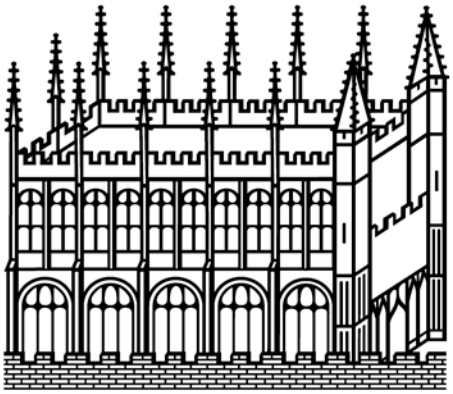


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AND

JIM: A LITTLE NIGGER.

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A LITTLE AUSTRALIAN GIRL;

OR,

THE BABES IN THE BUSH;

AND

JIM: A LITTLE NIGGER.

BY

ROBERT RICHARDSON, B.A.,

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A LITTLE AUSTRALIAN GIRL.

LET me try to give my young readers an idea of what the home of the Alister family was like. It was on the border of a great forest, or what in Australia is called the 'Bush.' Outside, the house had a somewhat rough look, being built chiefly of slabs and rudely-hewn planks of wood, upon which little care had been bestowed in regard to smoothing and polishing. Inside, however, the cottage was comfortable enough, plainly but sufficiently

furnished, and showing unmistakable signs that those who occupied it had all the necessaries and a good many of the comforts of life.

There was a garden in front of the house, and paddocks, stables, and outhouses behind; and behind these again, fields of grain, and meadows in which horses and cows stood knee-deep in the long grass. All around the cleared space which formed Mr. Alister's farm, the bush spread unbroken for miles and miles.

It was a bright morning in April, which in Australia is not a spring but an autumn month. The three Alister children, Katie, George, and Willie, stood at the door of the house, and with them their mother. Katie was nine years old, George seven, and Willie five. Katie held in her hand a small hatchet, and George a coil of cord.

'It's nice, small pieces I want, for kindling—you understand, Katie. The winter will be upon

us soon, and we shall need fine big fires in the evenings; so we must begin to get in a good stock of kindling wood. Father and Macandrew are making a fine pile of big logs, you know; but I think you and George could help with the small wood.'

'Oh yes, mother, we'll manage it all right,' said George.

'Be sure you don't go far from the track, and never wander into places you don't know about. You'd best keep by the creek; you'll get plenty of the right sort of wood there.'

'Very well, mother,' replied Katie; and the three children set off in the direction of the forest.

Katie was a rather grave and sober-faced little girl, with soft, intelligent eyes. George was a sturdy, active youngster, with cheeks tanned as brown as a nut; and Willie, a curly-haired little fellow, with bright blue eyes.

They very soon reached the forest, and a half-hour's walk after entering it brought them to the banks of a little creek or stream. Here, as their mother had said, they found plenty of the sort of wood they wanted. Young saplings of blue-gum, and other native trees, grew along the banks of the creek, and upon these Katie and George began to work with a will. The stems of the young trees were quite slender enough for the little woodcutters to be able to fell them without much difficulty, for Katie and George were strong and hardy, as a settler's children should be.

The brother and sister took the hatchet turn about, and when they had brought down one little tree they chopped it up into small lengths and passed on to the next. In this way they kept moving slowly down the stream, followed closely by Willie, who amused himself, while his brother and sister worked, in gathering wild

flowers and making them into little 'posies for mother,' as he said.

George and Katie did not cease from their labour, except for a few minutes now and then to rest their arms, until the sun was high up in the sky and they knew that it must be nearly mid-day.

'There, George, I think we have cut enough now, quite as much as we can carry, and mother said that we were to be home to dinner. Let us gather the wood together and tie it up into two bundles,' said Katie.

'All right,' answered George in his bluff little voice. 'I'm quite ready for dinner, Katie, I can tell you, for I'm awful hungry.'

The two now collected the wood together, and George, producing from his pocket his roll of cord, tied up the little faggots into two bundles. He slung one across his shoulders, Katie carried the other in the same way, and

with Willie following close in the rear the trio set their faces for home. But when Katie and George looked for the homeward track, it was nowhere to be seen. To right and left, before or behind—nowhere!

'Let us get to the creek. Once we reach that we are all right; we shall be sure to find the track,' said George.

