The Coxswain's Bride
Vol.II

By
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Chapter 1.
Jack Frost and SonsA Short Story.

One year in the last quarter of the present century John Frost, Esquire, of Arctic Hall, paid an unusually long visit to the British Islands.

John, or Jack, Frost, as he was familiarly called by those who did not fear him, was a powerful fellow; an amazingly active, vigorous, self willed fellow, whom it was difficult to resist, and, in some circumstances, quite impossible to overcome.

Jack was a giant. Indeed, it is not improbable that he was also a “giant killer,”an insolent, self assertive, cold hearted giant, who swaggered with equal freedom into the palaces of the rich and the cottages of the poor; but he did not by any means meet with the same reception everywhere.

In palaces and mansions he was usually met in the entrance hall by a sturdy footman who kicked him out and slammed the door in his face, while in cottages and lowly dwellings he was so feebly opposed that he gained entrance easilyfor he was a bullying shameless fellow, who forced his way wherever he couldand was induced to quit only after much remonstrance and persuasion, and even then, he usually left an unpleasant flavour of his visit behind him.

But there were some abodes in which our hero met with no opposition at all,

where the inmates scarcely made any attempt to keep him out, but remained still and trembled, or moaned feebly, while he walked in and sat down beside them.

Jack was somewhat of a deceiver too. He had, for the most part, a bright, beaming, jovial outward aspect, which made the bitter coldness of his heart all the more terrible by contrast. He was most deadly in his feelings in calm weather, but there were occasions when he took pleasure in sallying forth accompanied by his like minded sons, Colonel Wind and Major Snow. And it was a tremendous sight, that few people cared to see except through windows, when those three, arm in arm, went swaggering through the land together.

One Christmas morning, at the time we write of, Jack and his two sons went careering, in a happy go lucky sort of way, along the London streets towards the “west end,” blinding people’s eyes as they went, reversing umbrellas, overturning old women, causing young men to stagger, and treating hats in general as if they had been black footballs. Turning into Saint James’s Park they rushed at the royal palace, but, finding that edifice securely guarded from basement to roof tree, they turned round, and, with fearless audacity, assaulted the Admiralty and the Horse Guardstaking a shot at the clubs in passing. It need scarcely be recorded that they made no impression whatever on those centres of wealth and power.

Undismayedfor Jack and his sons knew nothing either of fear or favourthey went careering westward until they came to a palatial mansion, at the half open front door of which a pretty servant girl stood peeping out. It was early. Perhaps she was looking for the milkmanpossibly for the policeman. With that quick perception which characterises men of war, Major Snow saw and seized his opportunity. Dashing forward he sprang into the hall. Colonel Wind, not a whit less prompt, burst the door wide open, and the three assailants tumbled over each other as they took possession of the outworks of the mansion.

But “Jeames” was not far distant. The screams of Mary drew him forth, he leaped into the hall, drove out the intruders, and shut the door with a crash, but with no further damage to the foe than the snipping off part of Major Snow’s tails, which Mary swept up into a dust shovel and deposited in the coal hole, or some such dark region below.

Our trio possessed neither fear nor pride. They were also destitute of taste, and had no respect for persons. Treating their repulse as a good joke, they turned round and went hilariously along the Strand, embracing every one they met, young and old, rich and poor, pretty and plain, with pointed impartiality, until they reached the City. There we will leave them to revel amongst the poor, while we return to the mansion at the west end.

In two snug bedrooms thereof two young men lay in their comfortable beds, partially awake and yawningthe one flat on his back as if laid out for his last sleep; the other coiled into a bundle with the bedclothes, as if ready to be carried off to the laundry with the next washing. The rooms were connected by a door which stood open, for the occupants were twin brothers; their united ages amounting to forty years.

“Ned,” said the straight one to the bundle.

“Well, Tom,” (sleepily).

“Did you hear that noiselike a cannon shot?”

“Ya–i–o–u yessom’ing tumbleddoor bang’d,” (snore).

“Hallo, Ned!” cried Tom, suddenly leaping out of bed and beginning to dress in haste; “why, it’s Christmas morning! I had almost forgot. A Merry Christmas to you, my boy!”

“M’rry Kissm’s, ol’ man, but don’ waken me. What’s use o’ gettin’ up?”

“The use?” echoed Tom, proceeding rapidly with his toilet; “why, Ned, the use of rising early is that it enables a man to get through with his work in good time, and I’ve a deal of work to do to day at the east end.”

“So ’v’ I,” murmured Ned, “at th’ wes’ end.”

“Indeed. What are you going to do?”

“Sk–t.”

“Sk–t? What’s that?”

“Skateol’ man, let m’ ’lone,” growled Ned, as he uncoiled himself to some extent and re arranged the bundle for another snooze.

With a light laugh Tom Westlake left his brother to enjoy his repose, and descended to the breakfast room, where his sister Matilda, better known as Matty, met him with a warm reception.

Everything that met him in that breakfast parlour was warm. The fire, of course, was warm, and it seemed to leap and splutter with a distinctly Christmas morning air; the curtains and carpets and arm chairs were warm and cosy in aspect; the tea urn was warm, indeed it was hot, and so were the muffins, while the atmosphere itself was unusually warm. The tiny thermometer on the chimney piece told that it was 65 degrees of Fahrenheit.

Outside, the self registering thermometer indicated 5 degrees below zero!

“Why, Matty,” exclaimed Tom, as he looked frowningly at the instrument, “I have not seen it so low as that for years. It will freeze the Thames if it lasts long enough.”

Matty made no reply, but stood with her hands clasped on her brother’s arm gazing contemplatively at the driving snow.

“What are you thinking about?” asked Tom.

“About the poor,” answered Matty, as she went and seated herself at the breakfast table. “On such a terrible morning as this I feel so inexpressibly selfish in sitting down to an overflowing meal in the midst of such warmth and comfort, when I know that there are hundreds and thousands of men and women and children all round us who have neither fire nor food sufficientlittle clothing, and no comfort. It is dreadful,” added Matty, as an unusually fierce gust dashed the snow against the windows.

Tom was like minded with his sister, but he could not suppress a smile as he looked into her pretty little anxious face.

“Yes, Matty, it is dreadful,” he replied, “and the worst of it is that we can do so little, so very little, to mend matters. Yet I don’t feel as you do about the selfishness of enjoying a good breakfast in comfortable circumstances, for it is God who has given us all that we have, as well as the power to enjoy it. I grant, that if we simply enjoyed our good things, and neither thought of nor cared for the poor, we should indeed be most abominably selfish, but happily that is not our case this morning. Have we not risen an hour earlier than usual to go out and do what we can to mitigate the sorrows of the poor? Are we not about to face the bitter blast and the driving snow on this Christmas morning for that very purpose? and should we not be rendered much less capable of doing so, if we were to start off on our mission with cold bodies and half filledI beg pardon, pass the muffins, dear. Besides, sister mine, if you were to go out on such a morning cold and underfed, would it not be probable that I should have to go and fetch a doctor for you instead of taking you out to help me in aiding and comforting poor people?”

“That may be all very true, Tom,” returned Matty, with a dissatisfied and puzzled look, “but I cannot help feeling that I have so much, so very much, more than I need of everything, while the thousands I speak of have so littleso very little. Why could not rich people like us be content with plainer things, and use fewer things, and so have more to give to the poor?”

“You have broached a very wide and profound subject, Matty, and it would

probably take us a week to go into it exhaustively, but a few words may suffice to show you that your remedy would not meet the case. Suppose that all the people in England were all at once smitten with your desire to retrench in order to have more to spare to the poorand were to act upon their convictions; to determine that henceforth they would live on the plainest food, such as potatoes, mutton, and bread; what, I ask you, would become of the great army of confectioners? Would they not be thrown out of employment, and help, perhaps, to swell the ranks of the poor? If the rich ceased to buy pictures, what would become of painters? If they gave up books, (horrible to think of!) what would be the consequences to authors, and what the result to themselves? If carriages and horses were not kept, what would become of coachmen and grooms and ostlersto say nothing of coach makers, saddlers, harness makers, and their innumerable dependants? Noliving plainly or simply is not what is wanted, but living reasonablyaccording to one's means. Then, as to your having, as you say, much more than you needthat does not injure the poor, for nothing of it is wasted. Does not part of the surplus go to Mary and James and the other servants, and much of what they do not consume goes in charity, directly, to the poor themselves?"

"Well, but," returned Matty, with the distressed and puzzled look still unabated, "though all you tell me may be quite true, it does not in the least degree alter the fact that there is something quite wrong in the condition of the poor of our great cities, which ought to be remedied."

"Of course it does not, little woman, but it relieves my mind, and it ought to relieve yours, as to the selfishness of enjoying a good breakfast."

"But, surely," resumed Matty, with a slightly indignant look and tone, "surely you don't mean to tell me that there is no remedy for the miserable condition of the poor, and that the rich must just sigh over it, or shut their eyes to it, while they continue to revel in luxury?"

"How you fly to extremes, sister!" said Tom, with a laugh, as he neatly cut the top off a fourth egg. "I combat your erroneous views, and straightway you charge me, by implication, with having no views at all! A remedy there surely is, but the wisest among us are not agreed as to what it ischiefly, I think, because the remedy is not simple but extremely complex. It cannot be stated in a few words. It consists in the wise and prompt application of multiform means"

"Brother," interrupted Matty with a smile, "do you think I am to be turned from my quest after this great truth by the stringing together of words without meaningat least words vague and incomprehensible?"

