

A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN.



The night was dismal. Dismal! thought the lamps, as they shuddered in the cold.

The wind moaned with weariness, and flung the rain at the windows with a rattling sound as it went by, clutching desperately at the branches.

What misery it had seen! so had the lamps! they winked at each other; while the river sobbed and sobbed under the arches of the bridge.

People hurried by—somewhere—against the wind; the carriage lamps flashed; the mud, delighted, clung to your clothes to make you look to see how it glittered in the road. The street-lamps winked again, knowingly this time; what of the carriage-lamps and the mud? Do not *we* shine like stars? Is not each one of us the loadstone of a glittering snake, winding always passionately towards us, not in the mud forsooth, but in the river? They blushed with contempt, then shone forth again with a buzzing sound, to astonish the rain-drops on their panes; the wind moaned, and the river sobbed, with weariness.

A drunkard wept. What a lot of water! what a dismal night! Dismal! moaned the wind. Give us the money, he sobbed—the money, won't you? The money, he repeated, his eyes wandering towards the lamps. They blinked at him; he blinked too. The money, he thought, money, mon—— His little girl also thought of the

money. Could she get him home without having to give it him? She looked at the lamps, like her eyes, filled with rain; and the river murmured Money, money, round its basements.

No, decidedly it would be difficult. Father had taken to drinking to quench his sorrow since poor mother had gone. If she could only get him home! The wind laughed at this, rushed round a corner, wafting bad beer, bad spirit, as the doors of the public-house swung in the light, then hurried by.

How prettily the little drops glitter on the window-panes! Inside the ceiling is golden with light and gilding; it must be warm in there! Even the rain-drops thought so, for they flew to the windows and blinked, dazzled. She risked a look inside. No wonder poor father liked to be in there. Everything shone; lovely pink bottles, green bottles, gold bottles, and the bar was of silver.

He had taken the money; she knew he would. Ah, well! she would wait until he came out; he could not spend all *that*, and she might yet get something for the children. The wind rushed by, and plunged down a dark passage. The lamps felt it was colder, for they shuddered and looked blue. The brass-bound doors of the gin-palace swung lazily. Go home, little girl; go home, little girl. Ah! he was a long time.

The other side of the passage was more sheltered. She leant her head against the cool window. How nice everything looked! The walls were of a beautiful red, which it made you feel warm to look at. A clock went tic! tac! tic! tac! with a wreath of artificial flowers on its head; and how many nice things! shining hams, crimson sausages, jellies that trembled when you looked at them, golden pies, all trimmed with paper roses. Oh! it was most pretty.

How she would like to take some home! she would have some of this, then some of that; a little of this, not quite so much of that. Patty and Peggy were laughing when she brought the things to them; and perhaps she might get a paper rose with gilt leaves; she would put in on the mantelpiece under mamma's portrait, in which papa was standing by in new clothes. How bright it would look!

Perhaps if she went in and told the lady she would give her some nice things; she moved towards the door; or perhaps somebody would ask her what she would like to have; she looked at each passer-by hurrying on; even the wind hurried by without saying anything. It was a wretched night.

The lady in the shop had gold earrings, curls on her back, and she wore a grey dress trimmed with black velvet and little buckles. She looked into the street, not at the little girl; then she looked at the clock, and two ladies came in.

What a lot of things they bought and put under their aprons!

That little girl ain't overfed, said one lady, giving the child a mince pie. I don't like to see children starving, she added sententiously to the other lady, who looked hard at the little girl trying to say Thank you,

lady. But the wind flew by, and laughed round the corner ; it had seen so much charity in its time !

People had gone into Hengler's Circus. The shops shut up one by one, after the shopkeeper had stepped out to look inquiringly at the sky.

The street grew darker, darker ; and father was still there.

The wind had ceased, and the rain wept on the quieting town, till the little girl was soaked through and felt a little dizzy.

