

THE CORMORANT.

The children in the narrow court opening into a London street were playing noisily; their voices rose shrill and clear above the din of wheels, the calls of omnibus conductors, and the cries of flower-sellers:

Sally, Sally Waters, sprinkle in the pan.
Rise up, Sally, for a nice young man.

Then the words changed to another ditty:

Here we are on Tom Tiddler's ground,
Picking up gold and silver.

Yet, certainly, they had little to do with gold and silver, seeing that their clothes were ragged, and could never, at the best of times, have cost much. But they were young; the sky above was blue, and the sun shone, and life was pleasanter than it had been in the winter. It is better to be hungry and warm than hungry and shivering with cold.

So each little grimy hand was outstretched to clasp another in a joyous circle, and for the time at least childhood reigned triumphant. Harsh words and harsh blows were forgotten, and little feet, some bare, others poorly shod, danced around an imaginary mulberry bush to an odd, crooning chant, neither musical nor harmonious, but not without a charm of its own. There were children enough and to spare in Garden Court, and they were all at play, all save one.

"Come on, Polly, have a game with us!" they cried.

But she shook her head, which was covered with brown curls, and turned her face away. It was a pale little face, with large, thoughtful hazel eyes. The child had, without doubt, something on her mind.

The game went on merrily, interrupted by an occasional rough speech or quarrelsome word, that caused the little watcher to shrink as from a blow. It was only at such times that she seemed conscious of her surroundings; for the most part she remained unmoved, wrapped in her own thoughts.

"Bedtime, Polly!" A head appeared at the window above, and its owner called to her softly.

"Coming, mother!" The child's voice scarcely rose above a whisper, but she needed no second bidding. She was glad of the summons, glad to go indoors out of the noise; and with the sudden revulsion of feeling, so common to the young, a hope sprang up within her.

Perhaps there would be good news for her! Perhaps father was better. Only yesterday mother had said that when things were at their worst there came a turning point. Had it come now, all at once, while she stood on the threshold and waited for—she knew not what.

The invalid had been worse that afternoon, so bad that Polly had crept away terrified, and the idea that he would never recover had come into her mind. It was so terrible a thought that it turned her sick, until she reasoned with herself, and became convinced that it was but the outcome of her own foolishness. She had known so many persons who were ill, and they had all got better except—and her memory went back to the funerals she had seen in the court, some of them so grand and imposing that the children had collected in a crowd and admired the nodding plumes. Others were humble enough, but oh, so sad and dreary in Polly's eyes!

There was Mrs. Jones, the washerwoman; but then she was ever so old, and so was Matthew Sparks. He had gone on crutches for many a year past. Of course old persons had to die; but father was only thirty years old.

Yet how about William Smith, father of Mary Jane, the noisiest child in the court? He was only twenty-eight years old, and yet he had been carried out of his house one day in December, when the marks of the bearers' feet lay black and distinct upon the soft carpet of newly fallen snow.

Polly's heart ached and her lips trembled. Two years younger than father, yet he had gone! After all, then, some people die when they are young. Must he die too?

She went slowly upstairs, her feet dragging heavily, and entered the sick-room on tiptoe.

There he lay, perfectly still, his face white and drawn, as it had been so very long, his eyes big and shining; but he was not laid out, for he had strength to speak to her, although his voice was low and feeble. Nonetheless the child drew her chair to the bare table, and because hunger impelled her, took a crust of bread from her mother's hand, and ate it slowly.

The sick man watched her, sighing at times, and shifting uneasily from side to side. At last she felt his hand upon her head.

"Time was," he said, "when we had enough to eat and drink, and need not feed you on crusts, my little girl. Time was when your mother and I sat down in a cozy room, to a nice, hot supper, and I counted myself a gentleman—only a clerk, but a gentleman for all that. The happy, peaceful times, the friendly faces, the sympathetic words are gone with the money that bought them. Eh, lass?"

He turned to his wife with an access of bitter regret that rendered his voice strong for the moment.

She shook her head, but made no answer, except in the tender touch of her hand and a comprehensive glance around the bare room, which took in every poor detail.

"Gone!" he repeated; "gone! And it is time that I went, too, my dear. Things will be better for you when I lie underground."