“By no means, Matty. I hope that nothing will ever turn you from your quest after the best method of helping the poor. But my words are not meant to be vague. By multiform means I would indicate legislation in numerous channels, and social effort in all its ramifications, besides the correction of many erroneous modes of thoughtsuch, for instance, as the putting of the less before the greater”

“Tom,” again interrupted Matty, “I think it is about time to go and put on my things.”

“Not so, sister dear,” said Tom impressively; “I intend that you shall hear me out. I think that you put the less before the greater when you talk of ‘giving’ to the poor instead of ‘considering’ the poor. The greater, you know, includes the less. Consideration includes judicious giving, and the teaching of Scripture is, not to give to, but to consider, the poor. Now you may be off and get readyas quickly as you can, too, for it would never do to keep the poor waiting breakfast!”

With a light laugh and a vigorous stepthe result of goodwill to mankind, good intentions, good feeding, and, generally, good circumstancesMatilda Westlake ran upstairs to her room at the top of the house to put on a charming little winter bonnet, a dear little cloak lined with thick fur, and everything else to match, while Tom busied himself in meditating on the particular passage of God’s Word which he hoped, by the Spirit’s influence, to bring home to the hearts of some of the poor that Christmas morning.

Half an hour after these two had gone forth to do battle with John Frost and Sons, Edward Westlake sauntered into the breakfast room, his right hand in his pocket and his left twirling the end of an exceedingly juvenile moustache.

Turning his back to the fire he perused the morning paper and enjoyed himself thoroughly, while James re arranged the table for another sumptuous meal.

Ned was by no means a bad fellow. On the contrary, his companions thought and called him a “jolly good fellow.” His father was a jolly, though a gouty old widower. Perhaps it was owing to the fact that there was no mother in the household that Ned smoked a meerschaum in the breakfast room while he read the paper.

“Have my skates been sharpened?” he asked, looking over the top of the paper.

James said that they had been sharpened, and were then lying ready on the hall table.

Sauntering to the window Ned looked out, and, James having retired, he made a few remarks himself, which showed the direction of his thoughts.

“Capital! Ice will be splendid. Snow won’t matter. Lots of men to sweep it. Looks as if the wind would fall, and there’s a little bit of blue sky. Even if it doesn’t clear, the pond is well sheltered. I do like a sharp, stinging, frosty day. Makes one’s blood career so pleasantly!”

With such agreeable thoughts and a splendid appetite Ned Westlake sat down to breakfast. Thereafter he put on a thick overcoat, edged with sable, a thick pair of boots and softly lined gloves, and went out with the skates swinging on his arm.

Jack Frost and his two sons were still holding high revelry outside. They met him with impartial violence, but Ned bent forward with a smile of good humoured defiance, and went on his way unchecked.

Not so a stout and short old female of the coster monger class, who, after a series of wild gyrations that might have put a dancing dervish to shame, bore down on Ned after the manner of a fat teetotum, and finally launched herself into his arms.

“Hallo old girlsteady,” exclaimed Ned, holding her up with an effort. “You carry too much sail to venture abroad in such weather.”

“Which it were my only one!” gasped the old woman, holding out her umbrella that had been reversed and obviously shattered beyond repair. Then, looking up at Ned, “You’d better leave a go of me, young man. What will the neighbours think of us?”

Which remark she uttered sternlyall the more that she had securely hooked herself to the railings and could afford to cast off her friend.

With a solemn assurance that he esteemed her, “the sweetest of the fair,” Ned went smilingly on his way, receiving in reply, “La, now, who’d ’a’ thought it!”

Having twisted this lady’s bonnet off, blown her unkempt hair straight out, and otherwise maltreated her, Colonel Wind, with his father and brother, went raging along the streets until he came to the neighbourhood of Whitechapel. The three seemed rather fond of this region, and no wonder; for, although never welcomed, they found themselves strong enough to force an entrance into many a poor home, and to remain in possession.

Swaggering, in their own noisy and violent manner, into several courts and blind alleys, they caught up all the lighter articles of rubbish that lay about,

hurled them against the frail and cracked windowssome of which they broke, and others of which they could not break by reason of their having been broken already. They did what was next best, however,drove in the old hats and coats and other garments with which the square holes had been inefficiently stopped.

“Jolly! ain’t it?” remarked a street boy, with a ruddy face and hair blown straight on end all round, to another street boy with a cast iron look and a red noseboth being powerfully robust.

“Prime!” asserted the knight of the red nose.

And then both went eagerly to take liberties with a neighbouring pump, from the spout of which hung an icicle like a stalactite, the droppings from which, at an earlier period, had formed a considerable stalagmite on the stones below.

It is probable that the sick old man on the poor bed in the small room close to the pump did not think the state of matters either “jolly” or “prime,” for, besides being very old, he was very weak and thin and cold and hungry; in addition to which Jack Frost had seated himself on the rickety chair beside the empty grate, and seemed bent on remainingthe colonel having previously blown open the door and removed a garment which had sheltered the old man’s head, thus permitting the major to sprinkle a miniature drift on his pillow.

“I hardly like to leave you, gran’father, in such blustery weather,” said a little maiden of about ten years of age, with filthy garments and a dirty face, who, if she had been washed and dressed, would have been distinctly pretty, but who, in the circumstances, was rather plain. As she spoke she re adjusted the garment screen and removed the snowdrift.

“Don’t say that, Martha,” replied the old man in a thin weak voiceit had been strong and deep and resonant once, but Time and Want and Disease play sad havoc with strong men.

“You must go, darling,” resumed the old man after a few seconds’ pause to recover breath. “You’ve no chance of a breakfast otherwise. Andperhapsthey may give you a bit to bring home for”

Martha eagerly interrupted the hesitating voice,and it was easily interrupted! “Yes, yes, gran’father. They’ll be sure to let me bring home some for you. I’ll be quite, quite sure to do it.”

She made the promise with great decision, as well she might, for she had made up her mind to pocket all the food that was given to her except just a small

morsel, which she would nibble in order to make believe that she was feeding!

“Lock the door and put the key in your pocket,” said the old man, while the child tucked in about him the thin torn counterpane which formed the only covering to his straw bed. “An’ don’t fear for me, darling. The Lord is with me. Be sure to eat as much as you can.”

Having regard to her secret intentions, Martha refrained from pledging herself, but she laughed and nodded significantly as she quitted the cold, dismal, and shabby room.

It was little Martha’s first experience of a “free breakfast.” She had, indeed, heard of such a thing before, but had not up to that time met with anything of the kind, so she advanced to “the hall” with some timidity and much expectation.

The hall was very full, and, as poor little Martha was rather late, she could not manage to crush in much beyond the door. Besides, being small, she could see nothing. In these depressing circumstances her heart began to sink, when her attention was attracted by a slight stir outside the door. A lady and gentleman were coming in. It so happened that the lady in passing trod upon one of Martha’s cold little toes, and drew from the child a sharp cry.

“Oh, my dear, dear little girl!” cried the shocked lady, with a gush of self reproach and sympathy, “I’m so sorryso very, very sorry. It was so stupid of me! Have I hurt you much, dear little girl? Comecome with me.”

“Bring her to the stove, Matty, there’s more room there to have it looked to,” said the gentleman, in a kind voice.

Much consoled by all this, though still whimpering, little Martha suffered herself to be led to the front seats, and set on a bench just below the platform, where she began to bloom under the genial influence of the stove, and to wonder, with inexpressible surprise, at the mighty sea of upturned faces in front of her. As for the toe, it was utterly forgotten. The lady’s foot, you see, being almost as light as her heart, had done it no serious injury. Nevertheless, she continued for a few minutes to inspect it earnestly and inquire for it tenderly, regardless of dirt!

“You’re sure it is better, dear little child?”

“Oh yes, ma’am, thank you. I don’t feel it at all now. An’ it’s so nice to feel warm again!”

What a depth of meaning was unwittingly given to the last two words by the

emphasis of the child voice.“Warm”“Again!” The lady almost burst into tears as she thought of all that they implied. But her services were required at the harmonium. With a parting pat on Martha’s curly head, and a bright smile, she hurried away to ascend the platform.

The preliminaries of a feast at which most of the feasters are cold and hungrysome of them starvingshould not be long. Full well did Tom Westlake know and appreciate this truth, and, being the donor, originator, and prime mover in the matter, he happily had it all his own way.

In the fewest possible words, and in a good loud voice which produced sudden silence, he asked God to give His blessing with the food provided, and to send His Holy Spirit into the hearts of all present, so that they might be made to hunger and thirst for Jesus, the Bread and Water of Life. Then the poor people had scarcely recovered from their surprise at the brevity of the prayer, when they were again charmed to silence by the sweet strains of the harmonium. You see, they had not yet become blasé and incapable of enjoying anything short of an organ. Indeed, there were some among them who deliberately said they preferred a harmonium to an organ!

But no instrument either of ancient or modern invention could drown the clatter that ensued when enormous mugs of earthenware were distributed to the company, by more or less rich and well off “workers”; so the clatter and the hymns went on together until each lung was filled with some delectable fluid, smoking hot, and each mouth crammed with excellent bread and meat. Then comparative quiet ensued, during which temporary calm Tom read a few verses of the Word of God, commenting on them briefly in language so forcible that it went right home to many hearts, yet so simple that even little Martha understood it.