But where was the creek? It was out of sight too. The truth was, that the children, during the last half-hour of their work, had strayed away from the stream without hardly being aware that they were doing so. Engrossed in their wood-cutting, they had gone deeper into the heart of the forest than they had ever intended; and now, when they came to look for the creek, which was their guiding mark as it were, it was not to be seen.

The three children walked this way and that, first to the right and then to the left, and then

forwards and backwards, but no sign of the stream could they discover. They only seemed to be getting deeper and deeper into the bush every moment. All the place round about looked unfamiliar and strange to them. They could behold no tree, or hillock, or track which they knew, and which could help them to recover their way. All around them spread the endless forest, above them the bright blue, silent sky. They had lost themselves.

A heavy cloud overshadowed George's face; little Willie began to cry bitterly; but Katie said—

'We mustn't cry, you and I, George. We must keep up our hearts. We can't be far from home. Let us call as loud as we can, and perhaps father and mother will hear us.'

Katie and George lifted their voices and shouted the cry of 'Coo-ée,' which is the cry that all Australian bush people use, as loud

as they could; and even Willie ceased his tears to join his little voice to those of his brother and sister.

But no answer was returned to the children's call—no answer save the forest echoes, and the shrill cry of the parrots, and the hoarse, mocking voice of that strange bird the 'Laughing Jackass' or 'settler's clock.' Again and again they raised their 'coo-ée,' but never human voice answered, until at last, hoarse and weary, they could call no longer.

Then the three sat down beneath a mimosa tree, and presently Willie, spent with fatigue and weeping, dropped off to sleep.

'Whatever shall we do, Katie?' asked George, who could now hardly keep back his own tears.

'We must just wait here until we are found, George. As soon as father and mother miss us, they will set out to search for us, and they must

find us at last. We must keep up our hearts, George dear, and not give way.'

Thus bravely spoke little Katie. Her own young heart was heavy with anxiety and fear, but she tried to look hopeful and speak cheerfully before her younger brother.

'But I'm so dreadfully hungry, Katie,' said George.

Katie paused a moment before answering.

'You stay here with Willie, George, and I'll see if I can find some 'five-corners.' I'll be sure and not go far. I'll always keep in sight.'

Katie rose and went in search of her 'five-corners' among the low bushes that grew everywhere around in the spaces between the trees. There will be few of my readers, I should think, who will know what 'five-corners' are. They are small berries, about the size of a large pea, but longer in shape—a green pink in colour, and enclosed, like an acorn in its cup, in a little case

of five-pointed leaves, from which they take their familiar name of 'five-corners.' The fruit has a sweet, soft pulp, with a stone in the centre. A great many people would not think it a very good fruit, but most Australian children are fond of it. It is not so good, by a long way, I think, as the English blackberry.

Katie was fortunate enough to find a good number of 'five-corners,' and was soon back again with George. On the berries the two children dined, but they were careful to keep some for Willie when he should awake. By and by he did awake—rather cross and fretful, not at first knowing exactly where he was. The 'fives,' as they are called for shortness by Australian children, quieted him somewhat, and Katie soothed the little fellow with soft, kind words.

After a long rest the three children rose again and resumed their search for some path

or track which might lead them out of the forest. But all their efforts were in vain, and night found them weary and worn with their long walking and their long fast from anything that could be called proper food.

The twilight in Australia is very short during the greater part of the year, and night comes on swiftly. When the darkness had fairly settled down upon the forest, and the children could only see a little way on each side of them, Katie and George gathered together some dry grass and moss, and with this they made a bed for Willie. The little fellow lay down upon his hastily-made couch, and, quite tired out, was soon asleep. Then Katie, fearing that the child might be feeling cold from the unaccustomed exposure, took off her own jacket and wrapped it warmly about the sleeping boy.

'George,' she said, 'let us say our prayers

now. Willie was so tired I just let him go off without saying his.'

The two children knelt side by side and repeated together their usual evening prayer, and then Katie said the familiar hymn beginning 'Gentle Jesus.' The young voices sounded strangely clear and distinct in the stillness of the forest, for a deep silence now reigned throughout the woods, all birds and insects and living things having hushed their different cries with the sunset.

Then Katie and George lay down beside their little brother, and Katie folded her arms around Willie, the better to shield him from the cold. This brave and faithful little girl was determined to do her utmost to guard her brother from whatever hurt might befall him.

I think you can suppose how Mr. and Mrs. Alister were feeling all this time. When the

three children were not back at the house at dinner time, Mrs. Alister went to the door to look for them. She merely thought at first that they had miscalculated their time a little, as young people are apt to do. But she could see no signs of them from the house, and presently Mr. Alister came in from his work.

