicely put a finger on him. In comes Public. 'Let that poor chap alone,' says he, 'what are you draggin' him off in chains like that for?' And so on to that tune till every one begins to feel for the chap, who puts on a cantin' phisog, and turns his eyes about like them coves as chalks on the pavement for a livin'. Perhaps he's a burglar, or a smasher, or swell-mobsmen, or a nice tender-hearted critter as has been beatin' his wife with a poker, or knocked her head agin the wall, or some nice trick o' that kind. And then everybody takes part agin the police, and what can they do?

"'Their dooty,' says you.

"Well, in course, but it don't come werry pleasant, mind yer.

"People don't side with us; they don't like us a bit. And of course you'll say we don't like the people. Well, we'll drop that part of the business. It's only natural for us to like a good murder, or burglary, or forgery. You swells likes your huntin', and fishin' and shootin'; and we enjoys our sport as much as you does your little games. There's a sorter relish about taking a fellow for anything exciting just when my gentleman fancies he's got clean off – hopped his twig, as he thinks; when in we goes at my gaol-bird, and pops salt on his tail. Bless yer, we claps the darbies on his wrists, and has him walked off before he knows what's up. He's like a orspital patient; we chloroforms him with the bracelets, and before he comes to hissself we've cut off his liberty, and he wakes up in a cell."

“Yer see, sir,” said my friend, rising, “yer see, we’ve a knack o’ doin’ it. Spose, now, it’s you as is wanted. I’ve held you in play, say for half an hour, to make sure as you’re the man as I wants, for I’ve got yer phortygruff pinned in my hat; and at last I walks up to yer just so, and ‘You’re my pris’ner,’ says I. Whereupon you ups with yer hands – just so, that’s the way – and tries to shove me off, when – ”

“*Click, Click...*”

“There I has yer snug with your bracelets on; and werry proud I feels of yer.”

And in effect my visitor had carried out his illustration to the fullest extent, so that I sat before him handcuffed, and he resumed his seat smiling with triumph and LL. I suggested the removal of my bonds; but my captor, as he seemed to consider himself, merely smiled again, helped himself to a cigar, lighted it, and began to smoke.

This was as bad as being a Lambeth casual. Anybody, even Mrs Scribe might come in, and the thought was more powerful than any sudorific in the pharmacopoeia. It was no use to appeal to K9, for he seemed to consider Brag was a good dog, but Holdfast a better; and he did nothing but smile and smoke. Getting an idea for an article was all very well, but at what a cost! It would not do at all. Why the special correspondent of the *PMG* would not have rested upon his hay-bag if a committee to whom he was well-known had entered the place to inspect him. He would have fled without his bundle. Ay, and so would I, but

there was some one coming up the stairs, and I should have run right into some one's arms. A last appeal to the fellow before me only produced another smile; so, as a *dernier ressort*, I drew my chair towards the table, and thrust my manacled hands out of sight.

I was just in time, for the handle turned, and in walked an artist friend, who always makes a point of considering himself as much at home in my room as I do myself in his.

"How are you, old boy?" said he, which was hardly the thing, considering the company I was in.

I muttered something about being very well, and Chrayonne seated himself by the fire.

"Pass the cigar-box, old fellow," said he. But I couldn't hear him, and tried to appear as if sitting at my ease – of course, a very simple thing with one's hands pinioned.

"Pass the cigars, Scribe," said Chrayonne, again, in a louder key; while the policeman wagged his head, and smiled knowingly.

"He can't," said the wretch, grinning outright.

"Can't?" said Chrayonne, with a puzzled look. "Can't? But, I say," he exclaimed, jumping up, "I beg your pardon, old fellow, I never thought about your being engaged. I'm off. *Excusez.*"

"Pris'ner," said K9, grinning.

"I am not," I exclaimed, indignantly; but it was of no avail, for the wretch pulled the table-cover on one side, and pointed to my manacled hands.

Chrayonne blew out his cheeky opened his eyes widely, and then whistled very softly. Then, after a pause —

“Very sorry, old fellow. Can I do anything? Bail – friends – solicitors – ”

“Yes,” I exclaimed, furiously. “Knock that scoundrel down, and take the key of these confounded handcuffs from him. It’s a rascally piece of humbug – it’s a trick.”

Chrayonne looked at the constable, who winked at him in reply, and, to my intense disgust, I could see that for the moment he was more disposed to place faith in the impassive demeanour of the myrmidon of the law than in my indignant protestations.

Just then, however, by a desperate effort, and at the cost of some skin, I dragged one hand from its durance vile, and rushed at my captor, as he dubbed himself; but he coolly rose, took out the key, and released my other hand. Then pocketing the handcuffs, and winking at us both in turn, he opened the door, and the room knew him no longer. While, as a specimen of the advantage or disadvantage of first impressions, I may add that it took two cigars and words innumerable to make Chrayonne believe that my visitor had not departed with the expectation of a heavy bribe as payment for my release.

Chapter Four.

Waiting for 'Arry

Well, sir, yes; perhaps it was his own fault, a good deal of it, and yet I thinks sometimes as those big folks above us might do something for us to make things better. But that's neither here nor there; we was hungry, both on us, and he took it and got nabbed, and he's a taking it out in here; and I allus takes a walk round every morning before going out for the day with my basket. Seems like to do me good, though I can't see him; for I know he's there. And then I count up the days as well as I can so as to know when he'll come out, and 'tain't surprising as sometimes they seems so long, that I get my cheek up again the wall and has a good cry.

But that don't do no good, you know – only makes one feel a bit lighter; and then I'm up and off, so as to save all I can again my chap comes out; and then, good luck to us, I hope times 'll mend.

Down the Dials we live. Not in the main street, you know, but just off in a court, and right up atop in the garret. You see, 'Arry gets his living by birds, and we can keep 'em alive up there better. Poor little things! they dies fast enough now; but when we lived on the ground-floor back it was awful. I s'pose it was the closeness and bad smells, for the little things would turn rough all over, and wouldn't eat, and then next morning there they'd

be with their pretty little bright eyes half closed, and looking so pitiful that I used to cry about it, and then 'Arry used to call me a fool; but I know he didn't mind, for he allus put his arm round me and give me a kiss.

Pore little soft, downy things; it used to be sad enough to have 'em shut up behind them bars, beating their little soft breasts, and seeming to say, "Let me out! let me out!" but when they died it was ever so much worse. Sometimes of a night I've woke up to hear a little scratching noise and a rustling in one of the cages; and then I've known what it meant, for it's one of the pore thing's little spirits flown away from this weary life.

'Arry used to be soft over it too, for he's werry fond of his birds, and when one went away from us like that, he used to roll the little body up in a bit of stiff paper, and take it down in the country with him and bury it.