True to her intention, little Martha, although much surprised and charmed and perplexed by all that was going on around her, did not forget to pocket something for gran’father. She was met, however, by an exasperating difficulty at the very outset. Her pocket was not large enough to contain the huge roll which, with some meat, had been put hastily into her small hand by a lady with a red rose in her bonnet. To achieve her object with the roll and meat in one hand and the mug in the other was, she found, impossible, so she set the mug on the floor between her feet and proceeded to wrestle with the loaf and pocket, having previously torn off a very small portion of the bread for her own use. Still the loaf was too large; so she tore off another morsel, and finally, after a severe struggle, succeeded in getting it and the bit of meat in.

“You’ll go for to kick it over, if you don’t mind,” said a small boy near her, referring to the mug.

“You mind your own businessImperence!” replied Martha, sharply. It must be remembered that she was a child of the “slums.”

“Wot a cheeky little shrimp it is,” retorted the boy, with as much of a grin as a stuffed mouth would admit of.

Just then Matilda Westlake, having finished a hymn, and being mindful of the little toe, came quietly down to where Martha was sitting.

“Why, dear child,” she said, in surprise, “have they not given you something to eat?”

“Oh yes, ma’am. But I’ve”

She was going to say, “I’ve eaten it,” but gran’father had so earnestly impressed on her mind the sinfulness of telling lies, that she felt constrained to hesitate, and, with a trembling lip, finished by saying she had eaten some of it.

“And what has become of the rest, dear?”

“Please, miss, she’ve putt it in ’er pocket,” said “Imperence” promptly.

Without noticing the remark, Matty moved so as to make herself an effectual screen between Imperence and Martha.

“Tell me, dear child,” she said, stooping low and putting a gentle hand on Martha’s shoulder, “are you not hungry?”

“Oh yes,” answered the little one quickly; “I’m so ’ungry. You can’t think ’ow ’ungry; but I promised toto”

At this point her lip quivered, and she began to cry quietly.

“Stay, don’t tell me anything more about it, dear, till you have breakfasted. Here, eat this before you say another word.”

She took a roll from the basket of a passing “worker” and put it in the child’s hand. Nothing loth, Martha began to eat and drink, mingling a warm tear or two with the hot soup, and venting a sob now and then as she proceeded.

Watching her for a few moments, Matty left her.

In passing she stopped and said to Imperence, in a whisper of terrible intensity, “If you speak to that girl again you shall haveno more.”

No more! To be “hanged by the neck till you are dead” would not have

sounded so appalling just at that time. So Imperence collapsed.

It is not our purpose to go much further into the details of the feast. Suffice it to say that the poorest of the poor were there; that they were encouraged to eat as much as possible, and allowed to carry away what they could not eat, and there is reason to believe that, judging from the prominence of pockets, a considerable quantity found its way to hungry mouths which had been found incapable of attending the feast.

Among those who did great execution in the pocketing line was, as you may well believe, little Martha. Finding, to her ineffable joy, that there was no limit assigned to consumption, and that pocketing was not esteemed a sin, she proceeded, after stuffing herself, to stuff to overflowing the pocket with which she had previously wrestled, as already described, and then attempted to fill the pocket on the other side. She did so in utter and child like forgetfulness of the fact that she had recently lost several small articles in consequence of the condition of that pocket, and her memory was not awakened until, having just completed the satisfactory filling of it, she beheld, or rather felt, the entire mass of edibles descending to the floor, proving that the pocket was indeed a very bottomless pit.

“Never mind, little one,” said Tom Westlake, coming forward at the moment, for he had just closed the meeting; “I’ll find a bag for you to put it in. I hope the toe is all right.”

“Oh yes, sir, thank you, it’s quite well,” answered Martha, blushing through the dirt on her face, as she eyed the fallen food anxiously.

“Tell me now, little one,” continued Tom, sitting down on the bench and drawing the child gently towards him, “whom are you pocketing all these good things for?not for yourself, I’m quite sure of that.”

“Oh dear, no, sir; it’s for gran’father.”

“Indeed. Is grandfather very poor?”

“Oh yes, sir, very, very poor; an’ he’s got nobody but me to take care of him.”

“If that be so, who is taking care of him just now?” asked Matty, who had joined her brother, leaving another “worker” at the harmonium to play the people out,a difficult thing to do, by the way, for the people seemed very unwilling to go.

You see, among other things, Jack Frost and Sons could gain no footing in that hall, and the people knew only too well that the firm was in great force

awaiting them outside.

“Nobody’s takin’ care on ’im, ma’am,” replied Martha, somewhat shyly. “I locked ’im in, an’ he’s takin’ care of hisself.”

“Would you like to give grandfather anything in particular, little woman, if a fairy were to offer to give it you?”

“Oh, wouldn’t I just?”

“Yes? What would you ask for?”

Martha pursed her little mouth and knitted her brows in thought for a minute. Then she said slowly, “I’d ask for a mug of hot soup, an’ a blanket, an’ some coals, andoh! I forgot, a teapot, for ours is cracked an’ won’t ’old in now.”

“Do you live far from this hall?” asked Tom.

“No, sir, quite close.”

“Come, Matty, you and I will go with this little one and see grandfather. What is your name, child?”

“Martha Burns, sir.”

“Well, Martha, give me your hand, and come along.”

They were soon in the shabby little room,for Martha was eager to give the food to the old man. Of course Jack Frost and Sons were still in possession, but there had come another visitor during the child’s absence, whom they were scarce prepared to meet.

Death sat beside the lowly bed. He had not yet laid his hand on his victim, but his chill presence was evidently felt.

“Darling, I’m glad you’ve come,” said the old man, faintly. “I’ve been longing so for you. Give me your hand, dear. I’m so coldso cold.”

He shivered as he spoke until the miserable bed shook. Poor Martha forgot the food in her anxiety, for a striking change had come over gran’fathersuch as she had never seen before. She took his thin hand in hers, and began to weep softly.

But Matilda Westlake did not forget the food. She took up the tin can in which it had been brought there, and poured some of the still warm contents into a cracked soup plate that stood on the table. Finding a pewter spoon, she at once put her hand under the pillow, and raising the old man’s head gently, began to

feed him like a child. Meanwhile Tom Westlake took off his thick overcoat and spread it over the bed. Then he went out, bought some sticks and coal from a neighbour, and, returning, soon kindled a fire in the rusty grate.

The old man did not seem surprised. His face wore a dazed, yet thoroughly pleased, look as he quietly accepted these attentions. All the time he kept fast hold of Martha's hand, and smiled to her once or twice. It was evident that he relished the soup. Only once he broke silence to thank them and say, "Jesus sent you, I suppose?"

"Yes, Jesus sent us," replied Matty, thoroughly meaning what she said.

At that moment Death raised his hand and laid it gently on the old man's brow. The hoary head bowed to the summons, and, with a soft sigh, the glad spirit fled to that region where suffering cannot enter.

Oh, it was sad to witness the child grief when Martha at last came to understand that gran'father was really gone. And it required no little persuasion to induce her to leave the lowly sordid room that she had known as "home."

While his sister comforted the child, Tom went to the "authorities" to inform them that an old pauper had gone the way of all flesh.

When at last Martha permitted her new friends to remove her, she was led by Miss Westlake to the not far distant house of a lady friend, whose sympathies with the suffering, the sorrowful, and the fallen were so keen that she had given up all and gone to dwell in the midst of them, in the sanguine hope of rescuing some. To this lady's care Martha was in the meantime committed, and then Tom and his sister went their way.

Their way led them to a very different scene not far from the same region.

"We're rather late," remarked Tom, consulting his watch as they turned into a narrow street.

"Not too late, I think," said his sister.

"I hope not, for I should be sorry to go in upon them at dinner time."

They were not too late. David Butts, whom they were about to visit, was a dock labourer. In early youth he had been a footman, in which capacity he had made the acquaintance of the Westlakes' nursery maid, and, having captivated her heart, had carried her off in triumph and married her.

David had not been quite as steady as might have been desired. He had

acquired, while in service, a liking for beer, which had degenerated into a decided craving for brandy, so that he naturally came down in the world, until, having lost one situation after another, he finally, with his poor wife and numerous children, was reduced to a state bordering on beggary. But God, who never forgets His fallen creatures, came to this man's help when the tide with him was at its lowest ebb. A humble minded city missionary was sent to him. He was the means of bringing him to Jesus. The Saviour, using one of the man's companions as an instrument, brought him to a temperance meeting, and there an eloquent, though uneducated, speaker flung out a rope to the struggling man in the shape of a blue ribbon. David Butts seized it, and held on for life. His wife gladly sewed a bit of it on every garment he possessedincluding his night shirtand the result was that he got to be known at the docks as a steady, dependable man, and found pretty constant employment.

How far Matilda Westlake was instrumental in this work of rescue we need not stop to tell. It is enough to say that she had a hand in itfor her heart yearned towards the nurse, who had been very kind to her when she was a little child.

Jack Frost and his sons, with their usual presumption, were in close attendance on the Westlakes when they knocked at David's door, and when it was opened they rudely brushed past the visitors and sought to enter, but a gush of genial heat from a roaring fire effectually stopped Jack and the major on the threshold, and almost killed them. Colonel Wind, however, succeeded in bursting in, overturning a few light articles, causing the flames to sway, leap, and roar wildly, and scattering ashes all over the room, but his triumph was short lived. The instant the visitors entered he was locked out, and the door shut against him with a bang.

