

Literature, &c.

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DIVINITY FROM RAGS.

[Continued from our last.]

But my tale waits. At seven o'clock or thereabouts, in that dull street only yet gray dawn, the old man came down, unlocked the shop-door, and admitted another old red-nosed man, who proceeding to work, brought in the shutters one by one. It was evident the box had not yet been missed. Watching the second shutter to its place in the rear of the shop, the thief safe with his prize got clear into the street, and dived down the first court-way. There he picked up the fragment of a doormat, that, wound about the box, concealed it from observation; then making his way by obscure streets, to some disused mews in the vicinity of the Togg establishment, he brought forth from behind the rafters an old file, rived the lock, and cleared the mystery. But nothing for thief-hero-glory; nothing but what would make the whole Togg establishment roar with laughter, and Slimps once more the presiding Apollo! A strange old book, and a few fragments of womanly apparel, were all it held. And for these he had borne cold and hunger through so many winter nights! Depressed by hunger and vexation, for he had not tasted food for many hours; he crouched down amidst some mouldy straw; and for the first time, perhaps since his miserable childhood, fairly cried himself to sleep. It was dark drear night again, when he awoke benumbed and almost lifeless with the cold. As the comforts of the Togg establishment, were only open to such as could give in return some pretty practical tangibility, thus merely imitating the larger world which by no means recognises glory of any abstract kind, the thief, after hiding the box, set forth to the house of a Jew named Cripps, whose dealings with Mrs. Togg, for forty years, had varied between the scale of a rusty key, and a gold snuff box.

Books don't even come up to vices, as you should know, Tummy," said the Jew with a leer, as snuffing the guttering candle with his bony fingers, he looked round upon the group of thief-customers gathered in all attitudes round the little counter—"them isn't printed at the top of Moll's katy-kism, my love. Oh! dear no?"

"But, but," said the boy eagerly, his face so keen with intellect that the eyes of the Jew dropped beneath his look, "it was taken precious care of in a brass bound-box."

"Ah! ah!" and the Jew who had already commenced business with a fresh customer, laid his hand eagerly upon the book and drawing it quickly towards him, said in a whisper, "Well, a shilling, my love." That which had struck Cripps in a moment was made apparent to the thief; there must be some intrinsic value in a thing so carefully preserved. He snatched the book from the Jew's now grasping hand, and made his way to the door, without looking back upon the old man, who, eagerly bent across the counter, was crying out with his cracked squeaking voice—"Stop the boy, two shillings, three shillings, my love Oh dear, stop the boy!"

Even had the Togg supper been, on this particular night, a free-will affair, the thief could not face the old woman or the girl; for he had dropped hints of coming glory, and to fall short of this was a degradation too low even for humanity in rags. So creeping back to the mews he found the girl Bella waiting for him.

"You ain't a coming that dodge over Togg," she asked with something like contempt, as she watched the thief draw the precious volume from beneath his miserable shirt; "bless you, I shall have a firm foot with yer all the way to the gallows, Tummy, but I shan't be good enough if your come to that. So put it by, Tummy; them as is made by grand people to live like bats and owls, ha! got nothink so precious in natar as to prig and snatch when they can; so Tummy, flout the horn-book and be a hero!" This advice, added to certain information of Slimps' progress, so darkened all again the beautiful young light of natural good that on the production of a few pence, the book was carefully hidden, and the dimness of the squalid chamber changed in a few minutes for the warmth and gorgeousness of the nearest gin-shop. Some privileged customer was just at that instant opening one of the evening papers, and his literary courage had been lately fortified with a glass, he immediately read, for the edification of a few around him, an advertisement that met his eye on the first page:—£20 reward and a Free Pardon. Stolen from the shop of David Brandle, bookseller—Street, Cheapside, last night, or early this morning, a brass-bound box, containing a book! The thief stopped to hear no more, but placing back upon the counter the untouched glass of gin, wistfully looked round to see if the girl had heard, or observed; but as she was at a distance, amidst the struggling crowd of that death-sea, he glided into the street, and kept on with a swift step. All the visions of Togg glory shone again; and as all that were his friends were too ignorant to solve the mystery that lay between this advertisement and Cripps' sudden eagerness, he determined, with one of those impulses that sometimes seem to be angel-wise promptings of our spiritual nature, to understand and find the clue himself. There was a newly-opened school in that neighbourhood, where crime and squa-

lor, as he had often heard told with blasphemous lips in the roar of Togg glory, met with kindly ministration; and so the next threshold stepped on from the gin-shop was that of the ragged school. The heart of guilt was courageous till this last step was made; and then, with the abject and the coward fear of guiltiness, it stooped lowly, in meek confession of its abjectness, before the beaming light of good. But taking courage at last, he passed in with vacillating step, and full of shame at the abjectness of his rags, yet to be kindly hailed, as one boasting the form of the Divine; that hand that had been stretched forth to thieve on the foregoing night, now held the horn-book, and the wondering and the thirsty ear heard as were the silver-noted music of a heaven not even fashioned forth in the hopefulness of dreams!