"Seems hard to ketch the poor things," he used to say; "but we must get a living somehow."

When we got up atop of the house there was more light, and a bit of sun sometimes, so that the birds lived better, and used to sing more, and we sold a-many.

You see 'Arry had his nets, and traps, and call-birds, and in the fine weather we used to go down in the country together ketching linnets, and goldfinches, and redpoles. Sometimes we'd bring home a lark's or a nightingale's nest, and I used to help him all I could – cutting turves, and getting chickweed, and groundsel, and plantain, moss and wool for canary nests, and mosses and

sprays for the bird-stuffers to ornament with, besides grasses of all kinds. There's allus sale for them sorter things, you know, and it's a honest living.

Why, it was like getting into heaven to run down with 'Arry into the bright country – away from the dirt, and noise, and smoke; and I used to make him laugh to hear me shout and sing, and to see me running along a bank here to pick flowers, or stopping there to listen to the larks, and even running arter the butterflies; but he used to like it, I think, and allus took me with him when he could, for his mother lives with us and feeds the birds when we're out. Spring, and summer, and autumn, it was allus beautiful: flowers and fruit, and bright sunshine, and soft, gentle rain, and the sweet, sweet scent of the earth after. Oh, sir, shut yourself up for a month in a dirty room in a close court, where you can hardly breathe – live from hand to mouth, and p'raps not have enough – and then go out into the bright sunshine and on the breezy hills, with the green, shady woods there, and the sparkling stream there – the bees humming about on the heath bells, and all pure, and bright, and golden with the furze and broom – and then feel how it all comes over you, choking like, as if you were so happy you must cry, for it's all too sweet and beautiful to bear!

'Arry allus laughed at me, but I know him and his ways, and what it means when his eyes look so bright, and there's a twitching about the corners of his mouth: and the more wild and happy I seemed, the quieter he'd grow, poor boy, and then he'd

take my basket away and carry it hisself atop of his cages and sticks and nets, and “Go along, my gal,” he’d say, so that I should be free and light. For he’s a good fellow is ’Arry, and never lifted his hand again me once in all the six years we’ve been married, not even when he came home a bit on.

He used to like me to be fond of the country, and we’d go hopping in the autumn time down there in Surrey amongst the lovely hills, where the place is all sandy; and there’s the big fir woods where you go walking between the tall, straight trunks, with the sweet scent meeting you at every step, as you walk over a thick bed of spines. Then out again, where the heath is all purple, and the whortleberries grow; while every hedge is loaded with the great ripe blackberries – miles and miles away from the smoke, but we never thought of the distance till we were going home. Ah! it was enough to make one grudge the people as had money, allus out there in the clear, bright air; and yet I don’t know as they was happier than we when we made our bit o’ fire under a sandy bank, and sat there and had our bit of bread and cheese or a drop o’ tea.

Hopping used to set us up well for some time; and how I used to love it! but the worst of it was when we went back again into the court – so dull and dark, when somehow or other, it allus seemed to come in wet and miserable when we went back home, though the old woman was allus glad to see us, and did all she could to cheer us up; for she never goes out because of her rheumatics. But it was of no use to be low, and we soon settled

down again.

All sorts we had in our place: finches, and canaries, and larks, and squirrels sometimes. In the spring-time we used to put pairs of canaries in a big cage, and give 'em stuff to build their pretty little nests; and there was one pair one year as I used to watch, and seem to pity so, for there was the nest and the beautiful eggs, and the little soft, downy, yellow-breasted thing sitting week after week, and no little ones came; and then again and again the same. And I couldn't help it, you know; but it allus hurt me, and made me have a good cry; for it made me think of three times when, after begging very hard, 'Arry's mother had let me see a tiny, soft little babe, so delicate and beautiful, with its little hands and lovely pink nails; so pale, and still; there were the little blue veins in the white forehead, and the dimples in the cheeks, while the head was covered with soft golden hair; and the eyes – ah! the eyes were allus the same, closed – closed, and they never looked in mine; while when I put my cheek up against it 'twas allus the same too – cold, cold, cold. Three times; and I shall never have two little lips say “Mother” to me.

'Arry used to say it was just as well, for poor people like us was best without 'em; but it did seem so hard for the little, tiny, soft things never to look upon the daylight, though it was only in a garret up a court.

He'll be out in another month, 'Arry will, and we've kep' all together as well as we could. You see, I've done a great deal in creases of a morning, for they allus sells somehow; then, too, I've

had a turn at flowers, for people will allus buy them too; young chaps to stick in their button-holes, and gals going to work to put in a jug of water, so as to get the sweet scent of the pretty bright things, that it seems almost as cruel to bring into the City as it does birds. Moss roses, and pinks, and carnations sells best, and I don't know who loves 'em most, your work-gal from the country or the poor London-bred one. At times I've had a fruit-basket, and done pretty well that way; for, you see, I've been a bit lucky; and allus had a bit more than we wanted to keep us; though more'n once I thought we must sell the things outter the room.

Poor boy! he'll be surprised when he comes out, for it was along of hard times that he got his six months. He'd been down on his luck for some weeks, and, though he tried hard, things went again him. I tried to cheer him up, but he got a bit wild and savage, and there's allus plenty to get a chap like him to join in a plant – robbery, you know, sir; and what with not havin' enough to eat, and the drink they give him, he got worse and worse; and not being used to it, the other fellows got off, and poor 'Arry was taken.

He wouldn't peach, bless you; though some of his mates in the job was afraid, and got outter the way. One way and another we got money enough to get him a lawyer, and his case came on; and while I was a-sitting there, trying to keep all the trouble down, I heard the magistrate talk to him, and give him six months' hard labour, poor lad, when he'd only done it to get food.

He saw me there, and give me a good long look, trying to smile

all the time; but I know'd that bright look in his eyes, and the working at the corners of his mouth, and what he was feeling; but I never flinched a bit, but met his look true and steady, for I knew he wanted all the comfort I could give him.

I couldn't get near him to touch his hand, or I would; and while I was looking hard at the spot where he stood, he was gone; and then the place seemed to be swimming round, and I felt as though I wanted to cry out, and then I came to and found myself sitting on the stones outside, with 'Arry's mother, and we got away as fast as we could.

Yes; up early, and round here every morning, wet or dry, for I shouldn't seem to get on well if I didn't; and long tramps I has: now it's Farringdon Market for creases; now Common Garding for flowers; or Spitalfields or the Boro' for fruit – 'cept oranges, and them we gets o' the Jews; and you may say what you like, but I never finds them worse to deal with than some as calls themselves Christians.