The almost empty street was exhaling the smell of soot that belongs to London mud when wetted. Here and there a solitary woman, covering her red hands in her ornamented ulster, turned her face anxiously towards the town. Footsteps sounded distinctly as each woman presented the same vague ulstered silhouette, walking in the rain—somewhere.

A train rattled and rumbled over a bridge into the night. A signal fell with a jerk. It was a long way home.

Patty and Peggy were asleep ; the room seemed damper and colder than outside. She would try to go to sleep if the cold did not prevent her. But—the room became bright with bursts of sunlight ; she heard the murmur of pleasant streams. How delicious the sunlight would be if her feet were not so cold ! She wrapt herself up as well as she could ; then the stains on the wall-paper became beautiful pictures of fields and hills and water ; the monotonous magenta roses shot out from the paper, waved themselves over her, nodding their heads, far more beautiful than those in the shop ; they opened, and filled the room with a passionate scent, sighing fragrantly for very voluptuousness. Then, in a shower of velvety petals glittering in the sunlight, they tickled her as they fell, making her laugh.

Ah ! what a beautiful dream it was ; and how kind of mere strangers to put her into a pretty box with bright nails, where she knew she could think of her beautiful dream for a long, long time, without being disturbed.

Some one knocked on the lid. Oh, dear me ! she thought, this must be the day of judgment ! She opened her eyes. There was an angel, brilliant as a rocket. You must come to heaven ! said the angel. To heaven ? To heaven ! nodded the angel. The little brass nails on the coffin looked wistfully at the angel. She was not ungrateful, oh, no ! but she had not counted on going there so soon. To heaven ! the angel said again, and the little girl felt herself far away from the pretty box. The pink morning clouds floated round them ; upwards they flew through sheets of gold, exquisitely tinted. Purple clouds swam by, trimmed with little glowing ones, shooting about, changing colour, rose, orange ; the clouds seemed to sing in her ears as she floated upwards. Upwards ! the planets smiled at her with delight, not like the street lamps ; and the stars peeped over each other's shoulders to look at the angel and the little girl. Upwards ! the clouds were left behind, and the world was only a speck of soot against the dazzling sun, like a floor of gold beneath you. We are in heaven, said the angel, and the little girl looked up.

Ah, no! she was not ungrateful, but she had not thought of going to heaven so soon; though it did seem so beautiful, you can't think! She looked at the angel, who pointed out to her the colours that are sent to the flowers, and washed her eyes with liquid light, that she might see everything more distinctly. Angels hovered round, and looked into her eyes; she felt lighter; they placed a star on her heart, and each angel kissed her. Everything was so lovely; everybody was so kind. If only Patty and Peggy could have some of the stars! But what is that shining over there, she asked, like a sea of light, with waves of light that make you shine when you look at it? The Almighty, the angel said softly, and smiled. The sea now burned so brightly that the angel became wan, and looked like a violet mist. The Almighty spoke to the little girl.

The Voice thrilled her; It rolled in wells of unutterable tenderness, more beautiful far than the sweet, swelling music she had heard in a church, when a plate was handed round by a fine gentleman. She closed her eyes, and forgot all about the beautiful dream and the pretty box. No, she was not ungrateful; she courtesied very carefully, but—what should she call Him?—but poor mamma left us, and Patty and Peggy are alone, for poor papa since her death drinks to quench his sorrow, and there is a little rice in the cupboard, and a little sugar; she courtesied again; they will both cry without me to give it them and tell them a story; there will scarcely be enough for both without a story. I could not forget all about this if I heard them cry, now I am in heaven, because of their hunger. If I may—she did not dare courtesy again—might I go back again, only for a short time, to see all is right? for I don't know what they or poor papa will do without me. The Lord smiled, and she became a lily, blue, the colour of mercy, with leaves of violet. He kissed her and put her about His throne with the flowers whose beauty form the veil of light that surrounds Him. And each heart-shaped petal in its fragrance murmured, Peace! peace! peace!

C. RICKETTS.