"No, no!" cried his wife, wringing her hands as though in physical pain. "Not better, but a thousand times worse!"

"Better, I tell you, for you will have nothing to do but go to the cormorant and claim your money. You and Polly will not be beggars any longer. You will be able to put on a piece of decent black, and the neighbors will see how you look when you are dressed somewhat as you used to be when we were first married. How pretty you were, Mary—how fresh and happy! I can see you now, standing at the parlor window, watching for me when I came home from the city at night, a lady, every inch of you. In your neat, black gown, you'll be a lady again by and by. Please God, dear lass, by and by!"

He repeated the words very softly, as though they were the refrain of some half-forgotten song, and she sobbed as he listened.

"It is not by and by that I care for; we want the money now," she answered. "Polly and I are strong. We can live on

bread and water and be thankful, but you need nourishing food. Did not the doctor say that if you could have it you would be better?"

"Yes, and I believe I should, he answered quietly. His eyes had a hungry look as they glanced around in search, as it seemed, of unattainable luxuries. Then his wife burst into tears, and Polly, who longed to cry as well, but restrained lest she should add to her mother's distress, crept into her little bed, which was placed in a corner of the same room, and only separated from it by a curtain, and lay quite still, thinking. No wonder she was puzzled; she was only eight years old. "Who is the cormorant," she asked herself, "and why won't he give father the money now, while he is alive? Perhaps he would if he knew about his illness, and how very, very poor we are."

She slipped out of bed, and stood at the sick man's side.

"Father," she questioned, softly, "where does the cormorant live?"

He turned and looked at the little figure, smiling as he answered: "The cormorant lives in the city, in Threadneedle street, a long way from here."

"Too far to walk?" she asked again.

"Oh dear, no! not too far for grown-up folks."

"Hush, child! Go to bed. Sick persons should not be disturbed," interrupted her mother.

Polly ran back, but she could not go to sleep. A grand thought had come to her. Tomorrow she would go herself, see the cormorant, and tell him all about father, and how very ill he was. She would not let her mother know she was going, because it would disappoint her if she came home without the money—not an unlikely thing, for the cormorant might be out, and in that case she must try again.

"Please, God," she said, clasping her slender hands together, "I am going to see the cormorant tomorrow. Please, God, help me to find the way, and make him listen to me."

Her voice sank into a drowsy whisper; her tired eyelids drooped and closed. Then, because it was very late, long past her usual hour, Polly fell asleep.

All the next morning she repeated to herself, over and over again, "The cormorant, Threadneedle Street, City," she was so much afraid she might forget the words.

It was a suffocating day. The sick man lay panting on his pillows. No breeze was stirring. Away in the country, the wind swept, soft and fresh, over hills and valleys and golden cornfields, but here in the close court the atmosphere was dull and heavy, smoke-laden and weighed with the breath of men, women and children, huddled together and jostling one another as they passed.

"I shall not get over this, wife," said Polly's father. "The heat is stifling."

His child's face was flushed with heat as she bent over him.

"If only you could have beet tea and grapes and nice things," she whispered.

"Don't!" he said, peevishly; "it makes me feel worse than ever to hear them spoken of."

Polly was silent, but her face wore an odd sort of smile. The father wondered what happy, childlike fancy had come to her, at this time of all others, and would have been greatly surprised if he had known that her thoughts were wandering in the same direction as his own. For the mind of the sick man was fixed on the great insurance office in the city, where, years ago, he had gone, full of strength and vigor, to "make things square," as he put it, for wife and child, if they outlived him. That had been his one wise step; those that followed were foolish enough, and lying there he knew it, and reproached himself bitterly.

But amidst all his self-criticism there remained one subject for congratulation. He had managed, no one knew with what great difficulty, to keep up his payments; and those he loved would receive five hundred pounds at his death. Meanwhile he was passing away for want of what the doctor mentioned, carelessly enough, as nourishing diet. But about all this his little girl knew nothing.

She thought of the cormorant as a person, probably a very big and fierce man; but she would not allow herself to feel frightened. Whenever she began to tremble she whispered low, for "father's sake!" and smiled brightly as she trudged along.