'I'll just go down to the bush and call them,' said the father.

But no responding answer came to his call.

'I think you should go down to the creek and seek for them,' said Mrs. Alister, beginning to feel a little anxious.

Mr. Alister proceeded through the bush to the creek side. There he found the signs which told him that his children had been at work there, but the children themselves he looked for in vain. After a long search he returned to the house with an anxious face.

'I fear they have wandered farther away

from the home-track than they ought to have done. I can't find them anywhere. But don't be anxious, Mary; they can't be far. I have just come back to get Macandrew and Peter to help me to look for them.

Macandrew and Peter Rogers were the two men who assisted Mr. Alister in the work of the farm.

The three men set off at once on their search, and Mrs. Alister was left to spend an anxious and painful afternoon. When her husband and his two men returned at nightfall without the children, her anxiety and doubt were changed to the keenest fear and anguish. Nothing further could be done that evening, and what a sleepless night of dread and anxiety the mother and father passed it is needless to say.

With the first light of morning the father started for the nearest township, from which

his house and farm were some six or seven miles distant. When he had stated the object of his errand—to obtain assistance in looking for the lost children—a number of men, some acquaintances of Mr. Alister's and some unknown to him, at once volunteered their aid. Such cases always draw out the ready sympathy and help of an Australian bush community.

'But we had better get Tommy Sundown with us, John,' suggested one of Mr. Alister's friends.

'It will make our work twice as easy.'

'Very well; I didn't know that he was in the township at present,' Mr. Alister answered.

'Yes; he has been here for some days. I know where he is to be found.'

Tommy Sundown was soon brought. The man who bore this name was a native black, who was half-civilised and could speak English

pretty well. When he was told what was required of him, to help in the search for the children, he at once said—

'All right, Miss'r Alister. Tommy go with you quick. Lilly Missie Katie she bin cabon good to Tommy often; give him milk and things plenty times; Tommy find piccaninnies if him can, sar.'

In the language of the Australian blacks 'piccaninnies' mean children, and 'cabon' much.

As many as a dozen men started with Mr. Alister in search of the missing children. All that day they continued their search unweariedly, beating the bush in every direction, but in vain. Night fell, and the children were still unfound. Next day the quest was resumed with fresh vigour. It is unnecessary to describe each day's search; it is sufficient to say that it was continued for seven days with-

out success. Once Tommy Sundown thought he had got upon the right track of the children, but that same day rain came on heavily and blotted out all the traces which the black man was so carefully following.

On the morning of the eighth day Tommy again came upon what he felt sure were the children's tracks. He followed them up with the most patient care, now losing them, now catching them up again. Nothing escaped the keen eyes of the black tracker—no stone, or twig, or trodden moss over which the feet of the children had passed.

Tommy was closely followed by Mr. Alister, who never left his side. The eighth day was drawing to a close; the sun was setting, and in half an hour darkness would be upon the woods, when Tommy broke through a thicket of scrub, and leaped into a little open space with a shrill cry.

'Hurrah, Miss'r Alister! Here the piccaninnies—all a-heap!'

John Alister sprang forward, and beheld his three children lying close together beneath a tree. In a moment he was kneeling beside them. Were they asleep, or were they——? The father shrank with a shudder from the thought. He laid his hand over the chest of each. Yes, their hearts were beating still, but so faintly, so fitfully, that it was several moments before the father could be certain whether his children lived or not. Willie was lying clasped in Katie's arms, and George lay huddled together at her side.

By this time all the other men were on the spot, and the three children were swiftly but tenderly lifted into the arms of their father and other two men, and borne as fast as possible home. The poor mother received the party at the door, and when she beheld her children,

whom she had almost despaired of ever seeing alive again, the intensity of her feelings all but overpowered her.

The children were placed in bed, a doctor was brought from the township,—there was but one in the place,—and all necessary means applied for recovering the children from the effects of their long exposure, fast, and fatigue. All the three recovered. George was the first to return to his usual condition of health, being the strongest and sturdiest, and after him little Willie. But it was many months before Katie was the same as she had been. The greatest bodily strain had fallen upon her ; every night she had deprived herself of her own jacket to spread it over her little brother, and had thus suffered so much from cold that it had often kept her from sleeping when George and Willie were fast in slumber. Upon her, too, had fallen the task of trying to soothe,

quieten, and encourage her two brothers, when her own brave little spirit was like to sink within her; and all this had proved a severe strain upon one so young. Every night before lying down she had repeated her evening prayer and hymn with a patient, hopeful, trustful heart until that evening when God answered it.