"It do come rather awkward, sir, 'avin' no entrance 'all," said David, as he made the door fast. "If we even 'ad a porch it would 'elp to keep the wind and snow hout, but I ain't complainin', sir. I've on'y too good reason to be thankful."

"Dear Miss Matilda," said the old nurse, dusting a wooden chair with her apron, and beaming all over with joy, "it's good for sore eyes to see you. Don't mind the child'n, miss, an' do sit down near the fire. I'm sure your feet must be wetsuch dreadful weather."

"No, indeed, nurse,thank you," said Miss Westlake, laughing as she sat down, "my feet are not a bit wet. The frost is so hard that everything is quite dry."

"Now it's no use to tell me that, Miss Matty," said Mrs Butts, with the memory of nursing days strong upon her. "You was always such a dear, thoughtless child! Don't you remember that day when you waded in baby's bath, an' then

said you wasn't wet a bit, only a very little, an' you rather liked it? Indeed she did: you needn't laugh, Master Tom, I remember it as well as if it happened yesterday."

"I don't in the least doubt you, Mrs Butts," said Tom, "I was only laughing at my sister's idea of dryness. But you must not let us interrupt you in your cooking operations, else we will go away directly. Just go about it as if we were not here, for I have some business matters to talk over with your husband."

"Go away?" echoed Mrs Butts; "you must not talk of going away till you've had a bite of lunch with us. It's our dinner, you know, but lawks! what do it matter what you calls it so long as you've got it to eat? An' there's such a splendid apple dumplin' in the pot, miss; you see, it's Tommy's birthday, for he was born on a Christmas Day, an' he's very fond of apple dumplin', is Tommy."

The six children, of various ages and sizes scattered about the small room, betrayed lively interest in this invitationsome hoping that it would be accepted; others as evidently hoping that it would be declined. As for Tommy, his fear that the dumpling would be too small for the occasion filled his heart with anxiety that showed itself strongly in his face, but he was promptly relieved by Miss Matty assuring his mother that to stay was impossible, as they had other visits to pay that day.

Thus the lady and nurse chatted of past and present days, while Tom Westlake talked "business" with the dock labourer.

"You seem to be getting on pretty comfortably now," remarked Tom.

"Yes, sir, thank God I am. Ever since I was enabled to cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' things 'as gone well with me. An' the puttin' on o' the blue ribbon, sir, 'as done me a power o' good. You see, before that I was sorely tempted by comrades offerin' me a glass, and by my own wish to 'ave a glass, but when I mounted the blue I was let alone, though they chaffed me now an' then, an' I felt it was no use thinkin' about it, 'owever much I might wish for it. The missus, bless 'er 'art, sewed a bit o' blue on my night shirt in fun, but d'ee know, sir, I do believe it's that 'as cured me o' dreamin' about it, as I used to do."

"I'm glad to hear that, Butts," said Tom, with a laugh. "Now, tell me; how long is it since you tasted strong drink?"

"Six months this very day, sir."

“And are you satisfied that you are better without it?”

“Better without it, sir,” repeated Butts, with energy, “in course I ambetter in body and better in soul, also in pocket. Of course you know, sir, we don’t carry on every day with such fires an’ dinners as we’re a goin’ in for to dayfor Christmas on’y comes once a year, and sometimes we’ve been slack at the docks, an’ once or twice I’ve bin laid up, so that we’ve bin pinched a bit now an’ then, but we’ve bin able to make the two ends meet, and the older child’n is beginnin’ to turn in a penny now an’ again, so, you see, sir, though the fires ain’t always bright, an Jack Frost do manage to git in through the key ’ole rather often just now, on the whole we’re pretty comfortable.”

“I’m glad to hear it, Butts; very glad to hear it indeed,” said Tom, “because I’m anxious to help you, and I make it a point only to help those who help themselves. Six months of steadiness goes a long way to prove that your craving for drink has been cured, and that your reformation is genuine; therefore, I am able now to offer you a situation as porter in a bank, which for some time I have kept open on purpose to be ready for you. How will that suit youeh?”

Whatever David Butts replied, or meant to reply, could only be gathered from his gratified expression, for at that moment his voice was drowned by a shriek of delight from the youngest children in consequence of Mrs Butts, at Matilda’s request, having removed the lid of the pot which held the dumpling, and let out a deliciously scented cloud of steam. It was almost too much for the little ones, whose mouths watered with anticipation, and who felt half inclined to lay violent hands on the pot and begin dinner without delay.

“Now, I know by the smell that it is quite ready, so we will say good bye at once,” said Matilda, getting up with a smile, and drawing her warm cloak round her. “Be sure to send your eldest girl to me to morrow along with your husband.”

“And come early, Butts,” said Tom Westlake, buttoning up his coat.

“You may depend on me, sir.”

“Stand by to shut the door quickly after us,” added Tom as he grasped the handle, “else the wind will get in and blow the fire about.”

The brother and sister, being young and active, were pretty smart in making their exit, and David Butts, being used to doors, was not slow to shut his own, but they could not altogether baffle the colonel, for he was waiting outside. Indeed, he had been whistling with furious insolence through the keyhole all the time of the visit. Sliding in edgewise, at the moment of opening, he

managed to scatter the ashes again, and whirl about some of the light articles before he was fairly expelled.

Thereafter, along with his father and brother, he went riotously after Tom and Matilda Westlake, sometimes shrieking over their heads; now and then dashing on in front, and, whirling round in an eddy, plunging straight back into their faces, but they could make nothing of it. The brother and sister merely laughed at them, and defied them to do their worst, even, in the joy of their hearts, going the length of saying to several utter but beaming strangers, that it was “splendid Christmas weather.” And so it was,to the young and strong. Not so, alas! to the old and feeble.

It almost seemed as if Colonel Wind and Major Snow had taken offence at this last sally, for about that time of the day they forsook their father and left Londonprobably to visit the country. At all events, the clouds cleared away, the sky became blue, and the sun shone out gloriouslythough without perceptibly diminishing the frost.

After spending another hour or two in paying visits, during which they passed abruptly, more than once from poverty stricken scenes of moderate mirth to abodes of sickness and desolation, Tom and Matilda, by means of ’bus and cab, at last found themselves in the neighbourhood of the Serpentine.

“What say you to a turn on the ice, Matty?”

“Charming,” cried Matty.

Society on the Serpentine, when frozen over, is not very select, but the brother and sister were not particular on that point just then. They hired skates; they skimmed about over the well swept surface; they tripped over innumerable bits of stick or stone or orange peel; they ran into, or were run into by, various beings whose wrong headedness induced a preference for skating backwards. In short, they conducted themselves as people usually do on skates, and returned home pretty well exhausted and blooming.

That evening, after a family dinner, at which a number of young cousins and other relatives were present, Tom and his sister left the festive circle round the fire, and retired to a glass conservatory opening out of the drawing room. There was a sofa in it and there they found Ned Westlake extended at full length. He rose at once and made room for them.

“Well, Ned, how have you enjoyed yourself to day?” asked Tom.

“Oh, splendidly! There was such a jolly party in Wharton’s groundsmost of them able to skate splendidly. The pond is so sheltered that the wind scarcely

affected us, and a staff of sweepers cleared away the snow as fast as it fell. Afterwards, when it cleared up and the sun shone through the trees, it was absolutely magnificent. It's the jolliest day I've had on the ice for years, though I'm almost knocked up by it. Jovially fatigued, in fact. But where have you been?"

"We also have been skating," said Matilda.

"Indeed! I thought you had intended to spend the day somewhere in the east end attending some of those free breakfasts, and visiting the poor, or something of that sortas if there were not enough of city missionaries, and sisters of mercy, or charity, or whatever you call them, to look after such things."

"You are right, Ned," said Tom, "such was our intention, and we carried it out too. It was only at the end of the day that we took to skating on the Serpentine, and, considering the number of people we have run into, or overturned, or tumbled over, we found a couple of hours of it quite sufficient."

From this point Tom Westlake "harked back" and related his experiences of the day. He possessed considerable power of graphic delineation, and gradually aroused the interest of his gay and volatile but kindly disposed brother.

"Ned," said he, at last, "do you really believe in the truth of these words, 'Blessed are they that consider the poor?'"

"Yes, Tom, I do," replied Ned, becoming suddenly serious.

What Tom said to his brother after that we will not relate, but the result was that, before that Christmas evening closed, he succeeded in convincing Ned that a day of "jolly good fun" may be rendered inexpressibly more "jolly," by being commenced with an effort to cheer and lighten the lot of those into whose sad lives there enter but a small amount of jollity and far too little fun.

Chapter 1-2.
A Double RescueIntroduction.

It is a curious and interesting fact that Christmas tide seemed to have a peculiar influence on the prospects of our hero Jack Matterby all through his life. All the chief events of his career, somehow, happened on or about Christmas Day.

Jack was born, to begin with, on a Christmas morning. His father, who was a farmer in the middle ranks of life, rejoiced in the fact, esteeming it full of

promise for the future. So did his mother. Jack himself did not at first seem to have any particular feeling on the subject. If one might judge his opinions by his conduct, it seemed that he was rather displeased than otherwise at having been born; for he spent all the first part of his natal day in squalling and making faces, as though he did not like the world at all, and would rather not have come into it.

“John, dear,” said his mother to his father, one day not long after his birth, “I’m so glad he is a boy. He might have been a girl, you know.”