The pavement scorched her feet and her shoes were very thin and worn. She had washed her face particularly clean, and brushed her hair, making it as tidy as possible, but she wore no hat, and looked odd enough as she hurried through the crowded streets.

The policemen smiled their astonishment as she asked her way to Threadneedle street, but they were good-natured, and ready to answer her questions. She wished there were fewer horses and carriages, but that could not be helped; and she managed to get across.

Her head ached, and so did her feet; but Polly had no time to think of such things. She remembered her father, lying so sick and helpless, and when she was not thinking of him, which was seldom enough, she was trying to plan what she should say to the cormorant.

On, on, through the busy streets with her head held bravely up; on, on, past handsome shop windows, filled with beautiful things; and at last—Threadneedle Street.

Polly's heart beat fast, but she felt there was no need to ask further questions; she was eight years old and knew how to read. But this word was a very long one. It would, perhaps, be better to ask. She stopped in front of a tall policeman, and put her question.

"There you are," he answered, pointing across the street.

THE CORMORANT.

She read each letter slowly and aloud. Then she darted across, swift as an arrow, and entered what seemed to her a building as grand as the palace of a king. It was dreadful to find so many eyes fixed upon her; but she did not flinch.

"If you please," she asked in a clear voice, "does the cormorant live here?"

A number of men were present, and they all laughed aloud. Then one, with a pleasant face, stepped forward and answered her.

"Run upstairs, my dear; go down the little passage to the right. You will find an old gentleman sitting alone in his office. Ask him if he is the cormorant. If he says yes, you can tell him your business."

The men all laughed again, though Polly

considered it no laughing matter. She had, for her part, never been more serious or in earnest. Up she ran, her loose hair flying.

There was the little passage to the right, and at the farther end the door which had been indicated. Tap, tap, tap! She rapped and entered.

An old gentleman, who sat by a table strewn with papers, glanced up at her, evidently a little puzzled and somewhat astonished. He had a kind, ruddy face, gray hair and pleasant eyes. Polly, very white and trembling, advanced, and said hesitatingly:

"If you please, sir, are you the cormorant?"

He seemed to be a little bewildered for a moment; then his face cleared, and he answered, slowly.

"Yes, my dear, I suppose so. What is your business? Sit down, and let me hear all about it."

She hesitated; but he lifted her gently to the table, and looking up into her face, with her small hands folded in her lap, she told her simple story. Her father was very ill, she said, and she had heard him say, only last night, that when he died things would be better. Mother could go to the cormorant then, and get her money.

"But oh! if you please, dear Mr. cormorant," the child added, "it will be no good then—no good when father is dead! It is to keep him here that we want the money. He would get better if we could buy him nice things to eat—beef tea, and—and—nourishing food. I heard the doctor telling mother so."

The gravity upon the listener's face deepened. He questioned her, closely perhaps, but not unkindly; and, having fathomed the purport of the sick man's words, he endeavored patiently to explain them to his little daughter. He saw that he was understood, but the next moment the child burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Oh dear! dear!" she cried, "then it is all of no use, and poor father will die!"

"No, no, my dear. I will go with you and see him, and we will take him all sorts of nice things."

"Nourishing food?"

"Oh, yes."

"And beef tea?"

"Certainly; grapes, too, if you think he will like them."

Polly had no doubt on this point, and nodded her head so violently, to emphasize the conviction, that the curls fell over her forehead in picturesque confusion.

Meanwhile messages were sent to and fro, and before long a large basket was filled with delicacies, and Polly herself regaled on cake and grapes.

"Well, my little maid," asked one of the clerks, who had been conversing in a low tone with her new friend, and had even condescended to fetch a cab for them, "where are you going?"

"Home with the cormorant," replied Polly, promptly, and as distinctly as the last mouthful of cake would permit; and they both laughed as if it were an excellent joke.

The cab rolled along gaily, and the child entertained her companion with her artless talk. She did not know that when her father said the "cormorant," he meant the cormorant Life Insurance Company.

Neither did she know that the pleasant-faced gentleman at her side was the president of this company; but when they reached Garden Court, she lay fast asleep, her head pillowed on the old gentleman's shoulder.