I have not exaggerated or over-stated one fact in this true story which I have told you. The three children were wandering in the bush for seven days, during which time they supported life on such wild fruit as has been already described, some other berries of a similar kind, and a few roots which they dug out of the ground. They must have certainly perished for want of water but for the rain which fell one day; so that the very heavy shower which Tommy Sundown had regretted because it obliterated the tracks which he

was trying to follow, was the very thing which saved the children from death by thirst.

The children's story spread, of course, through the whole country-side, and so much was Katie Alister's brave, faithful, and heroic conduct admired, that the people made a subscription, and collected more than two hundred pounds, which was placed in a bank for Katie until she became a woman, which she now is.

JIM: A LITTLE NIGGER.

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HIS name was Jim, and they sometimes called him Jim Crow, because he was usually so black. He was a little nigger, but he wasn't born in Africa; he was born in the Seven Dials, London, and both his parents were white. His mother was dead at the time I am telling you about, and Jim's father was one of a strolling nigger minstrel troupe, to which Jim belonged too. That was why his hands and face were nearly always black, being made so by burnt cork; and that was why he was regarded by the boys

in the court in which he lived as a little nigger.

Jim's father played the banjo, and Jim was the dancer of the company. And very cleverly he danced too, with a wonderful agility and grace. The boys in the court thought it must be the grandest thing to be a nigger—to roam about the country in the free gipsy fashion in which Jim did, arrayed in the fantastic toggery which was his professional uniform, doing nothing but dance all the day long, and gather up the coppers. Nothing possibly could be better fun in the eyes of the youth of Eden Court than to have one's face made black with burnt cork every morning, and it didn't make any difference if the black wasn't removed at night time. And so one and all envied Jim.

To dance all the day long! Yes, that was just it. Jim many a time wished that he had

just a little less dancing to do. Many and many a day, while the boys among his audience were perhaps silently admiring his cleverness and agility, and wishing they could do the same, Jim himself was almost ready to drop from sheer weariness. And yet he had to keep up, and show no signs of flagging while a spark of strength and energy remained in his aching limbs; for if his father thought he had danced badly, and a smaller sum of coppers than usual was gathered in at the end of the performance, it frequently happened that the little dancer paid the cost with a beating. Poor little Jim! Had the boys really known all the facts of his life, it is pretty certain they would not have thought it so glorious and enviable a one. There was very little glory in it, and very much hardship.

The banjo player was not Jim's own father,

but only his step-father. He was a rough, careless man, big and strong, and yet not over fond of hard work, preferring to lead such a life as the one he followed to any that would have taxed his strength to the full. Being far too strong himself ever to feel tired from his exertions in playing the banjo, he had no sympathy whatever with Jim, and whenever the latter danced less smartly than usual, put it down simply to laziness, for which the only cure was a beating. The boy also sometimes felt the weight of his step-father's heavy hand for nothing that he himself had done—that is, when the latter had had too much to drink, and was ill-tempered, morose, and quarrelsome.

During the winter the little nigger minstrel band, to which the banjo player and his step-son belonged, remained in London, performing from street to street, but in the summer

months they betook themselves to some watering-place, usually at the sea-side. One summer they were quartered at Broadbeach, amusing the crowds of holiday folk that daily thronged the sands with their songs, speeches, and antics. 'Business' was brisk, and business being brisk meant for Jim much work and weary legs. Every night the lad lay down on his coarse stretcher bed in the garret which his step-father had taken in the town, so tired that he dropped off to sleep the moment that his head was on the pillow. It was fortunate, at least, that he had that refuge. Some people, more gently reared than he had been, do not fall asleep readily when over-tired; but that was not the way with Jim. He slept from sheer weariness.

It was a few days before the Sacramento Serenaders, as they styled themselves, were to quit Broadbeach. They left off their per-

formance early in the afternoon that day, being resolved to spend the remaining part of it in amusement and pleasure, like the rest of the holiday-makers around them. So little Jim was free to do with himself what he liked till the next day. His step-father had gone off to the public-house with his comrades, and cared not what became of Jim, so that he didn't trouble him. Jim was very unlikely to trouble his step-father; he was only too glad to be out of his presence and sight for a while. Jim wandered for a little about the shore, but he soon grew tired of the crowd and the noise. The gay sights on the beach brought no amusement to him, for he knew them all so well. He wandered on past the throngs of people, past the big hotels and the long terraces of houses. The houses became fewer, and the gardens more frequent and larger. Soon he was quite in the country, amidst fields and hedges.