Then it's off with your load, and get rid of it as fast as you can; for its heavy carrying miles after miles through the long streets; and it's a-many faces you look into before there's one to buy. And last of all, when I get back I can sit and think about 'Arry, and how pleased he'll be to find as the nets, and cages, and calls, ain't none of 'em sold. Yes, you can't help thinking about him, for outside the window there's the pigeon trap as he was a-making with laths and nails; inside there's his birds, and the one he was trying to stuff; for he says that's a good living for a chap,

if he's at all clever; and he used to think that after seeing so many birds alive he could do it right off. So at odd times he used to practise; and there was his scissors and wires, and tow, and files and nippers, and two or three little finches he'd done, perched up on sprigs of wood, with their feathers wound over and over with cotton, and pins stuck in 'em to keep the wings in their places.

But he allus was clever, was 'Arry; and if he'd had a chance, would have got on.

When the sun's a-going down I gets to the open window, if I'm home time enough; and while the birds are all twittering about me, I get looking right out far away over roofs and chimneys – right out towards where there's the beautiful country, and then I even seem to see it all bright and clear: trees waving, and grass golden green; and through the noise and roar of the streets I seem to hear the cows lowing as they go slowly through the meadows, and the tinkle of the sheep-bell; while all the clouds are golden, orange, and red. Then, too, the bright stars seem to come peeping out one at a time; and the sky pales, while there's a soft mist over the brook, and a sweet, cool, freshness after the hot, close, burning day; now, from where I seem to be on a hill-side, there can be seen a bright light here and there from the cottages, and then about me the bats go darting and fluttering silently along; there's the beautiful white ghost-moths flitting about the bushes, and flapping along, high up, a great owl; and, again, round and round, and hawking about along the wood-side, there's a large night-jar after the moths; for 'Arry taught me all their names.

And at last, in the deep silence, tears seem to come up in my eyes, as I hear the beautiful gushing song of the nightingales, answering one another from grove to grove – pure, bright, and sparkling song that goes through one, and sends one's thoughts far away from the present.

And those tears coming into one's eyes seem to shut out all the bright scene, and it goes again; and though there's the twinkling stars overhead, and the birds nestling around me, yet, instead of the peace and silence, there's the roar of the court and the streets, the chimneys and tiles all round, the light shining up from the gas, and I know I'm only in the Dials; but it's sweet to fancy it all, and get away from the life about you for a few minutes; and when 'Arry's mother sees me like that, she never disturbs me to complain of her aches and pains.

No; never in the country since my boy was taken; but the bright days are coming soon.

Chapter Five.

A Rogue in Grain

“Oh, no; ain’t nothing like such tools as I’ve been used to,” he says. “At my last shop everything was first class, and the place beautifully fitted-up – gas on, new benches, fine joiners’ chest o’ tools, full of beading and moulding planes, and stocks, and bits, and everything first class.”

“Well,” says the gov’nor, “I don’t want to be unreasonable: anything really necessary for the job you shall have; but of course I can’t help my workshop not being equal to your last; but I ’spose it won’t make much difference if you get your wages reg’lar?”

“Oh, no;” he says; it didn’t matter to him; he could work with any tools, he could; ony he did like to see things a bit to rights, and so on to that tune; and then my gentleman gets to work.

“Pity you didn’t stop where you was so jolly well off,” I thinks to myself; and then I goes on whistling, and priming some shutters as the gov’nor had made for a new shop front as he had to put in. You see, ’tain’t many years since our gov’nor was ony a working man like me, ony he managed to scrape a few pounds together, and then very pluckily started for hisself out in one of the new outskirts, where there was a deal of new building going on by the big London contractors, and a deal of altering and patching, which used to be done by the little jobbing men same

as our gov'nor. Often and often he's talked to me about it when working aside me pleasant and sociable as could be; how at times he'd be all of a shake and tremble for fear of going wrong, not knowing how to pay his man or two on Saturday, and obliged to be civil as could be to them, for fear they'd go off and leave him in the lurch over some job or other. Then people didn't pay up, and he'd have to wait; and then there was the ironmonger and the timber merchant wouldn't give him credit, being only a small beginner; and one way and another he led such a life of it for the first three years as made him wish again and again as he'd been content to be journeyman and stopped on the reg'lar. But there; he warn't meant for a journeyman, he was too good a scholar, and had too much in his brains, and, besides, had got such a stock of that "will do it" in his head as made him get on. He knowed well enough that you can't drive a nail up to the head at one blow, or cover a piece of flatting with one touch of the brush; and so he acted accordingly, tapping gently at first till he'd got his nail a little way in, and then letting go at it till it was chock up to the head, reg'lar fixture; and so on, nail after nail, till he got his house up firm and strong. He didn't turn master for the sake of walking about with his hands in his pockets; for, as he said to me often, "In my small way, Sam," he says, "master's a harder job than journeyman's." And so it was; for, come tea-time and the men knocked off, I've seen him keep on hard at it, hour after hour, right up to twelve o'clock; while the chaps as left the shop would wink at one another, for some men ain't got any respect for

a hard-toiling master: they'll a deal sooner slave for some foul-mouthed bully who gives them no peace of their lives.

Sometimes, when he's been hard pushed with a job, I've known him ask 'em to stay and work a bit of overtime, same as he did my gentleman as had been at such fine shops; but "Oh, no," he says, "couldn't do it, thanky," and away he goes.

Well, now, that ain't the sort of thing, you know; for one good turn deserves another; and my gentleman wouldn't have much liked it if he'd been refused a day when he wanted it. But, there, he was a poor sort; and one of those fellows as must have everything exact to pattern, and can't be put out in the least – chaps what runs in one groove all their lifetime and can't do anything out of it; and then, when they're outer work, why, they're like so many big babies and quite as helpless. But he didn't stay long; he was too fine, and talked too much. The guv'nor soon saw through him, and paid him off; and, according to my experience in such things, those men as have so much to say, and are so very particular to let the guv'nor know how particular they are not to waste a bit of time, generally turn out the most given to miking – skulking, you know.

I ain't much of a workman, you know; being only a sort of odd man on the place, doing anything – painting or what not; but me and the guv'nor gets on well together, for I make a point of helping him when he's hard pushed; and I will say that of him, he's always been as liberal after as a man could be. Say a job's wanted quick, what's the good of niggling about one's hours

exactly, and running off for fear of doing a stroke too much. Go at it, I says, and work with the master as if you take an interest in the job and feel a bit of pride in it. Why, bless your heart, 'tain't only the three or six-and-thirty shillings a week a man ought to work for, but the sense of doing things well, so as he can stand up aside his fellow-man, and look at his work and say, "I did that, and I ain't ashamed of it." Why, I've known fellows that bowky about their jobs that they wouldn't own to 'em afterwards. Sashes all knock-kneed, panelling out of the square, or painters with their paint all blistering and peeling off. No; 'tain't only for the week's wage a man ought to work, but for a sense of duty, and so on,

Guv'nor and me gets on very well together, for I was with him in his worst times, when he used to work in his shirt-sleeves aside me; and many's the time I've gone into little contract jobs with him, to calculate the expense, when from being over-anxious to get work he'd take the jobs a deal too low, and so I used to tell him. But we always got on together, and I'll tell you how it was I got along with him.