"Oh dear! What is the matter? Is it an accident?" Polly's mother asked, rushing to the door.

"An accident! Nothing of the sort. Far from it. It is only that you have a brave little daughter, who has brought you a friend."

Polly awoke, with a smile on her lips.

"Oh yes, mother, dear!" she exclaimed. "This is the cormorant, and he has all sorts of lovely things, in his basket. Father will get better now."

So he did—very slowly, but none the less surely; and Polly, as she kneels at her bedside night and morning, prays, with her young heart warmed by an unshaken faith, "Please, God, bless father and mother, and the dear, good cormorant."—*L. E. Tidde-man, in the Youths Companion.*

A THRILLING ADVENTURE

In these days in England, when a prisoner receives a sentence to prison it means fair living, a moderate daily task, letters once a month, and visits now and then from friends. He is therefore quite satisfied—as satisfied as one who loses his liberty can be.

In former years, before penal colonies were abandoned, transportation meant everything that was vile, vicious, and horrible. A man would have done better to die before going aboard the ship which was to convey him to Australia, and a great many did commit suicide. It meant, in every sense of the word, that the man was to be used as a dumb brute of the lowest order. He was to be underfed, overworked, kicked, cuffed, flogged and driven to some overt act for which he could be shot down. The idea was to strike terror to the heart of the criminal classes, but it acted just to the contrary. Although the courts inflicted the severest sentences, crime steadily increased. I did not set out to discuss the policy, however, but to tell you an adventure.

When fifty or more convicts were ready for Botany Bay the government would hire a sailing vessel to transport them. I have seen them go in files, and I have seen 215 on board of one ship. A transport ship was fitted up between decks as a prison, the space being divided off by iron gratings, and every twenty men were in charge of a captain—one of their own number. The lot were in charge of a surgeon appointed by the government to go with the ship. In all matters affecting the convicts every man on the ship was bound to obey the surgeon. The crew had muskets and cutlasses dealt out to them, and a certain number had to stand guard as the various gangs were brought on deck to be exercised. If the surgeon was a thorough man he got his "consignment" through in good order, but if he was not, there was sure to be an outbreak of malignant type which sometimes carried off half the lot. I knew one ship to lose forty-seven convicts out of sixty-five, and with them eleven of the crew.

The ship Silver Queen, Capt. James, had contracted to carry out 128 Botany Bay convicts, and this was my second year aboard of her as an apprentice. A day or

two before we left England I reached my fifteenth year, and was a pretty solid lad for my age. As I remember the lot, about fifty were sentenced for manslaughter, the same number for robbery and burglary, and the others were made up of forgers, embezzlers, incendiaries and so on. There were two in the lot who had escaped from the Bay, and finally found their way back to be recaptured. Taken as a whole, the lot was said to be the worst one ever sent out, and the ship carried an extra officer and four extra hands. The prison part took up one-half of the space between decks. Every morning and evening, when the weather would permit, twenty men at a time were allowed to come up for ten minutes' exercise. There were six gangs, and every man of them had leg chains on. There were temporary ladders to descend through the hatches, and at the foot of each ladder was a pen in which a sentinel was stationed day and night. Thus the convicts were always under a watchful eye.

Boy like, my sympathies were with the convicts. No matter what they had done, the idea that they were going off to a living death settled the matter with me. The discipline of the ship was very strict, but I found several opportunities to show my good will. When on duty below I passed them tobacco, gave them the news from above, and winked at the disobedience of rules. Every convict gang had its leader. The leader of this one was a man named Harry Small—one of the escaped Botany Bays who was being returned. He was a quiet fellow, intelligent and crafty, and when he saw that I leaned his way he one day asked me for pencil and paper. I gave them to him, and he wrote a note which I afterward delivered to a sailor before the mast. I did all this out of pure sympathy, having not the slightest idea that there was any wrong in it.

