

Morrison Arthur

A Child of the Jago



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Arthur Morrison

A Child of the Jago

*... Woe unto the foolish prophets, that
follow their own spirit, and have seen
nothing!..*

*Because, even because they have seduced
my people, saying, Peace; and there
was no peace; and one built up a
wall, and lo, others daubed it with
untempered mortar:*

*Say unto them which daub it with untempered
mortar, that it shall fall:
there shall be an overflowing shower;
and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall;
and a stormy wind shall rend it.*

*Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not
be said unto you, Where is the daubing
wherewith ye have daubed it? —*

Ezekiel xiii. 3... 10 12.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

I am glad to take this, the first available opportunity, to acknowledge the kindness with which *A Child of the Jago* has been received: both by the reading public, from which I have received many gratifying assurances that what I have tried to say has not altogether failed of its effect: and by the reviewers, the most of whom have written in very indulgent terms.

I think indeed, that I am the more gratified by the fact that this reception has not been unanimous: because an outcry and an opposition, even from an unimportant minority, are proofs that I have succeeded in saying, however imperfectly, something that was worth being said. Under the conditions of life as we know it there is no truth worth telling that will not interfere with some hearer's comfort. Various objections have been made to *A Child of the Jago*, and many of them had already been made to *Tales of Mean Streets*. And it has been the way of the objectors as well as the way of many among the kindest of my critics, to call me a 'realist.' The word has been used sometimes, it would seem, in praise; sometimes in mere indifference as one uses a phrase of convenient description; sometimes by way of an irremediable reproach. It is natural, then, not merely that I should wish to examine certain among the objections made to my work, but that I should feel some interest in the definition and description of a realist. A matter never made clear to me.

Now it is a fact that I have never called myself a 'realist,' and I have never put forth any work as 'realism.' I decline the labels of the schoolmen and the sophisters: being a simple writer of tales, who takes whatever means lie to his hand to present life as he sees it; who insists on no process; and who refuses to be bound by any formula or prescription prepared by the cataloguers and the pigeon-holders of literature.

So it happens that when those who use the word 'realist' use it with no unanimity of intent and with a loose, inapprehensive application, it is not easy for me, who repudiate it altogether, to make a guess at its meaning. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the man who is called a 'realist' is one who, seeing things with his own eyes, discards the conventions of the schools, and presents his matter in individual terms of art. For awhile the schoolmen abuse him as a realist; and in twenty years' time, if his work have life in it, he becomes a classic. Constable was called a realist; so was Corot. Who calls these painters realists now? The history of Japanese art affords a continuous illustration. From the day when Iwasa Matahei impudently arose and dared to take his subjects from the daily life of the people, to the day when Hiroshigé, casting away the last rag of propriety, adventurously drew a cast shadow, in flat defiance of all the canons of Tosa and Kano – in all this time, and through all the crowded history of the School of Ukiyô, no artist bringing something of his own to his art but was damned for a realist. Even the classic Harunobu did not escape. Look now at the work of these men, and the label seems grotesque enough. So it goes through the making of all art. A man with the courage of his own vision interprets what he sees in fresh terms, and gives to things a new reality and an immediate presence. The schoolmen peer with dulled eyes from amid the heap of precedents and prescriptions about them, and, distracted by seeing a thing sanctioned neither by precedent nor by prescription, dub the man realist, and rail against him for that his work fits none of their pigeon-holes. And from without the schools many cry out and complain: for truth is strong meat, and the weakling stomach turns against it, except in minim doses smothered in treacle. Thus we hear the feeble plea that the function of imagination is the distortion of fact: the piteous demand that the artist should be shut up in a flower-garden, and forbidden to peep through the hedge into the world. And they who know nothing of beauty, who are innately incapable of comprehending it, mistake it for mere prettiness, and call aloud for comfits; and among them that cannot understand, such definitions of the aims of art are bandied, as mean, if they mean anything, that art finds its most perfect expression in pink lollipops and gilt boxes. But in the end the truth prevails, if it be well set forth; and the schoolmen,

groaning in their infinite labour, wearily write another prescription, admit another precedent, and make another pigeon-hole.

I have been asked, in print, if I think that there is no phase of life which the artist may not touch. Most certainly I think this. More, I know it. It is the artist's privilege to seek his material where he pleases, and it is no man's privilege to say him nay. If the community have left horrible places and horrible lives before his eyes, then the fault is the community's; and to picture these places and these lives becomes not merely his privilege, but his duty. It was my fate to encounter a place in Shoreditch, where children were born and reared in circumstances which gave them no reasonable chance of living decent lives: where they were born fore-damned to a criminal or semi-criminal career. It was my experience to learn the ways of this place, to know its inhabitants, to talk with them, eat, drink, and work with them. For the existence of this place, and for the evils it engendered, the community was, and is, responsible; so that every member of the community was, and is, responsible in his degree. If I had been a rich man I might have attempted to discharge my peculiar responsibility in one way; if I had been a statesman I might have tried another. Being neither of these things, but a mere writer of fiction, I sought to do my duty by writing a tale wherein I hoped to bring the conditions of this place within the apprehension of others. There are those who say that I should have turned away my eyes and passed by on the other side: on the very respectable precedent of the priest and the Levite in the parable.

Now, when the tale was written and published it was found, as I have said, to cause discomfort to some persons. It is needless to say more of the schoolmen. Needless, too, to say much of the merely genteel: who were shocked to read of low creatures, as Kiddo Cook and Pigeony Poll, and to find my pages nowhere illuminated by a marquis. Of such are they who delight to read of two men in velvet and feathers perforating each other's stomachs with swords; while Josh Perrott and Billy Leary, punching each other's heads, present a scene too sickening and brutal to consider without disgust. And it was in defiance of the maunderings of such as these that Charles Lamb wrote much of his essay *On the Genius and Character of Hogarth*. But chiefly this book of mine disturbed those who had done nothing, and preferred to do nothing, by way of discharging their responsibility toward the Jago and the people in it. The consciousness of duty neglected is discomforting, and personal comfort is the god of their kind. They firmly believe it to be the sole function of art to minister to their personal comfort – as upholstery does. They find it comfortable to shirk consideration of the fate of the Jago children, to shut their eyes to it, to say that all is well and the whole world virtuous and happy. And this mental attitude they nickname optimism, and vaunt it – exult in it as a quality. So that they cry out at the suggestion that it is no more than a selfish vice; and finding truth where they had looked for the materials of another debauch of self-delusion, they moan aloud: they protest, and they demand as their sacred right that the bitter cup be taken from before them. They have moaned and protested at *A Child of the Jago*, and, craven and bewildered, any protest seemed good enough to them. And herein they have not wanted for allies among them that sit in committee-rooms, and tinker. For your professed philanthropist, following his own spirit, and seeing nothing, honestly resents the demonstration that his tinkering profits little. There is a story current in the East End of London, of a distracted lady who, being assailed with a request for the loan of a saucepan, defended herself in these words: – 'Tell yer mother I can't lend 'er the saucepan, consekince o' 'avin' lent it to Mrs Brown, besides which I'm a-usin' of it meself, an' moreover it's gone to be mended, an' what's more I ain't got one.' In a like spirit of lavish objection it has been proclaimed in a breath that I transgress: – because (1) I should not have written of the Jago in all the nakedness of truth; (2) my description is not in the least like; (3) moreover, it is exaggerated; (4) though it may be true, it is quite unnecessary, because the Jago was already quite familiar, and everybody knew all about it; (5) the Jago houses have been pulled down; and (6) there never was any such place as the Jago at all.

To objections thus handsomely variegated it is not easy to reply with the tripping brevity wherewith they may be stated; and truly it is little reply that they call for, except, perhaps, in so far as

they may be taken to impugn the sincerity of my work and the accuracy of my picture. A few of the objectors have caught up enough of their wits to strive after a war in my own country. They take hold of my technical method, and accuse me of lack of 'sympathy'; they claim that if I write of the Jago I should do so 'even weeping.' Now, my technical method is my own, and is deliberately designed to achieve a certain result, as is the method of every man – painter, poet, sculptor, or novelist – who is not the slave and the plaything of his material. My tale is the tale of my characters, and I have learned better than to thrust myself and my emotions between them and my reader. The cant of the charge stares all too plainly from the face of it. It is not that these good people wish me to write 'even weeping': for how do they know whether I weep or not? No: their wish is, not that I shall weep, but that I shall weep obscenely in the public gaze. In other words, that I shall do their weeping for them, as a sort of emotional bedesman: that I shall make public parade of sympathy in their behalf, so that they may keep their own sympathy for themselves, and win comfort from the belief that they are eased of their just responsibility by vicarious snivelling.