“No, Molly; he could never have been a girl!” replied the husband, as he gently patted his wife’s shoulder.

“Now, don’t laugh at me, John, dear. You know what I mean. But what shall we call him?”

“John, of course,” replied the farmer, with decision. “My father was called John, and his father was called John, and also his grandfather, and so on back, I have no doubt, to the very beginning of time.”

“Nay, John,” returned his wife, simply, “that could hardly be; for however many of your ancestors may have been Johns, the first, you know, was Adam.”

“Why, Molly, you’re getting to be quite sharp,” returned the farmer. “Nevertheless this little man is to be John, like the rest of us.”

Mrs Matterby, being meek, gave in; but she did so with a sigh, for she wished the little one to be named Joseph, after her own deceased father.

Thus it came to pass that the child was named John. The name was expanded to Johnny during the first period of childhood. Afterwards it was contracted to Jack, and did not attain to the simple grandeur of John till the owner of it became a man.

In the Johnny period of life our hero confined his attention almost exclusively to smashing and overturning. To overturn and to destroy were his chief amusements. He made war on crockery to such an extent that tea cups and saucers were usually scarce in the family. He assaulted looking glasses so constantly, that there was, ere long, barely enough of mirror left for his father to shave in. As to which fact the farmer used to say, “Never mind, Molly. Don’t look so down hearted, lass. If he only leaves a bit enough to see a corner of my chin and the half of my razor, that will do well enough.” No window in the family mansion was thoroughly whole, and the appearance of a fat little fist on the wrong side of a pane of glass was quite a familiar object in the nursery.

As for toysJohnny had none, so to speak. He had only a large basket full of bits, the misapplication of which to each other gave him many hours of profound recreation. Everything that would turn inside out was so turned. Whatever was by nature straight he bent, whatever bent he straightened. Round things he made square when possible, and square things round; soft things hard, and hard things soft. In short, nothing was too hard for Johnny. Everything that came into his clutches was subjected to what we may style the influence of experimental philosophy; and if Farmer Matterby had been a poor man he must soon have been ruined, but, being what is styled “well to do,” he only said, in reference to these things

“Go ahead, my boy. Make hay while the sun shines. If you carry on as you’ve begun, you’ll make your mark somewhere in this world.”

“Alas!” remarked poor Mrs Matterby, “he has made his mark already everywhere, and that a little too freely!”

Nevertheless she was proud of her boy, and sought to subdue his spirit by teaching him lessons of self denial and love out of the Word of God. Johnny listened intently to these lessons, gazing with large wondering eyes, though he understood little of the teaching at first. It was not all lost on him, however; and he thoroughly understood and reciprocated the deep love that beamed in his mother’s eyes.

Soon after Johnny had slid into the Jack period of life he became acquainted with a fisher boy of his own age, whose parents dwelt in a cottage on the sea shore, not a quarter of a mile from his own home, and close to the village of Blackby.

Natty Grove was as fine a little fellow as one could wish to see: fair, curly headed, blue eyed, rough jacketed, and almost swallowed up in a pair of his father’s sea boots which had been cut down in the legs to fit him. As to the feet!well, as his father Ned Grove remarked, there was plenty of room for growth. Natty had no mother, but he had a little sister about three years of age, and a grandmother, who might have been about thirty times three. No one could tell her age for certain; but she was so old and wrinkled and dried up and withered and small, that she might certainly have claimed to be “the oldest inhabitant.” She had been bed ridden for many years because of what her son called rum matticks and her grandson styled rum ticks.

The name of Natty’s little sister was Nellie; that of his grandmother, Nellold Nell, as people affectionately called her.

Now it may perhaps surprise the reader to be told that Jack Matterby, at the

age of nine years, was deeply in love. He had, indeed, been in that condition, more or less from the age of three, but the passion became more decided at nine. He was in love with Nellnot blue eyed little Nellie, but with wrinkled old Nell; for that antiquated creature was brimming over with love to mankind, specially to children. On our hero she poured out such wealth of affection that he was powerfully attracted to her even in the period of Johnny hood, and, as we have said, she captured him entirely when he reached Jack hood.

Old Nell was a splendid story teller. That was one of the baits with which she was fond of hooking young people. It was interesting to sit in the fisherman's poor cottage and watch the little ones sitting open mouthed and eyed gazing at the withered little face, in which loving kindness, mingling with fun, beamed from the old eyes, played among the wrinkles, smiled on the lips, and asserted itself in the gentle tones.

"Jack," said Mrs Matterby, on the Christmas morning which ushered in her boy's ninth birthday, "come, I'm going to give you a treat to day."

"You always do, mammy, on my birthdays," said Jack.

"I want you to go with a message to a poor woman," continued the mother.

"Is that all?" exclaimed Jack, with a disappointed look.

"Yes, that's allor nearly all," replied his mother, with a twinkle in her eye, however, which kept her son from open rebellion. "I want you to carry this basket of good things, with my best love and Christmas good wishes, to old Nell Grove."

"Oho!" exclaimed Jack, brightening up at once, "I'm your man; here, give me the basket. But, mother," he added with a sudden look of perplexity, "you called old Nell a poor woman, and I've heard her sometimes say that she has everything that she needs and more than she deserves! She can't be poor if that's true, and it must be true; for you know that old Nell never, never tells lies."

"True, Jack; old Nell is not poor in one sense: she is rich in faith. She has got 'contentment with godliness,' and many rich people have not got that. Nevertheless she has none too much of the necessaries of this life, and none at all of the luxuries, so that she is what people usually call poor."

"That's a puzzler, mammypoor and rich both!"

"I daresay it is a puzzler," replied Mrs Matterby, with a laugh, "but be off with your basket and message, my son; some day you shall understand it better."

Pondering deeply on this “puzzler,” the boy went off on his mission, trudging through the deep snow which whitened the earth and brightened that Christmas morning.

“She’s as merry as a cricket to day,” said Natty Grove, who opened the cottage door when his friend knocked.

“Yes, as ’erry as a kiket,” echoed flaxen haired Nellie, who stood beside him.

“She’s always ’erry,” said Jack, giving the little girl a gentle pull of the nose by way of expressing good will. “A merry Christmas both! How are you? See here, what mother has sent to old Nell.”

He opened the lid of the basket. Nattie and Nellie peeped in and snuffed.

“Oh! I say!” said the fisher boy. He could say no more, for the sight and scent of apples, jelly, roast fowl, home made pastry, and other things was almost too much for him.

“I expected it, dearie,” said old Nell, extending her withered hand to the boy as he set the basket on the table. “Every Christmas morning, for years gone by, she has sent me the same, though I don’t deserve it, and I’ve no claim on her but helplessness. But it’s the first time she has sent it by you, Jack. Come, I’ll tell ye a story.”

Jack was already open eyed with expectancy and he was soon open mouthed, forgetful of past and future, absorbed entirely in the present. Natty and Nelly were similarly affected and like minded, while the little old woman swept them away to the wilds of Siberia and told them of an escape from unjust banishment, of wanderings in the icy wilderness, and of starvation so dire that the fugitives were reduced to gnawing and sucking the leathern covers of their wallets for dear life. Then she told of food sent at the last moment, almost by miracle, and of hair breadth escapes, and final deliverance. Somehowthe listeners could not have told howold Nell inserted a reference to the real miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand, and she worked round to it so deftly, that it seemed an essential part of the story; and so indeed it was, for Nell intended the key stone of the arch of her story to be the fact that when man is reduced to the last extremity God steps in to save.

It is certain that little Nellie did not understand the moral of the story, and it is uncertain how far the boys appreciated it; but it was old Nell’s business to sow the seed beside all waters, and leave the rest to Him who gave the command.

“Yes, dearies,” she said in conclusion, laying her hand on the basket, “I expected this gift this morning; but many a time does our Father in heaven

send a blessin’ when an’ where we don’t expect it. Mind thatmind ye that.”

Jack had more than enough of mental food to digest that morning as he retraced his steps homeward through the deep snow; for he found that old Nell, not less than his mother, had treated him to a few puzzlers. Poor boy, he little knew as he plodded on that he was that day about to enter into one of the darkest clouds of his young life.

During his absence a letter had been received by his father, intimating that through the failure of a bank he was a ruined man. The shock had paralysed the farmer, and when Jack entered his home he found him lying on his bed in a state of insensibility from which he could not be rallied. A few days later the old man died.

Farmer Matterby’s widow had few relatives, and none of these were in circumstances to help her in the day of trial. They and her numerous friends did indeed what they could. Besides offering sincere sympathy, they subscribed and raised a small sum to enable the bereaved woman and her only child to tide over present difficulties, but they could not enable her to continue to work the farm, and as most of her late husband’s kindred had migrated to Canada, she had no one from whom she could naturally claim counsel or aid. She was therefore thrown entirely on God; and it was with strange and solemn feelings that Jack kneeled by her side, and heard her pray in tones of anguish for help, light, and guidance, and especially that, whatever might become of herself, her dear boy might be preserved from evil and guided in ways of righteousness.

A few months later, and the widow, gathering the small remnant of her possessions together, set off with her little boy to seek employment in London. How many poor souls, in various ranks of life, must have turned their steps, in days gone by, towards that giant city in the sanguine hope of bettering their condition! Mrs Matterby had no friends to whom she could go in London; but she could paint and draw and sing, and was fairly educated. She would teach. In the meantime she had a little money to start with. Entertaining a suspicion that it might be considered a wildish scheme by her friends and neighbours, she resolved to say nothing about her plans to any one, save that she was going to London for a time.