Nothing whatever occurred on the voyage to the Cape of Good Hope. All the officers were disagreeably disappointed in the behavior of the convicts, which was so exemplary that not a man had been flogged or imprisoned in the black hole. I heard our captain say that it was almost as fine as making a regular voyage out. I said nothing whatever occurred. I meant among the convicts. It afterward transpired that there was an excitement among the crew forward. The sailor to whom I had delivered the note had secretly declared to his mates that the surgeon had predicted an outbreak of fever after leaving the cape. The consequence was that seven of them deserted at Cape Town, and the same number of new hands were shipped. I could never see where the sailor had any hand in it, but we certainly lost by the exchange. We lost seven Englishmen, while those filled their places were Portuguese and half-breed Dutchmen, and as dirty a set as you ever saw aboard a ship.

In leaving the Cape we stood to the southeast for a hundred miles, and then laid the course straight for Point Davey, on the southernmost end of Tasmania Land, this course being only two points from due east. In this run, clear across the Indian ocean, we should pass a hundred miles to the south of the island of St. Paul. That and Amsterdam island are the only two within 500 miles of the course.

I was on guard below for four hours every other day. On each occasion Small asked me for the run of the ship. I could nearly always give it to him, as I heard it from some of the officers. We had been out a week when he asked me about the island of St. Paul. I had an old chart on which it was put down as uninhabited. He asked how close we would run to it, and that I find out, if possible, when we were at the nearest point. Had I been older I should not have been deceived. I was only a lad—and a green one at that—and, as I told you before, I felt a deep sympathy for the convicts.

It was on a Tuesday night that I overheard the captain say to the surgeon that if the wind held we should be opposite St. Paul by noon the next day. The wind did hold, and at ten o'clock next forenoon I went on duty below, and at once gave Small the news. It was just an hour later when a fight broke out among the men, and there was a row to disturb the

whole ship. The orders of the officers were set at defiance, and, as a consequence, when they did succeed in commanding obedience, it was deemed best to do some flogging to overawe the convicts. Four men who were supposed to be the ring-leaders were singled out, the entire lot were mustered on deck, and pretty soon No. 1 was lashed up to the gratings for punishment. The first blow struck was a signal, and every convict uttered a shout, and sprang for a weapon. It was a complete surprise to the officers, but it was quickly seen that there was a conspiracy. Not one of the seven new sailors would fire a shot, and the guns of four or five others had been tampered with. The fight lasted about ten minutes, during which time the surgeon, first and second mates, and three hands were killed. In return they killed seven of the convicts. I had no hand in the row. At the very first go off, some one struck me in the neck, and knocked me flat and unconscious, and when I came to, the convicts had the ship. I have reason to believe I was placed *hors du combat* that I might not be hurt during the row.

Well, as I said, the thing had been done by the time I got my senses back, and the convict gang was wild with exultation. The rougher portion demanded that every one who was not with them should be butchered, but small and his three or four lieutenants put them down. I think the first idea of the convicts was to go ashore at St. Paul, having previously scuttled the ship, but this gave place to another plan. The third mate or bo'sun agreed to cast in his lot with the convicts. The captain, carpenter, sailmaker and six or seven hands got no choice. The long boat was lowered, provided with sail, oars, food and water, and the men I have named were sent adrift without being harmed. By a pocket compass which one of them carried they steered a course for the island and landed there two days later, but were on it six months before being taken off. I wanted to go with them, but Small refused me permission, saying I had been so kind to him that he felt it his duty to reward me. All the others spoke very kindly to me, and I had the mortification of realizing that I was the cat's paw by which they had taken possession of the ship. Before going away the captain sought to argue with the men, telling them what the consequences of their acts would be, but he was hooted at. Indeed, but for Small he would never have been allowed to go off in the boat.

As soon as the long boat had left us, and the dead had been thrown overboard, Small called all the people together and made a speech. He appointed his officers, stated that he proposed to steer to the north, and that every one aboard could consider himself a pirate and be hanged to him. The men cheered again and again, and by an hour after meridian everything was running smoothly. Small enforced the strictest discipline, and the two or three convicts who growled about it were knocked down with promptness and vigor. I was assigned to the cabin to wait on the captain, and our cook and steward had to do duty as before. Small knew something of navigation, and he had some smart sailors with him. He had a whole ocean to himself, and the chart showed him that the nearest land to the north, after passing St. Paul and Amsterdam, was the Chagos Archipelago, in the Indian Ocean.