But the protest, that my picture of the Jago is untrue, is another thing. For the most part it has found very vague expression, but there are instances of rash excursion into definiteness. Certain passages have been denoted as exaggerations – as impossibilities. Now, I must confess that, foreseeing such adventurous indiscretions, I had, for my own diversion, set *A Child of the Jago* with traps. For certain years I have lived in the East End of London, and have been, not an occasional visitor, but a familiar and equal friend in the house of the East-Enders in all his degrees; for, though the steps between be smaller, there are more social degrees in the East End than ever in the West. In this experience I have seen and I have heard things that persons sitting in committee-rooms would call diabolical fable; nevertheless, I have seen them, and heard them. But it was none of my design to write of extreme instances: typical facts were all I wanted; these, I knew, would be met – or shirked – with incredulity; so that, whenever I saw reason to anticipate a charge of exaggeration – as for instance, in the matter of faction fighting – I made my typical incident the cold transcript of a simple fact, an ordinary, easy-going fact, a fact notorious in the neighbourhood, and capable of any amount of reasonable proof. If I touched my fact at all, it was to subdue it; that and no more. The traps worked well. Not one definite charge of exaggeration has been flung but it has been aimed at one of the normal facts I had provided as a target: not one. Sometimes the effect has had a humour of its own; as when a critic in a literary journal, beginning by selecting two of my norms as instances of 'palpable exaggeration,' went on to assure me that there was no need to describe such life as the life in the Jago, because it was already perfectly familiar to everybody.

Luckily I need not vindicate my accuracy. That has been done for me publicly by independent and altogether indisputable authority. In particular, the devoted vicar of the parish, which I have called the Jago, has testified quite unreservedly to the truth of my presentation. Others also, with special knowledge, have done the same; and though I refer to them, and am grateful for their support, it is with no prejudice to the validity of my own authority. For not only have I lived in the East End of London (which one may do, and yet never see it) but observation is my trade.

I have remarked in more than one place the expression of a foolish fancy that because the houses of the Old Jago have been pulled down, the Jago difficulty has been cleared out of the way. That is far from being the case. The Jago, as mere bricks and mortar, is gone. But the Jago in flesh and blood still lives, and is crowding into neighbourhoods already densely over-populated.

In conclusion: the plan and the intention of my story made it requisite that, in telling it, I should largely adhere to fact; and I did so. If I write other tales different in scope and design, I shall adhere to fact or neglect it as may seem good to me: regardless of anybody's classification as a realist, or as anything else. For though I have made a suggestion, right or wrong, as to what a realist may be, whether I am one or not is no concern of mine; but the concern (if it be anybody's) of the tabulators and the watersifters.

A. M.

February 1897.

I

It was past the mid of a summer night in the Old Jago. The narrow street was all the blacker for the lurid sky; for there was a fire in a farther part of Shoreditch, and the welkin was an infernal coppery glare. Below, the hot, heavy air lay, a rank oppression, on the contorted forms of those who made for sleep on the pavement: and in it, and through it all, there rose from the foul earth and the grimed walls a close, mingled stink – the odour of the Jago.

From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on one end of Old Jago Street, to where the other end lost itself in the black beyond Jago Row; from where Jago Row began south at Meakin Street, to where it ended north at Honey Lane – there the Jago, for one hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and festered; and half-way along Old Jago Street a narrow archway gave upon Jago Court, the blackest hole in all that pit.

A square of two hundred and fifty yards or less – that was all there was of the Jago. But in that square the human population swarmed in thousands. Old Jago Street, New Jago Street, Half Jago Street lay parallel, east and west: Jago Row at one end and Edge Lane at the other lay parallel also, stretching north and south: foul ways all. What was too vile for Kate Street, Seven Dials, and Ratcliff Highway in its worst day, what was too useless, incapable and corrupt – all that teemed in the Old Jago.

Old Jago Street lay black and close under the quivering red sky; and slinking forms, as of great rats, followed one another quickly between the posts in the gut by the High Street, and scattered over the Jago. For the crowd about the fire was now small, the police was there in force, and every safe pocket had been tried. Soon the incursion ceased, and the sky, flickering and brightening no longer, settled to a sullen flush. On the pavement some writhed wearily, longing for sleep; others, despairing of it, sat and lolled, and a few talked. They were not there for lack of shelter, but because in this weather repose was less unlikely in the street than within doors: and the lodgings of the few who nevertheless abode at home were marked here and there by the lights visible from the windows. For in this place none ever slept without a light, because of three kinds of vermin that light in some sort keeps at bay: vermin which added to existence here a terror not to be guessed by the unafflicted: who object to being told of it. For on them that lay writhen and gasping on the pavement; on them that sat among them; on them that rolled and blasphemed in the lighted rooms; on every moving creature in this, the Old Jago, day and night, sleeping and walking, the third plague of Egypt, and more, lay unceasing.

The stifling air took a further oppression from the red sky. By the dark entrance to Jago Court a man rose, flinging out an oath, and sat with his head bowed in his hands.

'Ah – h – h – h,' he said. 'I wish I was dead: an' kep' a cawfy shop.' He looked aside from his hands at his neighbours; but Kiddo Cook's ideal of heaven was no new thing, and the sole answer was a snort from a dozing man a yard away.

Kiddo Cook felt in his pocket and produced a pipe and a screw of paper. 'This is a bleed'n' unsocial sort o' evenin' party, this is,' he said, 'An' 'ere's the on'y real toff in the mob with ardl'y 'arf a pipeful left, an' no lights. D' y' 'ear, me lord' – leaning toward the dozing neighbour – 'got a match?'

'Go t' 'ell!'

'O wot 'orrid langwidge! It's shocking, blimy. Arter that y' ought to find me a match. Come on.'

'Go t' 'ell!'

A lank, elderly man, who sat with his back to the wall, pushed up a battered tall hat from his eyes, and, producing a box of matches, exclaimed 'Hell? And how far's that? You're in it!' He flung abroad a bony hand, and glanced upward. Over his forehead a greasy black curl dangled and shook as he shuddered back against the wall. 'My God, there can be no hell after this!'

'Ah,' Kiddo Cook remarked, as he lit his pipe in the hollow of his hands, 'that's a comfort, Mr Beveridge, any'ow.' He returned the matches, and the old man, tilting his hat forward, was silent.

A woman, gripping a shawl about her shoulders, came furtively along from the posts, with a man walking in her tracks – a little unsteadily. He was not of the Jago, but a decent young workman, by his dress. The sight took Kiddo Cook's idle eye, and when the couple had passed, he said meditatively: 'There's Billy Leary in luck ag'in: 'is missis do pick 'em up, s'elp me. I'd carry the cosh meself if I'd got a woman like 'er.'

Cosh-carrying was near to being the major industry of the Jago. The cosh was a foot length of iron rod, with a knob at one end, and a hook (or a ring) at the other. The craftsman, carrying it in his coat sleeve, waited about dark staircase corners till his wife (married or not) brought in a well drunken stranger: when, with a sudden blow behind the head, the stranger was happily coshed, and whatever was found on him as he lay insensible was the profit on the transaction. In the hands of capable practitioners this industry yielded a comfortable subsistence for no great exertion. Most, of course, depended on the woman: whose duty it was to keep the other artist going in subjects. There were legends of surprising ingatherings achieved by wives of especial diligence: one of a woman who had brought to the cosh some six-and-twenty on a night of public rejoicing. This was, however, a story years old, and may have been no more than an exemplary fiction, designed, like a Sunday School book, to convey a counsel of perfection to the dutiful matrons of the Old Jago.

The man and woman vanished in a doorway near the Jago Row end, where, for some reason, dossers were fewer than about the portal of Jago Court. There conversation flagged, and a broken snore was heard. It was a quiet night, as quietness was counted in the Jago; for it was too hot for most to fight in that stifling air – too hot to do more than turn on the stones and swear. Still the last hoarse yelps of a combat of women came intermittently from Half Jago Street in the further confines.

In a little while something large and dark was pushed forth from the door-opening near Jago Row which Billy Leary's spouse had entered. The thing rolled over, and lay tumbled on the pavement, for a time unnoted. It might have been yet another would-be sleeper, but for its stillness. Just such a thing it seemed, belike, to two that lifted their heads and peered from a few yards off, till they rose on hands and knees and crept to where it lay: Jago rats both. A man it was; with a thick smear across his face, and about his head the source of the dark trickle that sought the gutter deviously over the broken flags. The drab stuff of his pockets peeped out here and there in a crumpled bunch, and his waistcoat gaped where the watch-guard had been. Clearly, here was an uncommonly remunerative cosh – a cosh so good that the boots had been neglected, and remained on the man's feet. These the kneeling two unlaced deftly, and, rising, prize in hand, vanished in the deeper shadow of Jago Row.

A small boy, whom they met full tilt at the corner, staggered out to the gutter and flung a veteran curse after them. He was a slight child, by whose size you might have judged his age at five. But his face was of serious and troubled age. One who knew the children of the Jago, and could tell, might have held him eight, or from that to nine.

He replaced his hands in his trousers pockets, and trudged up the street. As he brushed by the coshed man he glanced again toward Jago Row, and, jerking his thumb that way, 'Done 'im for 'is boots,' he piped. But nobody marked him till he reached Jago Court, when old Beveridge, pushing back his hat once more, called sweetly and silkily, 'Dicky Perrott!' and beckoned with his finger.