I always could carpenter a bit, but most of my time's been spent as a painter – 'prenticed to it, you know, and spent seven years with a drunken master to learn 'most nothing, 'cept what I picked up myself. Well, I couldn't get a job in town, so I was on the look-out round the outside, when I came to our guv'nor's place, where he was at work with two men, and him doing about as much as both of 'em. No use to try on for carpentering, I

thinks, so I sets up the painting sign and goes in.

“Well,” says the gov’nor, “I can give you a job if you can grain.”

Now that was a rum ’un, for I was only a plain painter, and no grainer; but after three weeks’ hard lines, wife and family at home, and work awful, it did seem tantalising to a willing man to have a week’s wages shown him if he could only do one particular thing. Of course I had dodged it a bit before, but I wasn’t a grainer, and I knowed it well enough; but I thinks to myself, “Well, this is outside London, where people ain’t so very artis-like in their ideas, and perhaps I can manage it – so here goes. I can but try, and if I misses, why, it ain’t a hanging matter.” So I says, “Well; I wouldn’t undertake none of your superfine walnuts, and bird’s-eye maples, and marbles; but if it’s a bit of plain oak I’m your man.”

“Well,” he says, “that’ll do; it’s only plain oak; and, if you like, you can begin priming and going on at once. There’s paints and brushes, but you must find your own graining tools.”

At it I goes like a savage, and then I found as there was a week’s work for me before I need touch the graining; for there was priming, and first and second coats; and so I went on, but thinking precious hard about the bit of graining I should have to do. “Nothing venture, nothing gain,” I says; and that night I was hard at it after work – ah! and right up to four o’clock in the morning – trying to put a bit of oak grain on to a piece of smooth deal. I’d got a brush or two, and some colour, and a

couple of them comb-like things we uses; and there I was, with the missus trying to keep her eyes open and pretending to sew, while I painted and streaked, and then smudged it about with a bit of rag; and I'm blest if I didn't put some grain on that piece of wood as would have made Mother Nature stare – knots, and twists, and coarse grain, and shadings as I could have laughed at if I hadn't been so anxious. You see, the nuisance of it was, it looked so easy when another man did it: touches over with his colour, streaks it down with his comb, and then with a rag gives a smudge here and there, and all so lightly, and there it is done. But I couldn't, though I tried till the missus nodded, so I was obliged to send her to bed for fear she'd set her cap afire; and then I goes to the pump and has a reg'lar good sloosh, and touches my face over with the cold water, when after a good rub I goes at it again quite fresh.

I can't think now how many times I rubbed the paint off with the dirty rag, but a good many I know, and the clock had gone three when I was still at it, with every try seeming to be worse than the last; but still I kept on till I seemed to hear it strike four in a muffled sort of way, and then the next thing I heard was the wife calling me, for it was five o'clock, and I had a long way to walk to get to my work.

As soon as I could get my head off the table, and pull myself together, the first thing I did was to look at my graining; and some how or other it didn't look so very much amiss; but still it warn't anything like what it ought to be, as I knowed well enough.

All that day I was thinking it over, and best part of that dinner-hour I stopped in the shop trying it on again.

Just as I was going to smudge a piece over, and finish my bit of bread and meat, not feeling at all satisfied, I gives a jump, for some one behind me says, —

“Very neat, indeed. Bit of old oak, I suppose. You’d better do them shutters that style of grain.”

Well, do you know, if I didn’t look at the guv’nor — for him it was — to see whether he warn’t a joking me; but, bless you, no; he was as serious as a judge: so feeling all the while like a great humbug, as I was, I says, “Werry well, sir,” finished my dinner, and then got to work again.

It turned out as I expected, just a whole week before I had to begin graining; and what with about an hour a day, and four more every night, I got on pretty well, especially after giving a chap two pots of ale to put me up to a wrinkle or two; and now I sometimes pass by that very bit of graining, and though of course I could do it a deal better now, I don’t feel so very much ashamed of it.

But along of my guv’nor. What a fight that man did have surely; and how well I used to know when he was running short on Saturdays: he’d look ten years older those times; and over and over again I’ve felt ashamed to take the money; but one couldn’t do without it, you know, on account of the little ones and wife. Last of all, though, we got to understand one another — the guv’nor and me; and this was how it was: he’d been worse nor usual, and was terribly hard-up, for he’d been buying wood

and paying for it; for though he could have plenty of credit now as he don't want it, in those days not a bit of stuff could he get without putting the money down. Well, having next to no capital, this bothered him terribly; and after paying two men on Saturday, I felt pretty sure as he was run close, and stood hanging about in the shop, not knowing whether to go in to the house or be off home; and at last I did go home and told the wife about it, and she said we could hold out two or three weeks very well, if I thought the gov'nor would pay by-and-by. But I soon settled that, for I knew my man, and so I set down quietly to my tea, and was sticking a bit of bread-and-butter in one little open beak and a bit in another, when there comes a knock at the door, and I turned red all over, for I felt it was the gov'nor; and so it was, and he'd brought my wages, when, as he stood in my bit of a kitchen holding out the three-and-thirty shillings, I couldn't for the life of me help looking at where his watch-chain hung, and it warn't there.

I meant to do it neatly, and without hurting his feelings, for him and his wife had been very kind to us when we had the sickness in the house; but, you see, it warn't a bit of graining, and I regularly muffed the job when I told him to let it stand for two or three weeks, as we could do till then. Next moment he had hold of my hand, shaking it heartily, and then next after that he broke down in a humbled, mortified sort of a way; and when the wife hurried the children up the staircase, out of sight, poor chap! he sat down, laid his head on his hand, and groaned.

“Cheer up,” I says, “it’ll be all right soon.”

“Right! yes,” he says, jumping up. “But it ain’t that,” he says; “it’s meeting a friend where I didn’t expect one;” and then he was gone.

I was sitting at breakfast next morning (Sunday) when the garden gate rattles, and there was the guv’nor coming in such a hurry. Never stops to knock, but in he comes and shakes hands hearty; and then, without speaking, stuffs a letter into my hand. “Head it,” he says, “last post, last night,” and I did; but what I took most notice of was a long strip of paper with “197 pounds 10 shillings 6 pence” written on it, just under the name of one of the London bankers.