Of course the motive was yet towards that vision of Togg glory. When he could read, and tell what was within the book, what a sum he might sell it for! So mingled the evil and the good, as the chief crouched back into the straw that night—to dream, however, more of the horn-book than the halter, and waking in the morning to find that the poor Duckling had been there, and left some food. The act for the first time fell like dew upon the course hard nature of neglect and crime.

Yet, though the purpose still leant towards the furtherance of Togg glory, it was wonderful with what rapidity the poor thief learnt. Weeks did for him, what only months for others! He was the wondrous prodigy of the school, and this knowledge grew from day to day, the vision of Togg glory dimmed, the petty theft scarcely supplied the exigencies of hunger, and not only scouted at by Togg and her crew, he all at once found himself opposed to the bitter malice of the Jew, who had not forgotten the prize his fingers had clutched.

Driven by this from his miserable lodging; he had to find shelter as he might, sometimes beneath bridge-arches, or dank blind court ways, and even with the Duckling in his lonely sewer; for the little shrivelled creature had lately fallen ill, and of course all the glories of the Togg establishment were closed in the absence of some sort of tangibility. It was Tom's turn now to be a friend. When he could no longer thieve—when the paralysis of crime passed into the iron nerve and strenuous force of growing knowledge—when the last theft hung like a shadow on his spirit—he gathered together the refuse of markets, earned a few pence at wharves and stables, and when not, starved with his drooping friend. Wonderful often too was the Rembrandt picture of light and shade in the lonely sewer. Beside the narrow fire, sparkling up fitfully towards the dank roof, he told the pallid wretch of that inner life that is linked to divineness of good, or read scraps of newspapers picked up in the streets, or went over the marvellous one page stuck like tempting fruit in some shop-window; and so at last, even in this nursery of vileness, the intellectual nature of the outcast worshipped in spirit and truth. Now came the glorious night, when he could read well enough to open the bookseller's quaint treasure beside the Duckling fire. Now no longer was it the curiosity of guilt—but the curiosity of good.

It was a volume of ancient madrigals, with appropriate music; and 'Daisy Brandle' was the name written on the fly leaf. It opened everywhere, where the music and the poetry were twin in gracefulness. Now it was certain that there was no Togg treasure, but some old memory of an earth-sorrow; and the matter before thought of, was now resolved upon; and so, in a few days, (God bless thee Tom!) with an honest earned shilling, though fearfully hungered for, the lock was mended, the book and the few things replaced with a reverent hand, and having made up the Duckling's fire, and placed his fragment of blanket around him, Tom, with the box beneath his arm, and naked as of old, took his way to Brandle's shop, and, bless the outcast! not a bit of hesitation now; so different is the principle of evil and that of good; but going right in, placed the box upon the book the old man was reading. He turned deadly pale, looked fiercely up in the thief's face, and then, moving rapidly off his stool, gripped the wretch's naked arm. But fear was past. Looking with eyes that never flinched or wavered before the old man's searching gaze, Tom told the whole truth, yet never asked one word of pity.

One by one the fingers relaxed as the gaunt face of famine betrayed the misery of endurance, and when the tale was done, the old man said merely—"Humph! well see if you can put up the shutters, there they are!"—and when, with glad alacrity, the boy had moved away, that old man fell upon the box, and the tears gushed forth like summer rain. Well, when the shop was closed, and Tom was especially handy, the old man merely saying—"You're hungry, I see;" beckoned him upstairs, roused up the fire in that same little room, placed bread and a scrap of meat before him, and sinking into the old arm-chair, fell into a sort of dreaming reverie, looking up, however from time to time, to ask the name of the scholar-master, and to note it down; and when at last hunger was satisfied, and the best morsel saved for the Duckling, the boy rose and thanked the old man, who then said—"Well, I'll light you down; but come to-morrow at noon. I'll see what can be done for you."

It was a glorious night, of hope and fear. When he went punctual to the time, at noon, he found that the old man had been already to the schoolmaster, and the report had been

so favourable, that he, Tom, the outcast the vagabond, found himself in some five minutes appointed to the office shop-shutter, sweeper, and sole attendant on the old bookseller, the once-named red-nosed individual having recently died. In few words, the old man told him that he led a very lonely life; that one condition of their intercourse was that of little speech; that in the kitchen below he might make his home, and do there as he liked, that coals were in abundance for his use, that though for himself he sternly refused all comforts, having merely his food from a neighbouring cook-shop, yet that he, Tom, should have a little weekly sum to do with as he pleased, and that some old clothes were in a chest up stairs that he might have.