The boy approached, and as he did so the man's skeleton hand suddenly shot out and gripped him by the collar. 'It – never – does – to – see – too – much!' Beveridge said, in a series of shouts, close to the boy's ear. 'Now go home,' he added, in a more ordinary tone, with a push to make his meaning plain: and straightway relapsed against the wall.

The boy scowled and backed off the pavement. His ragged jacket was coarsely made from one much larger, and he hitched the collar over his shoulder as he shrank toward a doorway some few yards on. Front doors were used merely as firewood in the Old Jago, and most had been burnt there many years ago. If perchance one could have been found still on its hinges, it stood ever open and probably would not shut. Thus at night the Jago doorways were a row of black holes, foul and forbidding.

Dicky Perrott entered his hole with caution, for anywhere, in the passage and on the stairs, somebody might be lying drunk, against whom it would be unsafe to stumble. He found nobody, however, and climbed and reckoned his way up the first stair-flight with the necessary regard for the treads that one might step through and the rails that had gone from the side. Then he pushed open the door of the first-floor back and was at home.

A little heap of guttering grease, not long ago a candle end, stood and spread on the mantel-piece, and gave irregular light from its drooping wick. A thin-railed iron bedstead, bent and staggering, stood against a wall, and on its murky coverings a half-dressed woman sat and neglected a baby that lay by her, grieving and wheezing. The woman had a long dolorous face, empty of expression and weak of mouth.

'Where 'a' you bin, Dicky?' she asked, rather complaining than asking. 'It's sich low hours for a boy.'

Dicky glanced about the room. 'Got anythink to eat?' he asked.

'I dunno,' she answered listlessly. 'P'raps there's a bit o' bread in the cupboard. I don't want nothin', it's so 'ot. An' father ain't bin 'ome since tea-time.'

The boy rummaged and found a crust. Gnawing at this, he crossed to where the baby lay. 'Ullo, Looey,' he said, bending and patting the muddy cheek. 'Ullo!'

The baby turned feebly on its back, and set up a thin wail. Its eyes were large and bright, its tiny face was piteously flea-bitten and strangely old. 'Wy, she's 'ungry, mother,' said Dicky Perrott, and took the little thing up.

He sat on a small box, and rocked the baby on his knees, feeding it with morsels of chewed bread. The mother, dolefully inert, looked on and said: 'She's that backward I'm quite wore out; more 'n ten months old, an' don't even crawl yut. It's a never-endin' trouble, is children.'

She sighed, and presently stretched herself on the bed. The boy rose, and carrying his little sister with care, for she was dozing, essayed to look through the grimy window. The dull flush still spread overhead, but Jago Court lay darkling below, with scarce a sign of the ruinous back yards that edged it on this and the opposite sides, and nothing but blackness between.

The boy returned to his box, and sat. Then he said: 'I don't s'pose father's 'avin' a sleep outside, eh?'

The woman sat up with some show of energy. 'Wot?' she said sharply. 'Sleep out in the street like them low Ranns an' Learys? I should 'ope not. It's bad enough livin' 'ere at all, an' me being used to different things once, an' all. You ain't seen 'im outside, 'ave ye?'

'No, I ain't seen 'im: I jist looked in the court.' Then, after a pause: 'I 'ope 'e's done a click,' the boy said.

His mother winced. 'I dunno wot you mean, Dicky,' she said, but falteringly. 'You – you're gittin' that low an' an' –'

'Wy, copped somethink, o' course. Nicked somethink. You know.'

'If you say sich things as that I'll tell 'im wot you say, an' 'e'll pay you. We ain't that sort o' people, Dicky, you ought to know. I was alwis kep' respectable an' straight all my life, I'm sure, an' –'

'I know. You said so before, to father – I 'eard: w'en 'e brought 'ome that there yuller prop – the necktie pin. Wy, where did 'e git that? 'E ain't 'ad a job for munse and munse: where's the yannups come from wot's bin for to pay the rent, an' git the toke, an' milk for Looey? Think I dunno? I ain't a kid. I know.'

'Dicky, Dicky! you mustn't say sich things!' was all the mother could find to say, with tears in her slack eyes. 'It's wicked an' – an' low. An' you must alwis be respectable an' straight, Dicky, an' you'll – you'll git on then.'

'Straight people's fools, I reckon. Kiddo Cook says that, an' 'e's as wide as Broad Street. W'en I grow up I'm goin' to git toffs' clo'es an' be in the 'igh mob. They does big clicks.'

'They git put in a dark prison for years an' years, Dicky – an' – an' if you're sich a wicked low boy, father 'll give you the strap – 'ard,' the mother returned, with what earnestness she might. 'Gimme the baby, an' you go to bed, go on; 'fore father comes.'

Dicky handed over the baby, whose wizen face was now relaxed in sleep, and slowly disencumbered himself of the ungainly jacket, staring at the wall in a brown study. 'It's the mugs wot git took,' he said, absently. 'An' quoddin' ain't so bad.' Then, after a pause, he turned and added suddenly: 'S'pose father'll be smuggled some day, eh, mother?'

His mother made no reply, but bent languidly over the baby, with an indefinite pretence of settling it in a place on the bed. Soon Dicky himself, in the short and ragged shirt he had worn under the jacket, burrowed head first among the dingy coverings at the foot, and protruding his head at the further side, took his accustomed place crosswise at the extreme end.

The filthy ceiling lit and darkened by fits as the candle-wick fell and guttered to its end. He heard his mother rise and find another fragment of candle to light by its expiring flame, but he lay still wakeful. After a time he asked: 'Mother, why don't you come to bed?'

'Waitin' for father. Go to sleep.'

He was silent for a little. But brain and eyes were wide awake, and soon he spoke again. 'Them noo 'uns in the front room,' he said. 'Ain't the man give 'is wife a 'idin' yut?'

'No.'

'Nor yut the boy – 'umpty-backed 'un?'

'No.'

'Seems they're mighty pertickler. Fancy theirselves too good for their neighbours; I 'eard Pigeony Poll say that; on'y Poll said –'

'You mustn't never listen to Pigeony Poll, Dicky. Ain't you 'eard me say so? Go to sleep. 'Ere comes father.' There was, indeed, a step on the stairs, but it passed the landing, and went on to the top floor. Dicky lay awake, but silent, gazing upward and back through the dirty window just over his head. It was very hot, and he fidgeted uncomfortably, fearing to turn or toss lest the baby should wake and cry. There came a change in the hue of the sky, and he watched the patch within his view, until the red seemed to gather in spots, and fade a spot at a time. Then at last there was a tread on the stairs, that stayed at the door; and father had come home. Dicky lay still, and listened.

'Lor, Josh, where ye bin?' Dicky heard his mother say. 'I'm almost wore out a-waitin'.'

'Awright, awright' – this in a hoarse grunt, little above a whisper. 'Got any water up 'ere? Wash this 'ere stick.'

There was a pause, wherein Dicky knew his mother looked about her in vacant doubt as to whether or not water was in the room. Then a quick, undertoned scream, and the stick rattled heavily on the floor. 'It's sticky!' his mother said. 'O my Gawd, Josh, look at that – an' bits o' 'air, too!' The great shadow of an open hand shot up across the ceiling and fell again. 'O Josh! O my Gawd! You ain't, 'ave ye? Not – not – not that?'

'Not wot? Gawblimy, not what? Shutter mouth. If a man fights, you're got to fight back, ain't cher? Any one 'ud think it was a murder, to look at ye. I ain't sich a damn fool as that. 'Ere – pull up that board.'

Dicky knew the loose floor-board that was lifted with a slight groaning jar. It was to the right of the hearth, and he had shammed sleep when it had been lifted once before. His mother whimpered and cried quietly. 'You'll git in trouble, Josh,' she said. 'I wish you'd git a reg'lar job, Josh, like what you used – I do – I do.'

The board was shut down again. Dicky Perrott through one opened eye saw the sky a pale grey above, and hoped the click had been a good one: hoped also that it might bring bullock's liver for dinner.

Out in the Jago the pale dawn brought a cooler air and the chance of sleep. From the paving of Old Jago Street sad grey faces, open-mouthed, looked upward as from the Valley of Dry Bones. Down by Jago Row the coshed subject, with the blood dry on his face, felt the colder air, and moved a leg.

II

Three-quarters of a mile east of the Jago's outermost limit was the East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute: such was the amazing success whereof, that a new wing had been built, and was now to be declared open by a Bishop of great eminence and industry.