It was a touching scene, the parting of Jack and the Grove family. The sturdy fisherman was at sea at the time, but old Nell was in her accustomed corner in the lowly bed with the ragged counterpane, where her uneventful yet happy life was spent; and little curly headed Nellie was there, playing with the cat; and Natty was there, cutting out a first rate man of war with a huge knife.

“Granny,” (Jack always called her “granny” like the rest), “granny, I’ve come to say good bye. I am going away f–f–for ever an’ ever!”

“Amen!” responded Natty, from the mere force of habit, for he was a constant responder at granny’s family worship.

“Ye don’t know that, darlin’,” replied old Nell. “The Lord leads us in ways that we know not, an’ it may be His good pleasure to bring you here again.”

“N–no; I’m quite sure I’ll never see you again,” returned the boy, giving way to the sobs which he could not restrain. “M–mother says we will never come back again,n–never, never more”

He broke down entirely at this point, and a few silent tears trickled over the kind old face of Nell. Natty was too much of a man to give way out and out, but he snivelled a little in spite of himself. As for Nellie, she stood there in open eyed wonder, for she failed to quite understand the situation. We will not prolong the painful scene. When at length Jack had taken leave of them allhad kissed the two Nells and shaken hands with Nattythe younger Nell seemed to realise the facts of the case; for Jack saw her, as he glanced back for the last time, suddenly shut her large blue eyes, throw back her curly little head, open wide her pretty little mouth, and howl miserably.

Chapter 2.
Lost in London.

London in a fog is too well known to require description. In an uncommonly thick fog, on a day in December of the following year, Mrs Matterby hurried along Fleet Street in the direction of the city, leading Jack by the hand. Both were very wet, very cold, ravenously hungry, and rather poorly clad. It was evident that things had not prospered with the widow.

“Dear Jack,” she said in a choking voice, as they hurried along the streets towards the wretched abode in the Tower Hamlets to which they had been at length reduced, “dear Jack, my last human hope has failed. Mr Block has told me that I need not go there again; he has no more work for me.”

Jack’s experience of life was too limited to enable him to understand fully the depth of distress to which his mother had fallenwith health broken, money expended, and work not to be had except on terms which rendered life a misery, and prolonged existence almost an impossibility. But Jack’s power of sympathy was strong and his passions were vehement.

“Mother,” he said, with tearful eyes, as he clung closer to her side, “I would

kill Mr Block if I could!”

“Hush, dear boy! You know that would be wrong and could do no good. It is sinful even to feel such a desire.”

“How can I help it, mother!” returned Jack indignantly. Then he asked, “What are we going to do now, mother?”

For some time the poor widow did not reply; then she spoke in a low tone, as if murmuring to herself, “The last sixpence gone; the cupboard empty; nothingnothing left to pawn”

She stopped short, and glanced hastily at her marriage ring.

“Mother,” said Jack, “have you not often told me that God will not forsake us? Does it not seem as if He had forsaken us now?”

“It only seems like it, darling,” returned the widow hurriedly. “We don’t understand His ways. ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!’”

It seemed as if God were about to test the faith of His servant, for at that moment a cab drove furiously round the corner of a street and knocked her down. Jack was overturned at the same time. Recovering himself, instantly, he found his mother in a state of unconsciousness, with blood flowing from a deep cut in her forehead. In a state of semi bewilderment the poor boy followed the stretcher on which Mrs Matterby was carried to the nearest hospital, where he waited while his mother’s injuries were examined.

“My boy,” said a young surgeon, returning to the waiting room, and patting Jack’s head, “your mother has been rather badly hurt. We must keep her here to look after her. I daresay we shall soon make her well. Meanwhile you had better run home, and tell your fatherif, that isyour father is at home, I suppose?”

“No, sir; father’s dead.”

“Well then your sister or auntI suppose there’s some relative at home older than yourself?”

“No, sir; none but mother an’ me,” whispered Jack.

“No relations of any kind at all in London?”

“None, sir. We know nobodyat least not many, and they’re all strangers.”

“A sad case,” murmured the surgeon. “Your mother is poor, I suppose?”

“Very poor, sir.”

“But of course you have a home of some sort, somewhere?”

“Yes, it’s not far from here.”

“Well, them, you’d better go home just now, for you can’t see your mother to night. We dare not let her speak, but come back early to morrow, and you shall hear about herperhaps see her. Here, put that in your pocket.”

Poor Jack took the shilling which the sympathetic surgeon thrust into his hand, and ran home in a state bordering on distraction; but it was not till he entered the shabby little room which he had begun to consider “home” that he realised the full weight of the calamity that had befallen him. No mother’s voice to welcome him; no bit of fire in the grate to warm; no singing kettle to cheer, or light of candle to dispel the gloom of rapidly approaching night.

It was Christmas Day too. In the morning he had gone forth with his mothershe in the sanguine hope of renewing an engagement in a clothier’s shop, which terminated that day; he in the expectation of getting a few jobs of some sortmessages to run or horses to hold. Such were the circumstances to which they had been reduced in twelve months, Jack had arranged to call for his mother and walk home with her. On the way they were to invest a very small part of the widow’s earnings in “something nice” for their Christmas supper, and spend the evening together, chatting about the old home in Blackby, and father, and Natty Grove, and Nellie, and old Nell, in the happy days gone by.

“And now!” thought Jack, seating himself on his little bed and glancing at that of his mother, which stood empty in the opposite corner“now!”

But Jack could think no more. A tremendous agony rent his breast, and a sharp cry escaped from him as he flung himself on his bed and burst into a passion of tears.

Child like, he sobbed himself to sleep, and did not awake till the sun was high next morning. It was some time before he could recall what had occurred. When he did so he began to weep afresh. Leaping up, he was about to rush out of the house and make for the hospital, when he was checked at the door by the landlorda hard, grinding, heartless man, who grew rich in oppressing the poor.

“You seem to be in a hurry, youngster,” he said, dragging the boy back by the collar, and looking hurriedly round the room. “I’ve come for the rent. Where’s your mother?”

In a sobbing voice Jack told him about the accident.

“Well, I don’t really believe you,” said the man, with an angry frown; “but I’ll soon find out if you’re telling lies. I’ll go to the hospital and inquire for myself. D’ee know anything about your mother’s affairs?”

“No, sir,” said Jack, meekly, for he began to entertain a vague terror of the man.

“No; I thought not. Well, I’ll enlighten you. Your mother owes me three weeks’ rent of this here room, and has got nothing to pay it with, as far as I knows, except these sticks o’ furniture. Now, if your mother is really in hospital, I’ll come back here and bundle you out, an’ sell the furniture to pay my rent. I ain’t a goin’ to be done out o’ my money because your mother chooses to git run’d over.”

The landlord did not wait for a reply, but went out and slammed the door.

Jack followed him in silent horror. He watched him while he inquired at the gate of the hospital, and, after he had gone, went up timidly, rang the bell, and asked for his mother.

“Mrs Matterby?” repeated the porter. “Come in; I’ll make inquiry.”

The report which he brought back fell like the blow of a sledge hammer on the poor boy’s heart. His mother, they told him, was dead. She had died suddenly in the night.

There are times of affliction, when the human soul fails to find relief in tears or cries. Poor Jack Matterby stood for some time motionless, as if paralysed, with glaring eyes and a face not unlike to that of death. They sought to rouse him, but he could not speak. Suddenly, observing the front door open, he darted out into the street and ran straight home, where he flung himself on his mother’s bed, and burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears. By degrees the passion subsided, leaving only a stunned feeling behind, under the influence of which he lay perfectly still.

The first thing that roused him was the sound of a heavy foot on the stair. The memory of the landlord flashed into his mind and filled him with indescribable dreaddread caused partly by the man’s savage aspect and nature, but much more by the brutal way in which he had spoken about his mother. The only way in which to avoid a meeting was to rush past the man on the stair. Fear and loathing made the poor boy forget, for the moment, his crushing sorrow. He leaped up, opened the door, and, dashing downstairs, almost overturned the

man who was coming up. Once in the street, he ran straight on without thought, until he felt that he was safe from pursuit. Then he stopped, and sat down on a door stepto think what he should do; for, having been told that the furniture of his old home was to be sold, and himself turned out, he felt that returning there would be useless, and would only expose him to the risk of meeting the awful landlord. While he was yet buried in thought, one of those sprightly creatures of the great city known as street arabs accosted him in a grave and friendly tone.

“My sweet little toolip,” he said, “can I do anythink for you?”

Despite his grief Jack could scarcely forbear smiling at the absurdity of the question.

“No, thank you,” he replied.

“Well now, look ’ere, my toolip,” returned the arab in a confidential tone, “I’ve took quite a fancy to you; you’ve got such a look, some’ow, of my poor old grandmother. Now, if you’ve no objection, I’d like to give you your breakfast. You’re ’ungry, I suppose?”

Jack admitted that he was, and, after a moment’s hesitation, accepted this surprisingly kind and liberal offer. Taking him promptly by the arm his new friend hurried him to a pastry cook’s shop, and bade him “smell that,” referring to the odours that ascended through a grating.

“Ain’t it ’eavenly?” he asked, with sparkling eyes.

Jack admitted that it was very nice.