Yes, we had a pleasant dinner, a comfortable cup of tea, and a cosy supper with the guv’nor that day; and uncommon good friends we’ve been ever since. I do all sorts at the shop, so that there’s always a job, and though people say “Jack of all trades – master of none,” I think a man might follow French suit and know two trades and master them both, so as when work falls one way he has a chance the other. Poor folks often get hunted by the wolf Poverty, and it would not be amiss to take a lesson from the burrowing animals, and have two holes – to get out of one when t’other happened to be stopped.

Chapter Six.

A Cabman's Story

“Hope I see you well, sir. Thanky, sir, I ain't had such a cigar since as you give me that day. You'll often find me on this stand, sir, and happy to drive yer at any time, either on the box or inside. But I say, you know, sir, how about putting a feller in print? Fine game some of our chaps made on it, because they said as they knew it all by heart. You see I don't like to wherit people with my old stories; but when I can get any one to listen I du like to talk a bit. You can't form no idea of the things as we hears and sees; and I believe it would do any man good to drive a keb for a twelvemonth; it's both wonderful what you'd pick up, and how you'd git picked up. Here's your poets writing about green banks and flowers, and shepherds and shepherdesses, and love and stuff; why I've had no end of love-making in my keb here. Young ladies and young swells, whose pars and mars ain't agreeable like, makes assignations and hires a keb by the hour, to be drove up and down, and the driver often looking as innocent as you please. I don't dislike them sorter jobs, for you see, when he says 'How much, kebbey?' one can lay it on a bit, for he won't look shabby by disputing the fare before the young lady. But, Lor' bless you, they'd pay anything just at them times, for money seems no object – everythink's sweet, and when it rains I think

they fancies as it's all sugar and water.

“There was one old chap as I drove regular; he used to come to my stand twice a week, and after the first time I always knew what to do. Ah! he was a fine old chap, and had been a orficer or somethin' of that sort. Big mustarsh, yer know, and whiskers white as snow, and a hye! Ah, his was a hye, his were! Talk about tellin' soldiers to charge! why, they couldn't do no other with him a lookin' at 'em; though if he hadn't been a good sort I don't think as I could have done much in charging my fashion, you know. It was a pleasure to see him walk – as upright as his old gold-headed cane. Seven bob a week he was to me reg'lar, and I used to look out for his old white head a-coming round the corner about three o'clock in the arternoon, and then I used to drive him right off to Kensal-green Cemetery, where he'd get down, and I always waited for him half an hour, when out he'd come, looking as fierce and stiff as ever, get into the keb, 'Home,' he'd say, giving his stick a bit of a flourish, just as if it were a sword; and home it was.

“About the seccun time we went, I walks permiscus up to the gatekeeper – stiff-looking chap, too, with only one eye, and a touch o' the k'mishionaire about him, only he hadn't got no empty sleeve hanging to his button and didn't wear no mustarchers; but all the same, I sets him down as having handled the musket some time, and so he had. Well, I walks up to him slowly and 'spectfully, showin' him all the time as I know'd as I was only a keberman, and had learned to order myself lowly and reverently to

all my betters, you know; and this iled him a bit, so as he went easy, and we got into conversation. I draws him on by degrees; for these gatekeepers is werry great swells in their way, as any one may see for hisself by getting a haporth o' curds and whey at one of the parks, and studying the infloence of a gold band round a man's hat. 'Taint everybody as notices it, but it's wonderful how that ere yaller metal stiffens a feller's neck. Look at flunkeys, for instance – decent chaps enough, some on 'em, till they gets a bit o' lace on their hats, and then they're as proud on it as a fresh-moulted cockatoo. Never wore no lace on my hat; but shouldn't mind wearing a little more nap.

“Let's see where had I got to? Ah, I know. Most extinguished myself with them gold-band hats. You see, I was a saying as them gatekeepers is big swells, and wants careful handling. They're the sort of chaps that wun would like to buy at wun's own wallyation and sell at theirs. Payin' spec that to anybody; only I'm 'fraid as the market would soon get choked. Well, fust thing I does is to fall werry much in love with the flowers in his windy, and quite 'spectfully arsts the name of 'em; when, bein' a bit of a gardener, he comes out with some thunderin' great furrin word, as I knows jolly well he didn't know the meanin' on; and I says, 'Oh!' as if I was werry much obliged, and takes hold o' one werry gently, and has a smell, and then thinks a great deal o' the size of the blossoms, and so on; till, as if it was takin' a great liberty, I arsts if he couldn't cut me just one. Jest what he wanted, yer know; and making a terrible fuss over it, and explaining the wally of

the plant, he snips me off a bit, and I sticks it in my button-hole, while he looked as pleased as some o' those old buffers in white weskets as puts shillings in plates when there's a k'lection, and then thinks as they've been patrons: for some folks do love to be arskt favours, and then comes the grandee as they grants 'em.

“So then I goes on a fishin' and a fishin', and calls him 'sir,' and arsts his opinion of Common Garden, and so on, till at last I hooks him, and —

“Coo-o-ome orn! What are yer up to, Nosey? Never was such a 'oss as you for lookin' arter the main chance. That wasn't a sixpence, stoopid, and if it was I'd a got off and picked it up without yer going down on yer knees. Never was such a 'oss as this here, sir. He's a Paddy — come out of a Roman Catholic country, yer know; and blest if he ain't allus a tryin' to go down on his knees. Fancies every crossin'-sweeper he sees is a holy father, and wants to confess, I suppose. It's a natteral weakness of his, and it's taken all the hair off his knees. I paints 'em up a bit so as to hide the worst of it, but he's allus a tryin' it on. Get along, do.

“Well, I hooks him, you know — the gatekeeper, I means — and arter playin' him a bit he was as civil as you please; gets down off his stilts, and was ready to tell me anything. So then I gets to know as my gentleman was an old colonel as had buried a daughter there two months afore, and had allus come twice a week ever since to have a look at the place. 'An', says Mr Crusp — that was the gatekeeper's name — 'an', as you may find out yourself if you go, I've got geranums an' stocks, an' werbenas, quite a show on

'em, for the old gentleman said he should like to see some flowers there.' And just then out comes the old orficer, and I drives off.

“Well, sir, things goes on like this here for a matter o’ months, and —

“Just look at that, now. Coome orn, stoopid. Blest if ever there was sich a ’oss. It’s pounds outer my pocket; but the guv’nor don’t care, bless yer, as long as I take in my reg’lar dose every day. Jest look at that, now; pulling up short right in the middle of the road, cos them Jarmans was blowin’ up a row. Likes music, I spose; so do I, when I can get it good, and so does everybody, it seems to me. I was a talking to a gentleman only t’other day, jest as I may be to you, and he says, says he, ‘It’s my opinion that if you give the working classes good music, joined to good words, they wouldn’t notice them rubbishing music-hall things, as only goes down because they’re tacked on to a pretty tune.’ And he’s right, yer know, and he’s a man as has done a good deal towards improving the working people. Why, only see if a pretty tune comes up if it isn’t whistled and sung all over the town – ah, and the country too – in no time; and what’s more, it ain’t forgotten neither. Yer see, to like yer fine books and poetry a man wants eddication; but it comes nateral to him to love a pretty tune. I ain’t up to much, yer know, but I can’t stand the rubbish as folks goes and wags their heads to – and what for? only because they can’t get anything better. Who says common folks don’t love music! Just take ’em and show ’em the crowds arter the soldiers’ and volunteer bands, and in the parks, and then, perhaps, they’ll alter

their tune; and – look at that, now, if I ain't gone right away from the story. Shouldn't do for a speaker, I shouldn't, for it seems to me as I'm like my old 'oss, Nosey – allus wants to turn down the fust turning as comes. There he goes. Co-o-me orn.