The triumphs of the East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute were known and appreciated far from East London, by people who knew less of that part than of Asia Minor. Indeed, they were chiefly appreciated by these. There were kept, perpetually on tap for the aspiring East Ender, the Higher Life, the Greater Thought, and the Wider Humanity: with other radiant abstractions, mostly in the comparative degree, specifics all for the manufacture of the Superior Person. There were many Lectures given on still more subjects. Pictures were borrowed and shown, with revelations to the Uninformed of the morals ingeniously concealed by the painters. The Uninformed were also encouraged to debate and to produce papers on literary and political matters, while still unencumbered with the smallest knowledge thereof: for the Enlargement of the Understanding and the Embellishment of the Intellect. And there were classes, and clubs, and newspapers, and games of draughts, and musical evenings, and a brass band, whereby the life of the Hopeless Poor might be coloured, and the Misery of the Submerged alleviated. The wretches who crowded to these benefits were tradesmen's sons, small shop-keepers and their families, and neat clerks, with here and there a smart young artisan of one of the especially respectable trades. They freely patronised the clubs, the musical evenings, the brass band, and the bagatelle board; and those who took themselves seriously debated and Mutually-Improved with pomp. Others, subject to savage fits of wanting-to-know, made short rushes at random evening classes, with intervals of disgusted apathy. Altogether, a number of decently-dressed and mannerly young men passed many evenings at the Pansophical Institute in harmless pleasures, and often with an agreeable illusion of intellectual advance.

Other young men, more fortunately circumstanced, with the educational varnish fresh and raw upon them, came from afar, equipped with a foreign mode of thought and a proper ignorance of the world and the proportions of things, as Missionaries. Not without some anxiety to their parents, they plunged into the perilous deeps of the East End, to struggle – for a fortnight – with its suffering and its brutishness. So they went among the tradesmen's sons and the shopmen, who endured them as they endured the nominal subscription; and they came away with a certain relief, and with some misgiving as to what impression they had made, and what they had done to make it. But it was with knowledge and authority that they went back among those who had doubted their personal safety in the dark region. The East End, they reported, was nothing like what it was said to be. You could see much worse places up West. The people were quite a decent sort, in their way: shocking Bounders, of course; but quite clean and quiet, and very comfortably dressed, with ties and collars and watches.

But the Missionaries were few, and the subscribers to the Elevation Mission were many. Most had been convinced, by what they had been told, by what they had read in charity appeals, and perhaps by what they had seen in police-court and inquest reports, that the whole East End was a wilderness of slums: slums packed with starving human organisms without minds and without morals, preying on each other alive. These subscribers visited the Institute by twos and threes, on occasions of particular festivity among the neat clerks, and were astonished at the wonderful effects of Pansophic Elevation on the degraded classes, their aspect and their habits. Perhaps it was a concert where nobody was drunk: perhaps a little dance where nobody howled a chorus, nor wore his hat, nor punched his partner in the eye. It was a great marvel, whereunto the observers testified: so that more subscriptions came, and the new wing was built.

The afternoon was bright, and all was promising. A small crowd of idlers hung about the main door of the Institute, and stared at a string of flags. Away to the left stood the new wing, a face of fair,

clean brick; the ornamentation, of approved earnestness, in terra-cotta squares at regular intervals. Within sat many friends and relations of the shopmen and superior mechanics, and waited for the Bishop; the Eminences of the Elevation Mission sitting apart on the platform. Without, among the idlers, waited Dicky Perrott. His notions of what were going on were indistinct, but he had a belief, imbibed through rumour and tradition, that all celebrations at such large buildings were accompanied by the consumption, in the innermost recesses, of cake and tea. Even to be near cake was something. In Shoreditch High Street was a shop where cake stood in the window in great slabs, one slab over another, to an incalculable value. At this window – against it, as near as possible, his face flattened white – Dicky would stand till the shop-keeper drove him off: till he had but to shut his eyes to see once more, in the shifting black, the rich yellow sections with their myriad raisins. Once a careless errand-boy, who had bought a slice, took so clumsy a bite as he emerged that near a third of the whole piece broke and fell; and this Dicky had snatched from the paving and bolted with, ere the owner quite saw his loss. This was a superior sort of cake, at a penny. But once he had managed to buy himself a slice of an inferior sort for a halfpenny, in Meakin Street.

Dicky Perrott, these blessed memories in his brain, stood unobtrusively near the door, with the big jacket buttoned over as decently as might be, full of a desperate design: which was to get inside by whatsoever manner of trick or opportunity he might, and so, if it were humanly possible, to the cake.

The tickets were being taken at the door by an ardent young Elevator – one of the missionaries. Him, and all such washed and well-dressed people, Dicky had learnt to hold in serene contempt when the business in hand was dodging. There was no hurry: the Elevator might waste his vigilance on the ticket-holders for some time yet. And Dicky knew better than to betray the smallest sign of a desire for entrance while his enemy's attention was awake.

Carriages drew up, and yielded more Eminences: toward the end the Bishop himself, whom Dicky observed but as a pleasant-looking old gentleman in uncommon clothes; and on whom he bestowed no more thought than a passing wonder at what might be the accident to his hat which had necessitated its repair with string.

But at the spikes of the Bishop's carriage came another; and out of that there got three ladies, friends of the ticket-receiver, on whom they closed, greeting and shaking hands; and in a flash Dicky Perrott was beyond the lobby and moving obscurely along the walls of the inner hall, behind pillars and in shadow, seeking cake.

The Choral Society sang their lustiest, and there were speeches. Eminences expressed their surprise and delight at finding the people of the East End, gathered in the Institute building, so respectable and clean, thanks to persistent, indefatigable, unselfish Elevation.

The good Bishop, amid clapping of hands and fluttering of handkerchiefs, piped cherubically of everything. He rejoiced to see that day, whereon the helping hand of the West was so unmistakably made apparent in the East. He rejoiced also to find himself in the midst of so admirably typical an assemblage – so representative, if he might say so, of that great East End of London, thirsting and crying out for – for Elevation: for that – ah – Elevation which the more fortunately circumstanced denizens of – of other places, had so munificently – laid on. The people of the East End had been sadly misrepresented – in popular periodicals and in – in other ways. The East End, he was convinced, was not so black as it was painted. (Applause.) He had but to look about him. *Etcetera, etcetera*. He questioned whether so well-conducted, morally-given, and respectable a gathering could be brought together in any West End parish with which he was acquainted. It was his most pleasant duty on this occasion – and so on and so forth.

Dicky Perrott had found the cake. It was in a much smaller room at the back of the hall, wherein it was expected that the Bishop and certain Eminences of the platform would refresh themselves with tea after the ceremony. There were heavy, drooping curtains at the door of this room, and deep from the largest folds the ratling from the Jago watched. The table was guarded by a sour-faced man – just

such a man as drove him from the window of the cake shop in Shoreditch High Street. Nobody else was there yet, and plainly the sour-faced man must be absent or busy ere the cake could be got at.

There was a burst of applause in the hall: the new wing had been declared open. Then there was more singing, and after that much shuffling and tramping, for everybody was free to survey the new rooms on the way out; and the Importances from the platform came to find the tea.

Filling the room and standing about in little groups; chatting, munching, and sipping, while the sour-faced man distractedly floundered amid crockery: not a soul of them all perceived an inconsiderable small boy, ducking and dodging vaguely among legs and round skirts, making, from time to time, a silent snatch at a plate on the table: and presently he vanished altogether. Then the amiable Bishop, beaming over the tea-cup six inches from his chin, at two courtiers of the clergy, bethought him of a dinner engagement, and passed his hand downward over the rotundity of his waistcoat.

'Dear, dear,' said the Bishop, glancing down suddenly, 'why – what's become of my watch?'

There hung three inches of black ribbon, with a cut end. The Bishop looked blankly at the Elevators about him.

Three streets off, Dicky Perrott, with his shut fist deep in his breeches pocket, and a gold watch in the fist, ran full drive for the Old Jago.

III

There was nobody in chase; but Dicky Perrott, excited by his novel exploit, ran hard: forgetting the lesson first learnt by every child of the Jago, to avoid, as far as may be, suspicious flight in open streets. He burst into the Old Jago from the Jago Row corner, by Meakin Street; and still he ran. A small boy a trifle bigger than himself made a sharp punch at him as he passed, but he took no heed. The hulking group at the corner of Old Jago Street, ever observant of weaklings with plunder, saw him, and one tried to catch his arm, but he had the wit to dodge. Past the Jago Court passage he scudded, in at the familiar doorway, and up the stairs. A pale hunchbacked child, clean and wistful, descended, and him Dicky flung aside and half downstairs with 'Git out, 'ump!'

Josh Perrott sat on the bed, eating fried fish from an oily paper; for it was tea-time. He was a man of thirty-two, of middle height and stoutly built, with a hard, leathery face as of one much older. The hair about his mouth seemed always three days old – never much less nor much more. He was a plasterer – had, at least, so described himself at police-courts. But it was long since he had plastered, though he still walked abroad splashed and speckled, as though from an eruption of inherent plaster. In moments of pride he declared himself the only member of his family who had ever learned a trade, and worked at it. It was a long relinquished habit, but while it lasted he had married a decent boiler-maker's daughter, who had known nothing of the Jago till these latter days. One other boast Josh Perrott had: that nothing but shot or pointed steel could hurt him. And this, too, was near being a true boast; as he had proved in more than one fight in the local arena – which was Jago Court. Now he sat peaceably on the edge of the bed, and plucked with his fingers at the oily fish, while his wife grubbed hopelessly about the cupboard shelves for the screw of paper which was the sugar-basin.