“So green, an’ yet so fair!” murmured the arab, casting a look of admiration on his companion. “Now I means to go into that there shop,” he added, returning to the confidential tone, “an’ buy breakfast for youfor both on us. But I couldn’t go in, you know, with this ’ere shabby coat on, ’cause they wouldn’t give me such good wittles if I did. Just change coats with me for a few minutes. What! You doubt me? No one ever doubted Bob Snobbins withoutwithout a ’urtin’ of his feelin’s.”

Whatever might have caused Jack to hesitate, the injured look on young Snobbins’ countenance and the hurt tone were too much for him. He exchanged coats with the young rascal, who, suddenly directing Jack’s attention to some imaginary object of interest at one end of the street, made off at full speed towards the other end. Our hero was, however, a famous runner. He gave chase, caught the arab in a retired alley, and gave him an indignant punch in the head.

But although Jack had plenty of courage and a good deal of strength, he was no match for a street warrior like Bob Snobbins, who turned about promptly, blackened both his opponent's eyes, bled his nose, swelled his lips, and finally knocked him into a pool of dirty water, after which he fled, just as a policeman came on the scene.

The constable was a kindly man. He asked Jack a few questions, which, however, the latter was too miserable to answer.

"Well, well, my boy," said the constable gently, "you'd as well give up fightin'. It don't pay, you see, in the long run. Besides, you don't seem fit for it. Cut away home now, and get your mother to clean you."

This last remark caused Jack to run away fast enough with a bursting heart. All day he wandered about the crowded streets, and no one took any notice of him, save a very few among the thousands, who cast on him a passing glance of pity. But what could these do to help him? Were not the streets swarming with such boys?

And in truth Jack Matterby was a very pitiable object, at least according to the report of shop mirrors, which told him that his face was discoloured and bloody, his coat indescribably dirty and ragged, besides being out of harmony with his trousers, and that his person generally was bedaubed with mud. Hunger at last induced him to overcome his feelings of shame so far that he entered a baker's shop, but he was promptly ordered to be off. Later in the day he entered another shop, the owner of which seemed to be of a better disposition. Changing his shilling, he purchased a penny roll, with which he retired to a dark passage and dined.

When night came on he expended another penny and supped, after which he sought for some place of shelter in which to sleep. But wherever he went he found the guardians of the public requiring him to "move on." Several street arabs sought to make his acquaintance, but, with the memory of Bob Snobbins strong upon him, he declined their friendship. At last, wearied out and broken hearted, he found a quiet corner under an archway, where he sat down and leaned his head against the wall, exclaiming, "I'm lostlost!" Then he wept quietly, and sought to find temporary relief in slumber.

He was indeed lost, and more completely so, in the feeling of lonely isolation, perhaps, than he would have been if lost in the backwoods of America. Yet he was not utterly lost, for the tender Shepherd was on his track. Some such thought seemed to cross his mind; for he suddenly began to pray, and thoughts about the old home in Blackby and of the Grove family comforted him a little

until he fell asleep on his hard bed.

But, for the time being, the poor boy was lostlost in London! His disreputable face and discreditable coat argued a dissipated characterhence no one would employ him. Ere long necessity compelled him to accept the society of street arabs, and soon he became quite as sharp, though not quite as wicked, as they. But day by day he sank lower and lower, and evil at which he would have shuddered at first became at last familiar.

He did not sink without a struggle, however, and he would have returned to the place where his mother had died, to ask help of the young surgeon who had expressed sympathy with him, but, with the carelessness of boyhood, he had forgotten the name of the hospital, and did not know where, in the great wilderness of bricks and mortar, to search for it. As for the home from which he had fled, the memory of the landlord still kept him carefully clear of that.

But Jack's mother was not dead! In hospitalsas in the best of well regulated familiesmistakes will sometimes happen. The report which had proved so disastrous to our poor hero referred to another woman who had died. A messenger had been at once sent, by the young surgeon before mentioned, to tell Jack of the error; but when the messenger arrived the boy had flownas already described. Indeed, it was he whom Jack had passed on the stair.

It was long before Mrs Matterby recovered, for the disappearance of her boy caused a relapse; and when at last she left the hospital, feeble and homeless, she went about for many months, searching at once for work and for her lost treasure.

Christmas came again, and found Jack Matterby at nearly the lowest point in his downward career. It is due to him to say, however, that he had not up to that time, been guilty of any criminal act that could bring him with the grasp of human law; but in word and deed he had begun, more and more, to break the law of God: so that if poor Mrs Matterby had at that time succeeded in finding her son, it is probable that her joy would have been overwhelmed with terrible grief.

It was not exactly Christmas morning, but it was the Christmas season of the year, when our little hero, wearied in spirit and body with the hard struggle for life, sauntered down the now familiar Strand in the hope of finding some odd job to do. He paused before a confectioner's shop, and, being very hungry, was debating with himself the propriety of giving up the struggle and coolly helping himself to a pie! You may be sure that bad invisible spirits were at his elbow just then to encourage him. But God sent a good angel also, and she was visiblebeing in the form of a thin little old lady.

“You’d like a bun, I know,” she said, putting a penny into Jack’s hand.

“God bless you, ma’amyes,” burst from the astonished boy.

“Go in and buy one. Then, come and tell me all about you.”

The thin little old lady was one of those followers of the Lamb who do not wait for Christmas to unlock their sympathies. The river of her love and pity was always overflowing, so that there was no room for increase to a deluge at Christmas timethough she rejoiced to note the increase in the case of others, and wished that the flood might become perennial. To this lady Jack laid bare his inmost heart, and she led him back to the Saviour.

“Now, Jack, let me ask you one question,” she said; “would you like to go to Canada?”

With tremendous energy Jack answered, “Wouldn’t I!”

“Then,” said the old lady, “to Canada you shall go.”

Chapter 3.
The Double Rescue.

And Jack Matterby went! But before he went he had to go through a preliminary training, for his regular schooling had ceased when his father died, and he had learned no trade.

In those days there were no splendid institutions for waifs and strays such as now exist, but it must not be supposed that there was no such thing as “hasting to the rescue.” Thin little old Mrs Seaford had struck out the idea for herself, and had acted on it for some years in her own vigorous way. She took Jack home, and lodged him in her own house with two or three other boys of the same stampwaifs. Jack elected to learn the trade of a carpenter, and Mrs Seaford, finding that he had been pretty well grounded in English, taught him French, as that language, she told him, was much spoken in Canada. Above all, she taught him those principles of God’s law without which a human being is but poorly furnished even for the life that now is, to say nothing of that which is to come.

In a few months Jack was ready for exportation! A few months more, and he found himself apprenticed to a farmer, not far from the shores of that mighty fresh water sea, Ontario. Time passed, and Jack Matterby became a trusted servant and a thorough farmer. He also became a big, dashing, and earnest boy. More time passed, and Jack became a handsome young man, the bosom friend of his employer. Yet a little more time winged its silent way, and Jack

became John Matterby, Esquire, of Fair Creek Farm, heir to his former master's property, and one of the wealthiest men of the provincenot a common experience of poor emigrant waifs, doubtless, but, on the other hand, by no means unprecedented.

It must not be supposed that during all those years Jack forgot the scenes and people of the old land. On the contrary, the longer he absented himself from the old home the more firmly and tenderly did the old memories cling and cluster round his heart; and many a story and anecdote did he relate about these, especially during the Christmas season of each year, to his old master and to Nancy Briggs, in the log homestead of Ontario.

Nancy was a waif, who had been sent out by the same thin little old lady who had sent Jack out. She was very pretty, and possessed of delightfully amiable domestic qualities. She grew up to be a very handsome girl, and was a very bright sunbeam in the homestead. But Jack did not fall in love with her. All unknown to himself his heart was pre occupied. Neither did Nancy fall in love with Jack. All unwittingly she was reserving herself for another lot. Of course our hero corresponded diligently with the thin little old lady, and gladdened her heart by showing and expressing strong sympathy with the waifs of the great city; more than once, in his earlier letters, mentioning one named Bob Snobbins, about whose fate he felt some curiosity, but in regard to whose home, if such existed, he could give no information.

Twice during those years Jack also wrote to the Grove family; but as he received no answer on either occasion, he concluded that the father must have been drowned, that old Nell was dead, and the family broken up. Need we add that the memory of his dear mother never faded or grew dim? But this was a sacred memory, in regard to which he opened his lips to no one.

At last there came a day when John Matterby, being in the prime of life, with ample means and time to spare, set his heart on a holiday and a visit to the old countrythe thin little old lady being yet alive. It was not so easy, however, for our hero to get away from home as one might imagine; for, besides being a farmer, he was manager of a branch bank, secretary to several philanthropic societies, superintendent of a Sunday school, and, generally, a helper of, and sympathiser with, all who loved the Lord and sought to benefit their fellow men. But, being a man of resolution, he cut the cords that attached him to these things, appointed Miss Briggs to superintend the Sunday school in his absence, and set sail for Englandnot in a steamer, as most rich men would have done, but in a sailing ship, because the vessel happened to be bound for the port of Blackby, the home of his childhood.

It was winter when he set sail, and the storms of winter were having high jinks

and revels on the deep in the usual way at that season of the year. Jack's vessel weathered them all till it reached the shores of old England. Then the storm fiend broke loose with unwonted fury, and, as if out of spite, cast the good ship on the rocks lying a little to the eastward of the port of Blackby.