“Well, things goes on for a matter o' months, and twist a week I pockets my three-and-six; but I keeps thinking as it couldn't last much longer. ‘So the old gentleman got tired,’ says you. Right you are! He did get tired at last, but not as you might think. He allus came same time, and stopped same time, and then I drove him back to his own door. Summer went by. The gals had cried the lavendy up and down the streets, and the swells had all gone outer town to the sea-side and the furrin waterin' places; and for long enough, whenever a decent job had come, it had been luggage on the roof, and a bundle of sticks and umbrellys inside, and then off to some railway station or another. Kensington Gardings was a rainin' yaller leaves all day long, while the robins was tunin' up their melancholy little pipes, just as if there was no one else left to sing, and they was werry miserable becos the cold weather was a-comin'; while there was no sing left in me, for my asthmy was a beginning to tickle me up a bit, as it allus does in autumn time; but still my old gentleman comes as reg'lar as clockwork.

“One afternoon, as I was sitting on my box, rather cold and chilly, for the fog was a-comin' creepin' on earlier nor usual, I was amusin' myself a pickin' ov a few walnuts – eight a penny, you know, without the port wine and salt. It was a dull sort of time, when you could hear the muffin bell a-going down the side

streets; and the fires shining through the window-blinds looked warm and cosy. I was a pickin' and growlin' away at my nuts – for they didn't skin easy, besides being werry dry, when who should I see a-comin' but my reg'lar fare. Up he comes along the street, straight and stiff as a drill-sergeant, and though half a dozen whips runs up touting for the job, he never takes no notice of 'em, and I draws up to the kerb, jumps down to let him in, and opens the door, when he stops with one leg in the keb.

“Yer see, this wasn't a reg'lar thing, for arter the first time I allus knew what he wanted, and we understood one another, so that it was all done this way: jump in – set down – take up agin – set down agin – pay up – touch yer 'at – jump on the box – and nary word spoken. Sooted him, yer know; and it sooted me; so what more did you want? But now on this day it was diffurrt, for, as I said afore, he stops with one leg in the keb, and begins to speak, quite pleasant, and quiet, and civil, as a gentleman could speak, and he says, ‘Kebman, I thank you for your attention. Here's a suffrin for you. Drive on.’

“In course, I thanked him; but he didn't seem to want to be talked to, and I drives on, thinking it was a rum start paying aforehand. Not as I'd got anything to grumble about, for a suffrin warn't to be sneezed at, as the sayin' is. So I drives up to the cemetery gates; sets him down; puts the nose-bag on the mare I drove then; an' lights my pipe.

“One pipe allus used to do for me while he went in and came out; so I used to smoke it, and then put it away. But this time he

didn't come back so soon as usual, or else, being a bit outer sorts in stummick and pocket, I'd smoked faster; so I pulls it out and lights up agen, and a good deal o' bother I had, I remember, for the matches was damp, and there was I a-rubbin' one arter the other again the pipe bowl for long enough, inside my hat.

“Well, I finished that pipe, and then another, for it seemed to me as he was having a long stay on the strength of the suffrin. ‘And welcome,’ I says; for, of course, being a good sort, I wasn't going to grudge him an hour. But it got to be more than an hour, and dusky, and foggy, and damp; and that blessed rheumatic shoulder o' mine began a-going it orful. It was just for all the world as though some one had made a hole right through the blade-bone, and then, shovin' a piece of clothes-line through, was a sawin' of it backards and furards. Then it began to rain a little – mizzly, yer know – and the mare havin' tossed her old nose-bag about till she couldn't get not anuther taste o' chaff, let alone a hoat or a bean, stands hanging all together like, same as those fiery steeds as they used to send up under a balloon, Cremorne way, years ago, and lookin' for all the world like a hannimal cut out for the knackers.

“Last of all out comes Mr Crusp, all hot tea and buttered toast, shining beautiful, and looking as though he'd been going on to the tune o' four cups and three rounds. Then he begins to fasten up; and ‘Ulloa!’ says he, ‘what are you a-waitin' for?’ ‘Colonel,’ says I. ‘Out long ago,’ says he. ‘No,’ says I; ‘he's been in more'n two hours.’ Well, he looks gallus hard at me, and then he says,

'He must ha' gone out without you seein' of him. He's give you the slip.' 'Then he must ha' come away inside that there black omblibus with plumes on it, then,' I says, for I knowed as I must ha' seen him if he had come out; and then I tells him about the suffrin.

"'Why didn't you say that afore,' says Crusp. 'You see if he ain't been and committed hisself, or fell a wictim to his sorrow.' And then he turns short round, and goes puffin' along one o' the side walks; while, knowin' as my old mare wouldn't run away to save her life, I follered.

"'First we goes down a long gravel path where the 'santhemums was a hanging their heads, and seeming as if they was a crying; but then all the trees I could see in the dim light was covered with tears. Then Crusp leads off across a flower garding like, all covered with graves and stones; and somehow, stumbling along in a big old box coat, I manages to fall right over one of 'em; but when I pulled myself together agen, and gets up to the gatekeeper, I finds him standing aside my reg'lar fare, who was lying down there in the wet grass with his cheek agin a grave, and one arm stretched right over it: while in t'other was a long lock of dark hair. His hat had rolled off, and his own long white hair lay loose among the dead flowers and damp grass; and turning all of a tremble, I stoops down beside him, and Crusp whispers, so quiet and solemn, 'He's gone to her!'

"'For a moment or two I couldn't believe it, for there in the dusk it seemed as though he was only crying over the restin'-

place of his poor child. I didn't like to speak, for it all seemed so strange and solemn: there was the 'drip – drip – drip' from the trees, and now and then a sad mournful sort of sigh as the wind swept by; and I don't know how it was, but sad times seemed to come up again and take hold of a fellow's heart; so that dim as it all was before, it turned worse, till one could hardly see at all, and though the rain came slowly down, it seemed right and natural to take off one's hat; and we both did, and then stole away on tiptoe to fetch more help.