For the next twelve days little happened of interest. Then one day, about noon, we sighted a Dutch brig on her way out from Java. The sailmaker had manufactured a very fair piratical flag, and this was immediately run up, and our course changed to cut the stranger off. When signalled to heave to she lost no time, being scared half to death. He had a crew of seven men, and no resistance was offered. Small sent a boat load of armed men to take possession, and as it happened to fall calm soon after the crafts drifted together, they were lashed in that position for the next thirty hours. The brig was full of coffee and spices. Small took what he wanted out of her, and then scuttled her, while her crew was sent adrift in their own yawl. Had the brig been new or a better sailor a part of our large force would have seized

OAK HALL.

OUR'S can compare with any custom-made garment to be procured in this or any other city. Here's a beautiful piece of Scotch Tweed, make up fine, warm and neat. There's a fine piece of English Worsted Black, soft as silk; diagonal or stripe; a suit off that will be worth having. Then there's Fancy Worsted Pantings, handsome goods, if you like flashy pants; and as to fit and style, we guarantee to be equal to anything made in Canada.

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her as a tender. Some of our men were for killing all the Dutchmen, but Small decided otherwise. He was a man averse to bloodshed when it could be avoided.

During the next two weeks we sighted only two sail, and they were far distant. I think it was on the twenty-ninth day after the capture of the ship, and we were all well up to the Chagos, when a sail was made out on our port quarter. This was about 9 o'clock in the morning, and a man sent aloft declared her to be an Indian. The regular track of those vessels was to the west of Madagascar, up the Mozambique Channel; but this one might be going to call at some of the Eastern islands. No sooner was her character made out than all was rejoicing and excitement on board our ship. The arms were got out, grog served to the men, and everybody was impatient for the Indianman to come on. She came pacing along at a good gait, the wind being fair, and she was within half a mile of us when Small hoisted the black flag and signalled her to heave to. This was hardly accomplished when a dozen men cried out in chorus that the stranger was not an Indianman at all, but a corvette, and a moment later she flew French colors and began to drop her gun-port covers.

For the next five minutes confusion reigned supreme on our decks. Then Small hauled down the black flag and hoisted the English colors and dipped them in compliment, but the Frenchman could see over a hundred men running about on our decks, and he knew that something was wrong. He came racing up, and passed us close enough to hail and ask what was the trouble. Small answered him that we were an emigrant ship, and that the black flag was a joke.

The corvette ran ahead, luffed up, and fired a gun for us to heave to. Small ordered all sail to be set, but the men were hardly aloft before the corvette sent a solid shot over us and brought Small to his senses. As soon as our headway was checked an armed boat's crew came aboard and the fact that we were a convict ship was at once apparent. Half our number were transferred to the corvette, and twenty-five Frenchmen put aboard of the Queen, and then convoked the latter returned to Cape Town. The cook, steward, and myself were exonerated from all blame when put on trial, but Small and five others were hanged, and every other man whose sentence had been less than life had it extended.—*N. Y. Sun.*

"Nuf Ced."

A farmer-looking man entered a coal dealer's office yesterday with a parcel under his arm, and after looking about to assure himself that the pair were alone he removed the wrapper and displayed a lump of anthracite coal weighing about a pound.

"Well!" queried the dealer.

"I live out here on the Lake Shore Road."

"Yes."

"Found this on my land."

"Yes."

"It's coal, isn't it?"

"For sure."

"Hard coal?"

"Yes."

"If such pieces as this out-crop on the land my farm ought to be worth something, eh?"

"Fifty dollars an acre, perhaps."

"But there's a coal mine."

"Coal mine be hanged! Some brakeman threw that chunk of coal at your horse or cow. Dang 'em, they waste three tons for me that very way along the road every year."

The farmer man left the lump on the desk and went out without a word or a look.—*Ex.*

The Course of Human Events.

Customer—A year ago I paid you \$150 for an engagement ring. Shortly after that I got a wedding ring for \$25. Now I want some plated safety pins for baby.

Clerk—Yes, sir. Will you pay for them?

Customer—No; have them changed.—*Ex.*