Dicky entered at a burst. 'Mother – father – look! I done a click! I got a clock – a red 'un!'

Josh Perrott stopped, jaw and hand, with a pinch of fish poised in air. The woman turned, and her chin fell. 'O, Dicky, Dicky,' she cried, in real distress, 'you're a awful low, wicked boy. My Gawd, Josh, 'e – 'e'll grow up bad: I said so.'

Josh Perrott bolted the pinch of fish, and sucked his fingers as he sprang to the door. After a quick glance down the stairs he shut it, and turned to Dicky. 'Where d'je get that, ye young devel?' he asked, and snatched the watch.

'Claimed it auf a ol' bloke w'en 'e was drinkin' 'is tea,' Dicky replied, with sparkling eyes. 'Let's 'ave a look at it, father.'

'Did 'e run after ye?'

'No – didn't know nuffin' about it. I cut 'is bit o' ribbin with my knife.' Dicky held up a treasured relic of blade and handle, found in a gutter. 'Ain' cher goin' to let's 'ave a look at it?'

Josh Perrott looked doubtfully toward his wife: the children were chiefly her concern. Of her sentiments there could be no mistake. He slipped the watch into his own pocket, and caught Dicky by the collar.

'I'll give you somethink, you dam young thief,' he exclaimed, slipping off his belt. 'You'd like to have us all in stir for a year or two, I s'pose; goin' thievin' watches like a growed-up man.' And he plied the belt savagely, while Dicky, amazed, breathless and choking, spun about him with piteous squeals, and the baby woke and puled in feeble sympathy.

There was a rip, and the collar began to leave the old jacket. Feeling this, Josh Perrott released it, and with a quick drive of the fist in the neck sent Dicky staggering across the room. Dicky caught at the bed frame, and limped out to the landing, sobbing grievously in the bend of his sleeve.

It was more than his mother had intended, but she knew better than to attempt interference. Now that he was gone, she said, with some hesitation: "Adn't you better take it out at once, Josh?"

'Yus, I'm goin',' Josh replied, turning the watch in his hand. 'It's a good 'un – a topper.'

'You – you won't let Weech 'ave it, will ye, Josh? 'E – 'e never gives much.'

'No bloomin' fear. I'm goin' up 'Oxton with this 'ere.'

Dicky sobbed his way down the stairs and through the passage to the back. In the yard he looked for Tommy Rann, to sympathise. But Tommy was not, and Dicky paused in his grief to reflect that perhaps, indeed, in the light of calm reason, he would rather cast the story of the watch in a more heroic mould, for Tommy's benefit, than was compatible with tears and a belted back. So he turned and squeezed through a hole in the broken fence, sobbing again, in search of the friend that shared his inmost sorrows.

The belting was bad – very bad. There was broken skin on his shins where the strap had curled round, and there was a little sticky blood under the shirt half way up his back: to say nothing of bruises. But it was the hopeless injustice of things that shook him to the soul. Wholly unaided, he had done, with neatness and credit, a click that anybody in the Jago would have been proud of. Overjoyed, he had hastened to receive the commendations of his father and mother, and to place the prize in their hands, freely and generously, though perhaps with some hope of hot supper by way of celebration. And his reward was this. Why? He could understand nothing: could but feel the wrong that broke his heart. And so, sobbing, he crawled through two fences to weep on the shaggy neck of Jerry Gullen's canary.

Jerry Gullen's canary was no bird, but a donkey: employed by Jerry Gullen in his occasional intervals of sobriety to drag a cranky shallow, sometimes stored with glass bottles, rags, and hearth-stone: sometimes with firewood manufactured from a convenient hoarding, or from the joinery of an empty house: sometimes with empty sacks covering miscellaneous property suddenly acquired and not for general inspection. His vacations, many and long, Jerry Gullen's canary spent, forgotten and unfed, in Jerry Gullen's back-yard: gnawing desperately at fences, and harrowing the neighbourhood with his bray. Thus the nickname, facetiously applied by Kiddo Cook in celebration of his piteous song, grew into use; and 'Canary' would call the creature's attention as readily as a mouthful of imprecations.

Jerry Gullen's canary was gnawing, gnawing, with a sound as of a crooked centre-bit. Everywhere about the foul yard, ten or twelve feet square, wood was rounded and splintered and bitten white, and as the donkey turned his heavy head, a drip of blood from his gums made a disc on the stones. A twitch of the ears welcomed Dicky, grief-stricken as he was; for it was commonly thus that he bethought him of solace in Jerry Gullen's back-yard. And so Dicky, his arms about the mangy neck, told the tale of his wrongs till consolation came in composition of the heroic narrative designed for Tommy Rann.

'O, Canary, it is a blasted shame!'

IV

When Dicky Perrott came running into Jago Row with the Bishop's watch in his pocket, another boy punched a fist at him, and at the time Dicky was at a loss to guess the cause – unless it were a simple caprice – but stayed neither to inquire nor to retaliate. The fact was that the Ranns and the Learys were coming out, fighting was in the air, and the small boy, meeting another a trifle smaller, punched on general principles. The Ranns and the Learys, ever at war or in guarded armistice, were the great rival families – the Montagues and the Capulets – of the old Jago. The Learys indeed, scarce pretended to rivalry – rather to factious opposition. For the Ranns gloried in the style and title of the 'Royal Family,' and dominated the Jago; but there were mighty fighters, men and women, among the Learys, and when a combat arose it was a hard one and an animated. The two families ramified throughout the Jago; and under the Rann standard, whether by kin or by custom, were the Gullens, the Fishers, the Spicers, and the Walshes; while in the Leary train came Dawsons, Greens, and Harnwells. So that near all the Jago was wont to be on one side or the other, and any of the Jago which was not, was apt to be the worse for it; for the Ranns drubbed all them that were not of their faction in the most thorough and most workmanlike manner, and the Learys held by the same practice; so that neutrality meant double drubbing. But when the Ranns and Learys combined, and the Old Jago issued forth in its entire might against Dove Lane, then the battle was one to go miles to see.

This, however, was but a Rann and Leary fight; and it was but in its early stages when Dicky Perrott, emerging from Jerry Gullen's back-yard, made for Shoreditch High Street by way of the 'Posties' – the passage with posts at the end of Old Jago Street. His purpose was to snatch a handful of hay from some passing waggon, or of mixed fodder from some unguarded nosebag, wherewith to reward the sympathy of Jerry Gullen's canary. But by the 'Posties,' at the Edge Lane corner, Tommy Rann, capless, and with a purple bump on his forehead, came flying into his arms, breathless, exultant, a babbling braggart. He had fought Johnny Leary and Joe Dawson, he said, one after the other, and pretty nigh broke Johnny Leary's blasted neck; and Joe's Dawson's big brother was after him now with a bleed'n' shovel. So the two children ran on together, and sought the seclusion of their own back yard; where the story of Johnny Rann's prowess, with scowls and the pounding of imaginary foes, and the story of the Bishop's watch, with suppressions and improvements, mingled and contended in the thickening dusk. And Jerry Gullen's canary went forgotten and unrequited.

That night fighting was sporadic and desultory in the Jago. Bob the Bender was reported to have a smashed nose, and Sam Cash had his head bandaged at the hospital. At the Bag of Nails in Edge Lane, Snob Spicer was knocked out of knowledge with a quart pot, and Cocko Harnwell's missis had a piece bitten off of one ear. As the night wore on, taunts and defiances were bandied from window to door, and from door to window, between those who intended to begin fighting to-morrow; and shouts from divers corners gave notice of isolated scuffles. Once a succession of piercing screams seemed to betoken that Sally Green had begun. There was a note in the screams of Sally Green's opposites which the Jago had learned to recognise. Sally Green, though of the weaker faction, was the female champion of the Old Jago: an eminence won and kept by fighting tactics peculiar to herself. For it was her way, reserving teeth and nails, to wrestle closely with her antagonist, throw her by a dexterous twist on her face, and fall on her, instantly seizing the victim's nape in her teeth, gnawing and worrying. The sufferer's screams were audible afar, and beyond their invariable eccentricity of quality – a quality vaguely suggestive of dire surprise – they had mechanical persistence, a pump-like regularity, that distinguished them, in the accustomed ear, from other screams.

Josh Perrott had not been home all the evening: probably the Bishop's watch was in course of transmutation into beer. Dicky, stiff and domestically inclined, nursed Looey and listened to the noises without till he fell asleep, in hopeful anticipation of the morrow. For Tommy Rann had promised him half of a broken iron railing wherewith to fight the Learys.