“That allus comes back in the autumn time, when the leaves are falling, and the rain drips slowly down; and then, feeling quite melancholy-like, I can see again as plain as can be that fine old man restin' his head upon the grave, with his silver hair all spread out upon the grass, and him taking his rest from his troubles.

“Here we are, sir, – ’Tannic Gardings; and, if it's all the same to you, I'll just give that old 'oss a feed and a rub down, while you and the ladies look through the green'ouses. Eases his jints a bit, yer see, and they runs werry stiff sometimes.”

Chapter Seven.

J. Weltus

Reformations, and improvements, and setrer, are all very well; but, mind yer, if your drink's been four ale all your life you won't take kindly to porter, "threepence a pot in your own jugs," if some one tells you all at once as it's better for you, and your ale's pison. Rome warn't built in a day, you know, and arter sitting for five-and-twenty year on my bench and using the lapstone and sterrup-leather, you ain't a-going to make me take nat'rally to a hupright bench.

Here I am, yer see; allus at home – airy spot; good light, and never no sun; pleasant prospect o' four foot in front, none to the right, and chock down into Fleet-street on the left. What more would you have? Every convenience for carrying on a large and lucrative trade without moving from yer seat. Here's one's stool, and, altogether, close to one's hand, everything as a artis' in leather work could want. Now see here: paste? there you are; stuffin'? there you are; tub for soakin'? there you are; and so on with every think – whether it's lapstone, foot, hemp, ball, wax, bristles, dubbin, grease, or ink. There's one's knives and stone all in a row; there's one's divisions with all one's nails and pegs – brass, iron, and wood; there's one's hammers; and – there, what more would you have for soleing and heeling a boot or a

shoe right off without leaving yer seat? And all done in a regular business way, yer know; none o' yer new-fangled rivet and clinch and sewing-machine rubbish; but straightforward laid-in stitches, put in with a sharp awl and a fine pair of ends, laid into and drawn tight with plenty of elbow grease, and the sole stoned and hammered as solid as a board, and more too.

Rivets indeed! Why, how can a boot be decent as is nailed together just as a chip would make a box? 'Tain't natural, no more nor gutta-percha was, nor india-rubber was. Course I had to take to gutta-percha soles, as it was the fashun, else yer lose yer trade; but there you were, sticking the things on with a lot o' grease tar stuff, and then as soon as they got warm, off they comes again, and serve 'em right too for not being sewed, and then touched round the wearing Darts with a few rows o' sprigs neatly put in, or a facing o' sparrables.

And here's yer everlasting soles and yer machinery and clat! Don't tell me: why, they can't answer any more than indy-rubber goloshes can, as raises your corns, an' draws yer feet, an' makes a man miserable, as of course every one is as ain't got a decent shoe to his foot. It's all very fine having yer new fangles, and one introdoosing cork, and another iron, and another copper and copper toes. You may have yer grand warerusses over Southwark way; but my 'pinion is as it must come down to us at last, as only stands to reason.

Now here you are; you've bought yer pair o' ready-mades and worn 'em a bit, and then where are you? why, a-looking out for

“J. Weltus, shoemaker, repairs neatly executed” – as it says on the board over the stall, as cost me a soleing and heeling for a painter chap outer work as did it for me, and put no dryers in his colour, so as the boys give it that pitted-with-the-small-pox look by aimin’ at it with their popguns. Well, you looks for J. Weltus, and finds him sittin’ in his stall in the court, and shows him what’s up, and very naterally he laughs at yer, as he does at all as runs away from your fine old conservative wax-end and leather, for your improved, reform, upright bench, and machine-made understandings.

But J. Weltus takes pity on you, and soon has yer boots in hand; and, as the swell says, he “analyses” ’em. And then where are yer? Here’s your sole good for nought – the welt gone, heel sunk, and a whole regiment of pegs sticking up inside fit to rasp every bit o’ skin off yer foot.

Well, of course he grins; but you wants ’em to-morrow? Werry good; and he grins again to find that with all yer machine-making and sewing, yer obliged to come back to the old mender after all; so he takes off his glasses, gets Kidney Joe to cast a hie on his stall, and runs round to the grindery shop in Drury Lane, and comes back in ten minutes with a few real Archangel bristles, a ball of hemp, a set of first-class leather, some stuffin’; and of course, just as if to insult him, the counter’s chock full o’ ready-closed uppers, with all sorts o’ jigamaree, fiddle-faddle stitching about ’em, as ain’t no good only to let the water in. Then off he sets again – only he has to go back for his wax, which is, as one

may say, the mainspring of a boot – the mortar of the edifice, as holds all together and as it should be.

Nex' day you comes for the boots, and there they are. Well, they ain't done; but J.W.'s a-ripping into 'em. One's been touched over with a bit o' glass, as has smoothed the new half-sole wonderful, and another's being sprigged; then the edges'll be waxed up a bit with the dubbin', and then there's yer boots – a tighter and a better pair than they was afore, and all for three shillings, or three-and-six, according to your customer.

I never puts any toe-pieces on, punched full o' holes to make 'em look 'ansum; but does my work in the good old style, and if I was in Parliament every man as didn't wear Wellingtons should be taxed.

But along o' them cards in the winders. Well, a chap come to me one day, and wanted me to be agent, and I stares up at him at first to see as he wasn't joking, "Loans of from 5 pounds to 100 pounds upon personal security," says the card he showed me, just as you can see 'em in hundreds o' back courts and slums – places where you may be sure people wants heaps o' money.

"Do a wonderful stroke o' business," I says, looking at my chap. "Find plenty o' customers down here; but p'raps they might object to the smell o' the leather, and so keep away."

"Bless yer, no," says the chap – "not at all. Many of our agents is marine-store dealers and groshers. Good commission for you if you like to take it."

But I wouldn't; and there hung the card in the little red herring

and sweet shop till last week, when they had to turn out because the place is all coming down to make way for the new law courts, and setrer.

Do! of course it's a do; same as those 'wertisements in the papers is from distressed tradesmen who'll give five pound for the loan of ten for a week, and deposit fifty pounds wally of stuff for security – pawn tickets, yer know – cards got from folks' uncle when they've been on a wisit – “Frock-coat and satin wesket, fifteen and nine, John Smith, 999, Snooks-street” – and all on to that tune. Traps – traps – traps, every one on 'em, as the poor fellows know as has had any dealings with the moneylenders.

Now, just look here; about the only honest one there is, is your uncle. Fixed interest, certain time, and he wants security. Saturday night and a hard week, and rent due, and the chap as the boots was made for not come to fetch 'em; the pair as was mended not paid for – and all the stuff required cost money, you see – so off you goes to your uncle with two flat irons and the missus's ring. Then you does your bit of negotiation, and the job's done; and out you come from the little court where the door flaps to, and all's right and square, and no odds to nobody; but just try same as Jinks did to get a loan from the Cosmopolitan and Jint-Stock Adwance and Discount Company, and see how you like it. So many stamps for application; so much for inquiry fee; so much for this, and so much for that, and so on.