Life's contrasts make the copy of life. Truth's poetry of hope and gratefulness was there that night, when a fire burnt high and clear in the long-neglected grate of the strange kitchen; when the scissors, in the John-Bull-trowsers-of-capacity, fashioned forth a smaller pair, when their was a rub at the old Dutch clock, and a new voice from the long perished hour; when there was a dipping into one of the dusty volumes; and just a toast at the cheese, and a warm to the beer. Oh! blessed poetry of cheerfulness and joy!

Weeks of this happiness soon rolled by, and never was the truth better shown, that all great natural intellect, true to the great laws of nature of which it forms a part, falls, with its perfecting power, upon the lowliest, as the highest things. The trowsers of once terrible capacity fitted fairly; the coat-outshone Slimps' very best; the saucepans bright, the dressers reflected back the glowing fire; the fire itself was so cheerful, that the long moped crickets came in joy; the music of the Dutch clock went fairly on; the old man's food, though he knew it not, was warmer than of old, his hearth secretly cleaned; last and best too, with leave the vast heterogeneous mass of books, in the neglected rooms upstairs was begun to be sorted and arranged; and when, one night, a pile of thousands of spelling-books and grammars reared itself up, that intellect which society had disregarded and called vile, thought within 'every one of these shall be a light upon miserable Togg darkness; and thus, and thus began to be fashioned that great spiritual divinity which shall come forth from rags.

Another joy, too! One day, from some questions asked, Tom took courage to tell the taciturn old man the history of the wretched Duckling perishing in a sewer. In a moment in a word or so brief mercy, that supposed hard old man said, "Well, let him come and be by your fire below." And so that very night in an ancient sedan, lent by a smiling beadle (what a wonder!) who lived in the neighbourhood and had retired from sedan keeping, the dying creature was brought, and laid tenderly by Tom himself, for he had wasted to a shadow, upon a little bed made upon three chairs beside the glowing fire. And though the little shrivelled-up starveling was alone almost all day, with no other company than the ticking melody of the hours, and the chirping crickets, there was night, when Tom could sit beside and read, and strew with flowers the sinking pathway to the grave. Though still taciturn, the old man seemed to take pleasure in the company of the boy. One night after having observed a little tobacco-box on a shelf, Tom bought a pipe and some delicate tobacco, and laid it filled beside the old man. He shook his head said something about his not having smoked for many years; yet, nevertheless, laid it reverently beside him on the mantel-piece. As these privileges of intercourse increased, Tom found, that often after night-fall the old man had a visitor; a little flute-shaped wheezened old gentleman, named Webbe, who kept a small music shop in a street hard by; and as the strange story of the old man's daughter 'Daisy Brandle' oozed out bit by bit from the said cheerful beadle, Tom began to take great interest in his coming, as often on such occasions, a voice was given to the music of those old madrigals. This Webbe had been music-master to the girl, who, beside being beautiful had been gifted with a wonderful voice and possessing somewhat her father's quaint taste, had loved such music and such words. Much mystery hung about the foregone time; but on the very noon she was to have been married a cousin who dearly loved her, and who managed the old man's then extensive business, she departed with some princely vagabond, whom she had by accident met with at Webbe's. Little had been known of her from that hour; the business dwindled away, and the cousin dying broken-hearted, the old man had sunk into the sort of dreary life I tell off, and only once a year, on the anniversary of her departure, opened that old chamber that had been hers, and in its moulder and decay, was whispered to be just as she had left it; Master Webbe being on that night always a guest. From hints, dropped by the before-mentioned predecessor of Tom, the beadle had gathered, that Daisy had returned of late years to England, with a young child, and earned a precarious living as an itinerant player. This was all that was known.

It was curious that, as the summer waned, the Duckling, still lingering fitfully on, some little errand took the boy one night to old Webbe's shop. The musician was in his little backparlour, rommaging amongst some old music for a customer, who, seated in the shop, was worthily representing those gods of Parnassus, Stornhold and Hopkins, by scraping his throat, and looking solemn, whenever he laid aside an heretic song from the quaint L. M.'s and S. M.'s he was looking at.