V

Sleep in the Jago was at best a thing of intermission, for reasons – reasons of multitude – already denoted; nevertheless Dicky slept well enough to be unconscious of his father's homecoming. In the morning, however, there lay Josh Perrott, snoring thunderously on the floor, piebald with road-dust. This was not a morning whereon father would want breakfast – that was plain: he would wake thirsty and savage. So Dicky made sure of a crust from the cupboard, and betook himself in search of Tommy Rann. As to washing, he was never especially fond of it, and in any case there were fifty excellent excuses for neglect. The only water was that from the little tap in the back yard. The little tap was usually out of order, or had been stolen bodily by a tenant; and if it were not, there was no basin there, nor any soap, nor towel; and anything savouring of moderate cleanliness was resented in the Jago as an assumption of superiority.

Fighting began early, fast and furious. The Ranns got together soon, and hunted the Learys up and down, and attacked them in their houses: the Learys' chances only coming when straggling Ranns were cut off from the main body. The weapons in use, as was customary, rose in effectiveness by a swiftly ascending scale. The Learys, assailed with sticks, replied with sticks torn from old packing-cases, with protruding nails. The two sides bethought them of coshes simultaneously, and such as had no coshes – very few – had pokers and iron railings. Ginger Stagg, at bay in his passage, laid open Pud Palmer's cheek with a chisel; and, knives thus happily legitimised with the least possible preliminary form, everybody was free to lay hold of whatever came handy.

In Old Jago Street, half way between Jago Court and Edge Lane, stood the Feathers, the grimmest and vilest of the four public-houses in the Jago. Into the Feathers some dozen Learys were driven, and for a while they held the inner bar and the tap-room against the Ranns, who swarmed after them, chairs, bottles, and pewter pots flying thick, while Mother Gapp, the landlady, hung hysterical on the beer-pulls in the bar, supplicating and blubbing aloud. Then a partition came down with a crash, bringing shelves and many glasses with it, and the Ranns rushed over the ruin, beating the Learys down, jumping on them, heaving them through the back windows. Having thus cleared the house of the intruding enemy, the Ranns demanded recompense of liquor, and took it, dragging handles off beer-engines, seizing bottles, breaking into the cellar, and driving in bungs. Nobody better than Mother Gapp could quell an ordinary bar riot – even to knocking a man down with a pot; but she knew better than to attempt interference now. Nothing could have made her swoon, but she sat limp and helpless, weeping and blaspheming.

The Ranns cleared off, every man with a bottle or so, and scattered, and this for a while was their undoing. For the Learys rallied and hunted the Ranns in their turn: a crowd of eighty or a hundred sweeping the Jago from Honey Lane to Meakin Street. Then they swung back through Edge Lane to Old Jago Street, and made for Jerry Gullen's – a house full of Ranns. Jerry Gullen, Bill Rann, and the rest took refuge in the upper floors and barricaded the stairs. Below, the Learys broke windows and ravaged the rooms, smashing whatsoever of furniture was to be found. Above, Pip Walsh, who affected horticulture on his window-sill, hurled down flower-pots. On the stairs, Billy Leary, scaling the barricade, was flung from top to bottom, and had to be carried home. And then Pip Walsh's missis scattered the besiegers on the pavement below with a kettleful of boiling water.

There was a sudden sortie of Ranns from Jago Court, but it profited nothing; for the party was small, and, its advent being unexpected, there was a lack of prompt co-operation from the house. The Learys held the field.

Down the middle of Old Jago Street came Sally Green: red faced, stripped to the waist, dancing, hoarse and triumphant. Nail-scores wide as the finger striped her back, her face, and her throat, and she had a black eye; but in one great hand she dangled a long bunch of clotted hair, as she whooped defiance to the Jago. It was a trophy newly rent from the scalp of Norah Walsh, champion of the

Rann womankind, who had crawled away to hide her blighted head, and be restored with gin. None answered Sally's challenge, and, staying but to fling a brickbat at Pip Walsh's window, she carried her dance and her trophy into Edge Lane.

The scrimmage on Jerry Gullen's stairs was thundering anew, and parties of Learys were making for other houses in the street, when there came a volley of yells from Jago Row, heralding a scudding mob of Ranns. The defeated sortie-party from Jago Court, driven back, had gained New Jago Street by way of the house-passages behind the Court, and set to gathering the scattered faction. Now the Ranns came, drunk, semi-drunk, and otherwise, and the Learys, leaving Jerry Gullen's, rushed to meet them. There was a great shock, hats flew, sticks and heads made a wooden rattle, and instantly the two mobs were broken into an uproarious confusion of tangled groups, howling and grappling. Here a man crawled into a passage to nurse a broken head; there a knot gathered to kick a sprawling foe. So the fight thinned out and spread, resolving into many independent combats, with concerted rushes of less and less frequency, till once again all through the Jago each fought for his own hand. Kiddo Cook, always humorous, ran hilariously through the streets, brandishing a long roll of twisted paper, wherewith he smacked the heads of Learys all and sundry, who realised too late that the paper was twisted round a lodging-house poker.

Now, of the few neutral Jagos: most lay low. Josh Perrott, however, hard as nails and respected for it, feared neither Rann nor Leary, and leaving a little money with his missis, carried his morning mouth in search of beer. Pigeony Poll, harlot and outcast, despised for that she neither fought nor kept a cosh-carrier, like a respectable married woman, slunk and trembled in corners and yards, and wept at the sight of bleeding heads. As for old Beveridge, the affair so grossly excited him that he neglected business (he cadged and wrote begging screeves) and stayed in the Jago, where he strode wildly about the streets, lank and rusty, stabbing the air with a carving knife, and incoherently defying 'all the lot' to come near him. Nobody did.

Dicky Perrott and Tommy Rann found a snug fastness in Jago Row. For there was a fence with a loose board, which, pushed aside, revealed a hole where-through a very small boy might squeeze; and within were stored many barrows and shallows, mostly broken, and of these one, tilted forward and bottom up, made a hut or den, screened about with fence and barrows. Here they hid while the Learys swept the Jago, and hence they issued from time to time to pound such youngsters of the other side as might come in sight. The bits of iron railing made imposing weapons, but were a trifle too big and heavy for rapid use in their puny hands. Still, Dicky managed to double up little Billy Leary with a timely lunge in the stomach, and Tommy Rann made Bobby Harnwell's nose bleed very satisfactorily. On the other hand, the bump on Tommy Rann's forehead was widened by the visitation of a stick, and Dicky Perrott sustained a very hopeful punch in the eye, which he cherished enthusiastically with a view to an honourable blackness. In the snuggery intervals they explained their prowess one to another, and Dicky alluded to his intention, when he was a man, to buy a very long sword wherewith to cut off the Learys' heads: Tommy Rann inclining, however, to a gun, with which one might also shoot birds.

The battle flagged a little toward mid-day, but waxed lively again as the afternoon began. It was then that Dicky Perrott, venturing some way from the retreat, found himself in a scrimmage, and a man snatched away his piece of iron and floored a Leary with it. Gratifying as was the distinction of aiding in the exploit, Dicky mourned the loss of the weapon almost unto tears, and Tommy Rann would not go turn-about with the other, but kept it wholly for himself; so Dicky was fain to hunt sorrowfully for a mere stick. Even a disengaged stick was not easy to find just then. So Dicky, emerging from the Jago, tried Meakin Street, where there were shops, but unsuccessfully, and so came round by Luck Row, a narrow way from Meakin Street by Walker's cook shop, up through the Jago.

Dicky's mother, left with the baby, fastened the door as well as she might, and trembled. Indeed she had reason. The time of Josh Perrott's return was a matter of doubt, but when he did come he would want something to eat; it was for that he had left the money. But Dicky was out, and there

was nothing in the cupboard. From the window she saw divers fights in Jago Court; and a man lay for near two hours on the stones with a cut on his temple. As for herself, she was no favourite in the neighbourhood at any time. For one thing, her husband did not carry the cosh. Then she was an alien who had never entirely fallen into Jago ways; she had soon grown sluttish and dirty, but she was never drunk, she never quarrelled, she did not gossip freely. Also her husband beat her but rarely, and then not with a chair nor a poker. Justly irritated by such superiorities as these, the women of the Jago were ill-disposed to brook another: which was, that Hannah Perrott had been married in church. For these reasons she was timid at the most peaceful of times, but now, with Ranns and Learys on the war-path, and herself obnoxious to both, she trembled. She wished Dicky would come and do her errand. But there was no sign of him, and mid-day wore into afternoon. It was late for Josh as it was, and he would be sure to come home irritable: it was his way when a bad head from overnight struggled with morning beer. If he found nothing to eat there would be trouble.

At length she resolved to go herself. There was a lull in the outer din, and what there was seemed to come from the farther parts of Honey Lane and Jago Row. She would slip across by Luck Row to Meakin Street and be back in five minutes. She took up little Looey and went.

And as Dicky, stickless, turned into Luck Row, there arose a loud shriek and then another, and then in a changed voice a succession of long screams with a regular breath-pause. Sally Green again! He ran, turned into Old Jago Street, and saw.