Jinks comes in, as maybe you, and he says, “I shall be wantin' a pair o' boots nex' week,” he says, “and you may as well take the

measure now," he says; "save time when I gives the order."

"All right," I says, getting hold o' my rule and a strip o' paper.

"But I dunno yet what sort I'll have," he says. "I've a sorter leaning towards 'lasticks; but I dunno," he says, "but what I'd best stick to the old sort – laceups."

"Say the word," I says, and he said it – "Lasticks!" and I took his measure, and brought out a pen, dips in my ink-bottle, and makes marks; and all the time he was precious busy rattling some printed paper about and pretending to be reading.

"Oh, Weltus," he says all at once, just as if it struck him all at the moment, "I'm a-going to have an advance from the 'ciety."

"Are you?" I says – "inches and a harf – 'lasticks – kid tops."

"What?" he says.

"Only my measuring," I says, with the pen in my mouth.

"Oh!" he says, "jusso." And then he goes on – "Bliged to get a couple of tradesmen – 'spectable tradesmen – to sign their names to the papers – just to show, you know, as I'm some one decent. You'll be one, won't yer?"

"One what?" I says – "bondsman?"

"Oh, no," he says, "nothing o' the kind; only just sign yer name. It's me as is bound; and if anything went wrong, why, they'd come upon me, and so on, yer know. Don't yer see?"

"No!" I says, taking off my glasses, and rubbin' 'em on my leather apron – "No," I says, "I can't quite."

"Why," he says, "it's five pound as I'm going to borrow; and they lends it me on my own pussonal security; but just to show

as I'm the right sort, I get two 'spectable tradesmen to put down their names. Don't yer see? I could get plenty to do it, only I don't want every one to know. You see now, don't you?"

"No," I says, "I can't somehow."

"Why," he says, "it's all right, man," and he gives me a slap on the shoulder. "I'm going to pay it back by 'stalments, and I shall pay yer cash for them boots when I gets the money, and it'll be doing us both a good turn. There's the line – just along there – 'J. Weltus, Pull-Down Court.' Don't you be in a stew; there's nothing to be 'feard on. It's me as they'd come on, I tell you. Your signing yer name along that line is only a form, and it's me they'd sell up. Now don't you see? I shall give you the order for them boots o' Monday."

But, do you know, I'm blest if I could see it then; and though he tried a bit more, he couldn't make me see it. Long course o' roughing it in the world's made my eyes dull, yer know; and, last of all, Jinks doubles up his papers, and goes out quite huffy; while I gets ready a fresh pair of ends and goes on with a job I had in hand, when every time I pulls the threads home I gives a good hard grunt, and goes on analysing Bob Jinks, and wondering what it would all come to. "Holiday now and then's all werry well," I says, "but Rye House, 'Ampton Court, and Gravesend on Mondays won't do even if a man does make six-and-thirty bob a week. Masters don't like their hands to be allus going out, and besides, it don't look well to take a soot o' clothes out on Saturday night, and stuff 'em up the spout again on Toosdays

or Wensdays;" and arter analysing a good deal, I couldn't help finding as Bob Jinks was one of them chaps as helped pay for Mrs Shortnip's satin dress at the Rising Sun. "Hal, a pint o' beer's good," I says to myself, "and I don't object to a pipe with it; but have the work done first. That's my motter."

"Don't begin them boots till I gives yer the order," says Jinks, as he goes out.

"No," I says, "I shan't;" nor I didn't neither, for I couldn't see the Jos Miller of it, and somehow or another Jinks never come inside my place again.

I was on the look-out, though, and I suppose he did make some one see all about it, and got him to sign; for two months arter there was a snuffy-looking old foggy-eyed chap a-stopping in his lodgings, and a little while arter two o' Levy Haman's men was fetching the furnitur down, and I saw sev'ral things as must ha' been his at the broker's shop at the corner; for they do say as these loan 'cieties are precious hard on any one as gets behind with the payments, and 'll eat you outer house and home. But, bless yer, it's no 'ciety in most cases, but some precious hook-beaked knowing one as is company, directors, and sekketary all in himself and lives on the interest and sellings up of them as gets into his claws. 'Taint often as they do lend anything, but when they do they makes theirselves safe enough by getting about three names and a plugging rate of interest; and then, good luck to yer if yer don't pay up. Gettin' things on tick's all werry well, but though they call it so, 'taint no credit to nobody; and that's what

I say; and if I ain't right, my name ain't J. Weltus.

Chapter Eight.

My Fare

Don't you make a mistake, now, and think I'm not a working man, because I am. Don't you run away with the idea that because I go of a morning and find my horse and cab waiting ready cleaned for me, and I jumps up and drives off, as I don't work as hard as any mechanic, because I do; and I used to work harder, for it used to be Sunday and week days, till the missus and me laid our heads together, and said, if we couldn't live on six days' work a week at cabbing we'd try something else; so now I am only a six days' man – Hansom cab, VR, licensed to carry two persons.

None o' your poor, broken-kneed knackers for me. I takes my money in to the governor regular, and told him flat that if I couldn't have a decent horse, I wouldn't drive; and I spoke a bit sharp, having worked for him ten years.

“Take your chice, Steve Wilkins,” he says; and I took it, and drove Kangaroo, the wall-eyed horse with a rat tail.

I had a call one day off the stand by the Foundling, and has to go into New Ormond Street, close by; and I takes up an old widow lady and her daughter – as beautiful a girl of seventeen or eighteen as ever I set eyes on, but so weak that I had to go and help her down to the cab, when she thanked me so sweetly

that I couldn't help looking again and again, for it was a thing I wasn't used to.

“Drive out towards the country, cabman, the nearest way,” says the old lady; “and when we want to turn back, I'll speak.”

“Poor gal!” I says, “she's an invalid. She's just such a one as my Fan would have been if she'd lived;” and I says this to myself as I gets on to my box, feeling quite soft; for though I knew my gal wouldn't have been handsome, what did that matter? I didn't like to lose her.

“Let's see,” I says again, “she wants fresh air. We'll go up the hill, and through Hampstead;” and I touches Kangaroo on the flank, and away we goes, and I picks out all the nicest bits I could, and when I comes across a pretty bit of view I pulls up, and pretends as there's a strap wanted tightening, or a hoof picking, or a fresh knot at the end of the whip, and so on. Then I goes pretty quickly along the streety bits, and walks very slowly along the green lanes; and so we goes on for a good hour, when the old lady pushes the lid open with her parasol, and tells me to turn back.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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