"A pretty thing this, sir, said Tom, 'as he took up a song he had heard old Webbe sing. 'Profane, profane,' hem'd Stornholdism. 'Yet even cometh it forth from the mouth of babes and sucklings, for no longer ago than last Monday a little vagabond was a-sitting a-singing it in my churchyard, and what made it badder, under my very desk window. He—m, but I s'e soon 'ad her off, for like Moses I smote with a rod, 'specially as it was a little vagabond, as our blessed wicar o' Gold-deacon is going to law with the neighbouring wicar of Batter-cum-Bacon, 'cause the mother, a tramping cretar, died on extraparoekia ground, and each parish says it won't maintain, and so * * * * * With glistening eyes, and heart divining all, Tom stopped him to ask the name. 'Well, some scrap paper, with Brandle written on it, was found in the mother's pocket, and * * * * * This was enough, the boy waited not for his errand, but posted off to his friend the smiling beadle; and that very night Tom asked his master for a holiday, which was granted.

It was a glorious autumn noon, some days after, that the once outcast and the vagabond made some inquiries at a cottage door in a little village amidst the Surrey hills. 'The child that these parsons are a-making a noise about! Well, as Gruntpipe's gathering his apples, and 's safe, she, poor cretar, has crept into the churchyard I dare duresay, it is her only home.' And so, breathlessly, Tom crossed the rustic stile, and with hushed step, went on towards the shadow of the church. In a corner, assigned to pauper burial, for the grass was rank and long, sat a little child some seven years old, bending like a crushed flower down-trodden to the earth. Starting with terror, even at the boy's light step, she rose, little flower as she was, and stood before him, the image of the old man. 'Daisy,' and at that word spoken lowly by divinity from rags, the trusting nature of childhood recognised in the outcast a friend, and, folded in his arms, the ministering angel of Pity wept above the tears of overflowing gladness. He bore her swiftly from the churchyard in his arms, to the top of the lane where the coach passed by, waited for it, and with her then journeyed on to town. Reaching home by night-fall, he bore her into the house unseen by the old man; and the slowly-dying creature, who at times wandered in intellect, said often through the night as she slept beside the fire, nursed by Tom, 'Don't look at her hard, she is too like those pure-winged things you read of, Tom.'

The morrow night, as the divinity-forth-from-rags had reckoned, was the anniversary when the locked chamber was opened. Tom had never entered it; but when he knew old Webbe was come, and after listening with little tiptoed Daisy on the landing to some of those old songs, quickly recognised by the child, for they had been sung by her mother, he took courage and went in. It was a bed-chamber, strewn with apparel, just as the girl had left it; and the two old men were seated by the instrument she had so often played. The one had played sorrowfully, the other had listened droopingly, and they heard not the boy and the child enter; to them the past was visible and sentient; the present dead.

"Please, sir," said Tom, at last laying his hand respectfully on that of the old bookseller, "do not now let these songs make you longer sorrowful; here is a living spirit that will sing them cheerfully because music is the glad voice of God himself. This is your little grand-child." The power of anger was all gone; and the old man forgot his years of sorrow, in the living image and voice of the child. And if at last one was more subdued than the rest, it was the once outcast, the vagabond, the thief, who had by act made the baptism of sin, and recognised by each the beautiful power which good in its nature has over evil!

The pipe was four times filled that night; a rare supper came from the Drum and Trumpet opposite, and whilst Daisy sung on the old man's knee to the ravished ear of Webbe, Tom listened reverently and lovingly!

And now, whilst I write, Tom Brandle, as he is called, is a proper fighting dragon in the matter of time and education, and the dogmatic, self-satisfied British Lion, with all his roaring, is like to have the worst of it; for, besides being a bookseller, and concocter of 'aiming high' spelling books, and a diver into every haunt of crime and wretchedness, he has turned the once gloomy warehouses into a great Ragged School, where is fought, every night, a glorious and triumphant battle with Ignorance and Superstition. That sweet harmonies of our divine nature may not be absent.

Daisy has been trained to sing oftentimes therein; and the little flute-shaped man has become an enthusiastic teacher. And Mr. Slimps, from an Apollo of thievery, has become a dispenser of Brandle spelling books through the country; and he often tells of the poor Duckling's happy death, and Tom's great friendship. And old Brandle smokes extraordinary pipes, over his Bartons and his Fullers thinking much of a wedding ring Tom may bye and bye give to Daisy, with as much reverence for the human flower, as did he, the Poet, when he raised up the one of the summer air crushed beneath his mountain plough.

Therefore the divine metaphysic of Truth is this: Evil is not a necessity to man, but a contingent of ignorance, that will fall as humanity progresses towards the great principle of good, which is that of Nature.

An Athenian, who was lame in one foot, joining the army, was laughed at by the soldiery, on account of his lameness. "I am here to fight," said he, "not to return."