Sprawled on her face in the foul road lay a writhing woman and screamed; while squeezed under her arm was a baby with mud in its eyes and a cut cheek, crying weakly; and spread over all, clutching her prey by hair and wrist, Sally Green hung on the nape like a terrier, jaws clenched, head shaking.

Thus Dicky saw it in a flash, and in an instant he had flung himself on Sally Green, kicking, striking, biting and crying, for he had seen his mother and Looey. The kicks wasted themselves among the woman's petticoats, and the blows were feeble; but the sharp teeth were meeting in the shoulder-flesh, when help came.

Norah Walsh, vanquished champion, now somewhat recovered, looked from a window, saw her enemy vulnerable, and ran out armed with a bottle. She stopped at the kerb to knock the bottom off the bottle, and then, with an exultant shout, seized Sally Green by the hair and stabbed her about the face with the jagged points. Blinded with blood, Sally released her hold on Mrs Perrott and rolled on her back, struggling fiercely; but to no end, for Norah Walsh, kneeling on her breast, stabbed and stabbed again, till pieces of the bottle broke away. Sally's yells and plunges ceased, and a man pulled Norah off. On him she turned, and he was fain to run, while certain Learys found a truck which might carry Sally to the hospital.

Hannah Perrott was gone indoors, hysterical and helpless. She had scarce crossed the street on her errand when she had met Sally Green in quest of female Ranns. Mrs Perrott was not a Rann, but she was not a Leary, so it came to the same thing. Moreover, there was her general obnoxiousness. She had tried to run, but that was useless; and now, sobbing and bleeding, she was merely conscious of being gently led, almost carried, indoors and upstairs. She was laid back on the bed, and somebody loosened her hair and wiped her face and neck, giving her hoarse, comforting words. Then she saw the face – scared though coarse and pitted, and red about the eyes – that bent over her. It was Pigeony Poll's.

Dicky had followed her in, no longer the hero of the Jago Row retreat, but with his face tearful and distorted, carrying the baby in his arms, and wiping the mud from her eyes. Now he sat on the little box and continued his ministrations, with fear in his looks as he glanced at his mother on the bed.

Without, the fight rallied once more. The Learys ran to avenge Sally Green, and the Ranns met them with a will. Down by the Bag of Nails a party of Ranns was driven between the posts and through the gut into Shoreditch High Street, where a stand was made until Fag Dawson dropped, with a shoemaker's knife sticking under his arm-pit. Then the Ranns left, with most of the Learys

after them, and Fag Dawson was carried to a chemist's by the police, never to floor a Rann again. For he was chived in the left lung.

Thus the fight ended. For a faction fight in the Jago, with a few broken heads and ribs and an odd knife wound here and there – even with a death in the hospital from kicks or what not – was all very well; but when it came to homicide in the open High Street, the police drew the line, and entered the Jago in force. Ordinarily, a peep now and again from a couple of policemen between the 'Posties' was all the supervision the Jago had, although three policemen had been seen to walk the length of Old Jago Street together, and there were raids in force for special captures. There was a raid in force now, and the turmoil ceased. Nothing would have pleased both Ranns and Learys better than to knock over two or three policemen, for kicking-practice; but there were too many for the sport, and for hours they patrolled the Jago's closest passages. Of course nobody knew who chived Fag Dawson. No inquiring policeman ever found anybody in the Old Jago who knew anything, even to the harm of his bitterest foe. It was the sole commandment that ran there: – 'Thou shalt not nark.'

That night it was known that there would be a fight between Josh Perrott and Billy Leary, once the latter grew well. For Josh Perrott came home, saw his wife, and turned Rann on the spot. But for the police in the Jago that night, there would have been many a sore head, if no worse, among the Learys, by visitation of Josh Perrott. Sally Green's husband had fled years ago, and Billy Leary, her brother, was the obvious mark for Josh's vengeance. He was near as eminent a fighter among the men as his sister among the women, and a charming scrap was anticipated. It would come off, of course, in Jago Court one Sunday morning, as all fights of distinction did; and perhaps somebody in the High Mob would put up stakes.

VI

In the morning the police still held the Jago. Their presence embarrassed many, but none more than Dicky Perrott, who would always take a turning, or walk the other way, at sight of a policeman. Dicky got out of Old Jago Street early, and betook him to Meakin Street, where there were chandlers' shops with sugar in their windows, and cook-shops with pudding. He designed working through by these to Shoreditch High Street, there to crown his solace by contemplation of the cake-shop. But, as he neared Weech's coffee-shop, scarce half through Meakin Street, there stood Weech himself at the door, grinning and nodding affably, and beckoning him. He was a pleasant man, this Mr Aaron Weech, who sang hymns aloud in the back parlour, and hummed the tunes in the shop: a prosperous, white-aproned, whiskered, half-bald, smirking tradesman, who bent and spoke amiably to boys, looking sharply in their eyes, but talked to a man mostly with his gaze on the man's waistcoat.

Indeed, there seemed to be something about Mr Aaron Weech especially attractive to youth. Nearly all his customers were boys and girls, though not boys and girls who looked likely to pay a great deal in the way of refreshment, much as they took. But he was ever indulgent, and at all times accessible to his young clients. Even on Sunday (though, of course, his shutters were kept rigidly up on the Day of Rest) a particular tap would bring him hot-foot to the door: not to sell coffee, for Mr Weech was no Sabbath-breaker.

Now he stood at his door, and invited Dicky with nods and becks. Dicky, all wondering, and alert to dodge in case the thing were a mere device to bring him within striking distance, went.

'W'y Dicky Perrott,' quoth Mr Weech in a tone of genial surprise, 'I b'lieve you could drink a cup o' cawfy!'

Dicky, wondering how Mr Weech had learnt his name, believed he could.

'An' eat a slice o' cake too, I'll be bound,' Mr Weech added.

Dicky's glance leapt. Yes, he could eat a slice of cake too.

'Ah, I knew it,' said Mr Weech, triumphantly; 'I can always tell.' He rubbed Dicky's cap about his head, and drew him into the shop, at this hour bare of customers. At the innermost compartment they stopped, and Mr Weech, with a gentle pressure on the shoulders, seated Dicky at the table.

He brought the coffee, and not a single slice of cake, but two. True, it was not cake of Elevation Mission quality, nor was it so good as that shown at the shop in High Street: it was of a browner, dumpier, harder nature, and the currants were gritty and few. But cake it was, and to consider it critically were unworthy. Dicky bolted it with less comfort than he might, for Mr Weech watched him keenly across the table. And, indeed, from some queer cause, he felt an odd impulse to cry. It was the first time that he had ever been given anything, kindly and ungrudgingly.

He swallowed the last crumb, washed it down with the dregs of his cup, and looked sheepishly across at Mr Weech.

'Goes down awright, don't it?' that benefactor remarked. 'Ah, I like to see you enjoyin' of yerself. I'm very fond o' you young 'uns: 'specially clever 'uns like you.'

Dicky had never been called clever before, so far as he could recollect, and he wondered at it now. Mr Weech, leaning back, contemplated him smilingly for some seconds, and then proceeded. 'Yus,' he said, 'you're the sort o' boy as can 'ave cawfy and cake w'enever you want it, you are.'

Dicky wondered more, and his face said as much. 'You know,' Mr Weech pursued, winking again, grinning and nodding. 'That was a fine watch you found the other day. Y'ought to 'a' brought it to me.'

Dicky was alarmed. How did Mr Weech learn about the watch? Perhaps he was a friend of the funny old man who lost it. Dicky half rose, but his affable patron leaned across and pushed him back on the seat. 'You needn't be frightened,' he said. 'I ain't goin' to say nothink to nobody. But I know all about it, mind, an' I could if I liked. You found the watch, an' it was a red 'un, on a bit o' ribbin.'

Well, then you went and took it 'ome, like a little fool. Wot does yer father do? W'y 'e ups an' lathers you with 'is belt, an' 'e keeps the watch 'isself. That's all you git for yer pains. See – I know all about it.' And Mr Weech gazed on Dicky Perrott with a fixed grin.

"Oo toldjer?" Dicky managed to ask at last.

'Ah!' – this with a great emphasis and a tapping of the forefinger beside the nose – 'I don't want much tellin': it ain't much as goes on 'ereabout I don't know of. Never mind 'ow. P'raps I got a little bird as w'ispers – p'raps I do it some other way. Any'ow I know. It ain't no good any boy tryin' to do somethink unbeknownst to me, mindjer.'

Mr Weech's head lay aside, his grin widened, his glance was sidelong, his forefinger pointed from his temple over Dicky's head, and altogether he looked so very knowing that Dicky shuffled in his seat. By what mysterious means was this new-found friend so well informed? The doubt troubled him, for Dicky knew nothing of Mr Aaron Weech's conversation, an hour before, with Tommy Rann.