It was a tremendous storm! The oldest inhabitant of Blackby said, as well as his toothless gums would let him, that, "it wos the wust gale as had blow'd since he wos a leetle booyan' that warn't yesterdayno, nor yet the day before!"

The gale was at its height, in the grey of early morning, when the ship struck, and all the manhood of the port and neighbouring village were out to render aid, if possible, and to gaze and sympathise. But who could render aid to a vessel which was rolling on those black rocks in a caldron of white foam, with a hundred yards of swirling breakers that raged and roared like a thousand lions between it and the base of the cliffs? Even the noble lifeboat would have been useless in such a place. But hark! a cry is raisedthe coastguardmen and the rocket! Yes, there is one hope for them yetunder God. Far below the men are seen staggering along over the shingle, with their life saving apparatus in a hand cart.

Soon the tripod is set up, and the rocket is fired, but the line falls to leeward. Another is tried; it falls short. Still anotherit goes far to windward. Again and again they try, but without success, until all their rockets are expended. But these bold men of the coastguard are not often or easily foiled. They send for more rockets to the next station. Meanwhile the terrible waves are doing their awful work, dashing the ship on the rocks as if she were a mere toyas indeed she is, in their grasp. Can nothing be done?

"She'll never hold together till the rockets come," said a young seaman stepping out from the crowd. "Here, let me have the line, and stand by to pay out."

"Don't try it, lad, it'll be your death."

The youth paid no regard to this advice. "A man can only die once," he remarked in a low voice, more as if speaking to himself than replying to the caution, while he quickly tied the end of the light rope round his waist and dashed into the sea.

Oh! it is grand and heart stirring to see a stalwart youth imperilling life and limb for the sake of others; to see a powerful swimmer breasting the billows with a fixed purpose to do or die. But it is terrible and spirit crushing to see such a one tossed by the breakers as if he were a mere baby, and hurled back helpless on the sand. Twice did the young sailor dash in, and twice was he caught up like a cork and hurled back, while the people on shore, finding their

remonstrances useless, began to talk of using force.

The man’s object was to dive through the first wave. If he could manage thisand the secondthe rest would not be beyond the power of a strong man. A third time he leaped into the rushing flood, and this time was successful. Soon he stood panting on the deck of the stranded vessel, almost unable to stand, and well he knew that there was not a moment to lose, for the ship was going to pieces! Jack Matterby, however, knew well what to do. He drew out the hawser of the rocket apparatus, fixed the various ropes, and signalled to those on shore to send out the sling life buoy, and then the men of the coastguard began to haul the passengers and crew ashore, one at a time.

The young sailor, recovering in a few minutes, lent a hand. Jack knew him the instant he heard his voice, but took no notice of him, for it was a stern matter of life or death with them all just then.

When Jack and the captain stood at last awaiting their turn, and watching the last of the crew being dragged over the boiling surf, our hero turned suddenly, and, grasping the young sailor’s hand with the grip of a vice, said, “God bless you, Natty Grove!”

Nat gazed as if he had been stunned. “Can it be?” he exclaimed. “We had thought you dead years ago!”

“Thank God, I’m not only alive but hearty. Here comes the life buoy. Your turn next. But one word beforeold Nell; andNellie?”

“Both well, and living with your mother”

“My” Jack could not speak, a tremendous shock seemed to rend his heart. Young Grove felt that he had been too precipitate.

“Your mother is alive, Jack, and”

He stopped, for the captain said quickly, “Now, then, get in. No time to lose.”

But Jack could not get in. If he had not been a strong man he must have fallen on the deck. As it was, he felt stunned and helpless.

“Here, captain,” cried Nat Grove, leaping into the life buoy, “lift him into my arms. The ropes are strong enough for both.”

Scarce knowing what he did, Jack allowed himself to be half lifted into the buoy in which his old friend held him fast. A few minutes more, and they were dragged safely to land and the ringing cheers and congratulations of the assembled multitude. The captain came last, so that, when the ship finally

went to pieces, not a human life was losteven the ship's cat was among the number of the saved, the captain having carried it ashore in his arms.

Now, there are some scenes in this life which will not bear description in detail. Such was the meeting of our hero with his long lost mother. We refrain from lifting the curtain here. But there is no reason why we should not re introduce the joyful and grateful pair at a later period of that same eventful day, when, seated together by the bedside of old Nell, they recounted their experiencesyes, the same old woman, but thinner and wrinkleder, and smaller in every way; and the same bed, as far as appearance went, though softer and cosier, and bigger in all ways. On the other side of the bed sat the manly form of Natty Grove. But who is that fair girl with the curling golden hair, whose face exhibits one continuous blush, and whose entire body, soul and spirit is apparently enchained by an insignificant piece of needlework? Can that be Nellie Grove, whom we last saw with her eyes shut and her mouth openhowling? Yes, it is she, andbut let Mrs Matterby explain.

"Now, Jack," said that lady in a firm tone, "it's of no use your asking question after question of every one in this way, and not even waiting for answers, and everybody speaking at once"

"Excuse me, dearest mother, Miss Nellie Grove has not yet spoken at all."

"Miss Nellie, indeed! Times are changed,"murmured Natty, with a look of surprise.

"Her not speaking proves her the wisest of us all," resumed the widow, looking at Old Nell, who with tremulous head nodded violent approval. You must know, old Nell had become as deaf as a post, and, being incapable of understanding anything, she gratified her natural amiability by approving of everythingat least everything that was uttered by speakers with a visible smile. When they spoke with gravity, old Nell shook her tremulous head, and put on a look of alarmingly solemn sympathy. On the present occasion, however, the antique old thing seemed to have been affected with some absolutely new, and evidently quaint, ideas, for she laughed frequently and immoderately, especially when she gazed hard at Jack Matterby after having looked long at Nellie Grove!

"Now, Jack," resumed the widow for the fiftieth time, "you must know that after I lost you, and had given you up for dead, I came back here, feeling an intense longing to see once more the old home, and I began a school. In course of years God sent me prosperity, notwithstanding the murmurings of rebellion which rose in my heart when I thought of you. The school became so big that I had to take a new housethat in which you now sitand sought about for a

teacher to help me. Long before that time poor Ned Grove had been drowned at sea. Your old friend Natty there had become the first mate to a merchantman, and helped to support his grandmother. Nellie, whose education I had begun, as you know, when you were a boy, had grown into a remarkably clever and pretty girl, as, no doubt, you will admit. She had become a daily governess in the family of a gentleman who had come to live in the neighbourhood. Thus she was enabled to assist her brother in keeping up the old home, and took care of granny."

At this point our hero, as he looked at the fair face and modest carriage of his old playmate heartily admitted, (to himself), that she was much more than "pretty," and felt that he now understood how a fisherman's daughter had, to his intense surprise, grown up with so much of gentle manners, and such soft lady like hands. But he said never a word!

"Most happily for me," continued Mrs Matterby, "Nellie lost her situation at the time I speak of, owing to the death of her employer. Thus I had the chance of securing her at once. And now, here we have been together for some years, and I hope we may never part as long as we live. We had considerable difficulty in getting old Nell to quit the cottage and come here. Indeed, we should never have succeeded, I think, had it not been for Natty"

"That's true," interrupted Nat, with a laugh.

"The dear old woman was too deaf to understand, and too obstinate to move: so one day I put the bed clothes over her head, gathered her and them up in my arms, and brought her up here bodily, very much as I carried you ashore, Jack, in the life buoy, without asking leave. And she has been content and happy ever since."

What more of this tale there is to tell shall be told, reader, by excerpts from our hero's Christmas letter to thin little Mrs Seaford, as follows:

"Pardon my seeming neglect, dear old friend. I meant to have run up to town to see you the instant I set foot in England, but you must admit that my dear, long lost mother had prior claims. Pardon, also, my impudence in now asking you to come and see me. You must come. I will take no denial, for I want you to rejoice at my wedding! Yes, as old Nell once said to me, 'God sends us a blessing sometimes when we least expect it.' He has not only restored to me my mother, but has raised me from the lowest rung in the ladder to the very highest, and given me the sweetest, and most. But enough. Come and see for yourself. Her name is Nellie. But I have more to astonish you with. Not only do I take Nellie back with me to my home in the new world, but I take my mother also, and Natty Grove, and old Nell herself! How we got her to

understand what we want her to do, could not be told in less than four hundred pages of small type. Nat did it, by means of signs, symbols, and what he styles facial logarithms. At all events she has agreed to go, and we hope to set sail next June. Moreover, I expect to get you to join us. Don't laugh. I mean it. There is good work to be done. Canada needs philanthropic Christians as well as England.

"You will scarcely credit me when I say that I have become a match makernot one of those 'little' ones, in whose welfare you are so much interested, but a real one. My deep design is upon your partner, Natty Grove. Yes, your partnerfor were not you the instrument used in rescuing my soul, and he my body? so that you have been partners in this double rescue. Well, it is my intention to introduce Natty Grove to Nancy Briggs, and abide the result! Once on a time I had meant her for Bob Snobbins, but as you have failed to hunt him up, he must be left to suffer the consequences. D'you know I have quite a pathetic feeling of tenderness for the memory of that too sharp little boy. Little does he know how gladly I would give him the best coat in my possessionif I could only find him!

"Now, dearest of old friends, I must stop. Nellie is sitting on one side of me, mother on the other, and old Nell in frontwhich will account to you, in some degree, for the madness of my condition.

"Once more, in the hope of a joyful meeting, I wish you 'a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.'"