'But it's awright, bless yer,' Mr Weech went on presently. 'Nobody's none the wuss for me knowin' about 'em... Well, we was a-talkin' about the watch, wasn't we? All you got after sich a lot o' trouble was a woppin' with a belt. That was too bad.' Mr Weech's voice was piteous and sympathetic. 'After you a-findin' sich a nice watch – a red 'un an' all! – you gits nothink for yerself but a beltin'. Never mind, you'll do better next time – I'll take care o' that. I don't like to see a clever boy put upon. You go an' find another, or somethink else – anythink good – an' then you bring it 'ere.'

Mr Weech's friendly sympathy extinguished Dicky's doubt. 'I didn't find it,' he said, shy but proud. 'It was a click – I sneaked it.'

'Eh?' ejaculated Mr Weech, a sudden picture of blank incomprehension. 'Eh? What? Click? Wot's a click? Sneaked? Wot's that? I dunno nothink about no talk o' that sort, an' I don't want to. It's my belief it means somethink wrong – but I dunno, an' I don't want to. 'Ear that? Eh? Don't let me 'ave no more o' that, or you'd better not come near me agin. If you *find* somethink, awright: you come to me an' I'll give ye somethink for it, if it's any good. It ain't no business of anybody's *where* you find it, o' course, an' I don't want to know. But clicks and sneaks – them's Greek to me, an' I don't want to learn 'em. Unnerstand that? Nice talk to respectable people, with yer clicks an' sneaks!'

Dicky blushed a little, and felt very guilty without in the least understanding the offence. But Mr Weech's virtuous indignation subsided as quickly as it had arisen, and he went on as amiably as ever.

'When you *find* anythink,' he said, 'jist like you found that watch, don't tell nobody, an' don't let nobody see it. Bring it 'ere quiet, when there ain't any p'liceman in the street, an' come right through to the back o' the shop, an' say, "I come to clean the knives." Unnerstand? "I come to clean the knives." There ain't no knives to clean – it's on'y a way o' tellin' me you got somethink without other people knowin'. An' then I'll give you somethink for it – money p'raps, or p'raps cake or wot not. Don't forgit. "I come to clean the knives." See?'

Yes, Dicky understood perfectly; and Dicky saw a new world of dazzling delights. Cake – limitless cake, coffee, and the like whenever he might feel moved thereunto; but more than all, money – actual money. Good broad pennies, perhaps whole shillings – perhaps even more still: money to buy bullock's liver for dinner, or tripe, or what you fancied: saveloys, baked potatoes from the can on cold nights, a little cart to wheel Looey in, a boat from a toy-shop with sails!

'There's no end o' things to be found all over the place, an' a sharp boy like you can find 'em every day. If you don't find 'em, someone else will; there's plenty on 'em about on the look-out, an' you got jist as much right as them. On'y mind!' – Mr Weech was suddenly stern and serious, and his forefinger was raised impressively – 'you know you can't do anythink without I know, an' if you say a word – if you say a word,' his fist came on the table with a bang, 'somethink 'll happen to you. Somethink bad.'

Mr Weech rose, and was pleasant again, though business-like. 'Now, you just go an' find somethink,' he said. 'Look sharp about it, an' don't go an' git in trouble. The cawfy's a penny, an' the

cake's a penny – ought prop'ly to be twopence, but say a penny this time. That's twopence you owe me, an' you better bring somethink an' pay it off quick. So go along.'

This was an unforeseen tag to the entertainment. For the first time in his life Dicky was in debt. It was a little disappointing to find the coffee and cake no gift after all: though, indeed, it now seemed foolish to have supposed they were; for in Dicky Perrott's world people did not give things away – that were the act of a fool. Thus Dicky, with his hands in his broken pockets, and thought in his small face, whereon still stood the muddy streaks of yesterday's tears, trudged out of Mr Aaron Weech's shop-door, and along Meakin Street.

Now he was beginning the world seriously, and must face the fact. Truly the world had been serious enough for him hitherto, but that he knew not. Now he was of an age when most boys were thieving for themselves, and he owed money like a man. True it was, as Mr Weech had said, that everybody – the whole Jago – was on the look-out for himself. Plainly he must take his share, lest it fall to others. As to the old gentleman's watch, he had but been beforehand. Through foolish ingenuousness he had lost it, and his father had got it, who could so much more easily steal one for himself; for he was a strong man, and had but to knock over another man at any night-time. Nobody should hear of future clicks but Mr Weech. Each for himself? Come, he must open his eyes.

VII

There was no chance all along Meakin Street. The chandlers and the keepers of cook-shops knew their neighbourhood too well to leave articles unguarded. Soon Dicky reached Shoreditch High Street. There things were a little more favourable. There were shops, as he well remembered, where goods were sometimes exhibited at the doors and outside the windows; but to-day there seemed to be no chance of the sort. As for the people, he was too short to try pockets, and indeed the High Street rarely gave passage to a more unpromising lot. Moreover, from robbery from the person he knew he must abstain, except for such uncommon opportunities as that of the Bishop's watch, for some years yet.

He hung about the doors and windows of shop after shop, hoping for a temporary absence of the shop-keeper, which might leave something snatchable. But he hoped in vain. From most shops he was driven away, for the Shoreditch trader is not slow to judge the purpose of a loitering boy. So he passed nearly two hours: when at last he saw his chance. It came in an advantageous part of High Street, not far from the 'Posties,' though on the opposite side of the way. A nurse-girl had left a perambulator at a shop door, while she bought inside, and on the perambulator lay loose a little skin rug, from under which a little fat leg stuck and waved aloft. Dicky set his back to the shop, and sidled to within reach of the perambulator. But it chanced that at this moment the nurse-girl stepped to the door, and she made a snatch at his arm as he lifted the rug. This he dropped at once, and was swinging leisurely away (for he despised the chase of any nurse-girl) when a man took him suddenly by the shoulder. Quick as a weasel, Dicky ducked under the man's arm, pulled his shoulder clear, dropped forward and rested an instant on the tips of his fingers to avoid the catch of the other hand, and shot out into the road. The man tried to follow, but Dicky ran under the belly of a standing horse, under the head of another that trotted, across the fore-platform of a tramcar – behind the driver's back – and so over to the 'Posties.'

He slouched into the Jago, disappointed. As he crossed Edge Lane, he was surprised to perceive a stranger – a toff, indeed – who walked slowly along, looking up right and left at the grimy habitations about him. He wore a tall hat, and his clothes were black, and of a pattern that Dicky remembered to have seen at the Elevation Mission. They were, in fact, the clothes of a clergyman. For himself, he was tall and soundly built, with a certain square muscularity of face, and of age about thirty-five. He had ventured into the Jago because the police were in possession, Dicky thought; and wondered in what plight he would leave, had he come at another time. But losing view of the stranger, and making his way along Old Jago Street, Dicky perceived that indeed the police were gone, and that the Jago was free.

He climbed the broken stairs and pushed into the first-floor back, hopeful, though more doubtful, of dinner. There was none. His mother, tied about the neck with rags, lay across the bed nursing the damage of yesterday, and commiserating herself. A yard from her lay Looey, sick and ailing in a new way, but disregarded. Dicky moved to lift her, but at that she cried the more, and he was fain to let her lie. She rolled her head from side to side, and raised her thin little hand vaguely toward it, with feverishly working fingers. Dicky felt her head and she screamed again. There was a lump at the side, a hard, sharp lump; got from the stones of the roadway yesterday. And there was a curious quality, a rather fearful quality, in the little wails: uneasily suggestive of the screams of Sally Green's victims.

Father was out, prowling. There was nothing eatable in the cupboard, and there seemed nothing at home worth staying for. He took another look at Looey, but refrained from touching her, and went out.

The opposite door on the landing was wide open, and he could hear nobody in the room. He had never seen this door open before, and now he ventured on a peep: for the tenants of the front

room were strangers, late arrivals, and interlopers. Their name was Roper. Roper was a pale cabinet-maker, fallen on evil times and out of work. He had a pale wife, disliked because of her neatly-kept clothes, her exceeding use of soap and water, her aloofness from gossip. She had a deadly pale baby; also there was a pale hunchbacked boy of near Dicky's age. Collectively the Ropers were disliked as strangers: because they furnished their own room, and in an obnoxiously complete style; because Roper did not drink, nor brawl, nor beat his wife, nor do anything all day but look for work; because all these things were a matter of scandalous arrogance, impudently subversive of Jago custom and precedent. Mrs Perrott was bad enough, but such people as these!..

Dicky had never before seen quite such a room as this. Everything was so clean: the floor, the windows, the bed-clothes. Also there was a strip of old carpet on the floor. There were two perfectly sound chairs; and two pink glass vases on the mantel-piece; and a clock. Nobody was in the room, and Dicky took a step farther. The clock attracted him again. It was a small, cheap, nickel-plated, cylindrical thing, of American make, and it reminded him at once of the Bishop's watch. It was not gold, certainly, but it was a good deal bigger, and it could go – it was going. Dicky stepped back and glanced at the landing. Then he darted into the room, whipped the clock under the breast of the big jacket, and went for the stairs.

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