He was feeling tired enough, but the sweet freshness and peacefulness of everything beguiled him, brought a feeling of rest and ease to the boy's heart, and he continued to stroll slowly on. At length he reached what seemed to him the prettiest house he had seen yet. It stood in a garden that was shady and cool, with broad-branching trees, and spaces of smooth green sward, and bright with flowers, whose fragrance was wafted over to Jim as he stood leaning timidly against the low fence. He sat down on the grassy bank that separated the garden from the road, and continued to gaze in at the house and its surroundings.

Presently he saw the door open, and the figure of a little girl come out into the garden. She had shining brown hair that fell over her shoulders like golden waves, and Jim could see from where he sat that her eyes were very soft and kind looking. He thought he had

never seen a gentler, prettier, sweeter face than that little girl's. He could not take his eyes off her. She wore a light-coloured dress that fell in soft folds about her, that might have made Jim think of a fairy if he had known anything about fairies.

She came straight down the centre garden-walk, plucking a flower here and there from the side beds, and did not see Jim until she had nearly reached the gate. When her eyes fell upon him, she paused a moment, and then came forward to the gate a little more slowly. A slight look of wonder came into her face, which presently changed to one of pity.

'Are you tired, little boy?' she said in a clear voice like a silver bell. She called Jim little, but she was not bigger herself. Jim did not answer at once—he had not had much teaching in manners—and the girl repeated her question.

'Nothin' more nor common,' answered Jim a little abruptly.

'You look tired—very tired.'

She came close to the fence, and examined Jim more narrowly, the pitying look in her face deepening.

'Why, I think I've seen you before. Are you not the boy that dances to amuse the people in the town?'

'Yes, miss,' replied Jim, this time more politely.

'I didn't know you at first in your different clothes, and with the black off your face. Have you given up dancing? I often thought it must be very tiring.'

'No, miss; but we giv' up sooner to-day, and I took me things off, and rubbed off the black, leastways most on it.'

'Are you hungry? It's nearly tea-time.'

'A bit, miss.'

'Will you wait there a minute till I come back?'

'Yes.'

Ella Raymond—that was the little girl's name—turned and ran up the walk again. She entered the sitting-room, where a lady sat working, dressed in black, with a widow's cap.

'Mamma, do you remember the other day, when we were in the town, seeing that little dancing boy with those funny black men, that sang and made such a noise, and don't you recollect how tired we both thought he looked? Well, here he is at the gate, and he looks more tired than ever, and he says he's hungry. He says "a bit," but I am sure he is very hungry. Please, let me take him something, mamma.'

'Kitty will be here with the tea in a few minutes; she can take him some tea or milk, and a plate of bread and butter, my dear.'

'I would like to do it, if you don't mind, mamma.'

'No; there can be no harm in your taking the things to the poor boy. Kitty will put them on a small tray for you.'

'Thank you, mamma, dear. Will you come out and see him for a minute before he goes away again?'

'Yes, when he has finished his tea.'

I doubt if Jim was ever more astonished in his life than when he beheld Ella Raymond appear before him carrying a tray with a little snow-white cloth, on which was a large glass of creamy milk, and a plate of bread and butter cut with a thinness which presented bread in an entirely new aspect to him. Jim was not slow to perceive, too, that the great advantage of having your bread cut in this way was that you got so much more butter, provided, of course, that you had the proper

allowance of bread, as he certainly had now. Jim finished his meal silently, and Ella did not interrupt him. Just at the end she pointed to a piece of cake which she had placed in a corner of the tray, and which Jim had left untouched, not being quite sure whether it was meant to be included in his supper. He took it now, and ate it with much quiet zest. He had never enjoyed a meal so much in his life. That may be safely said.

'Have you had enough?' asked Ella.

'Lots, miss, thank you,' answered Jim.

'What is your name—do you mind telling me?'

'Jim—Crow. No, not Crow—I forgot—my right name's Crann; but I'm mostly called just Jim.'

'Where do you live—in Broadbeach?'

'Mostly in Lunnon, but lots of different places this time o' the year.'

'Do you go to school in London?'

'No; never were at school, miss.'

Jim's friends had been at much pains that Jim should elude the School Board authorities, and their efforts had, up to this, been successful.

'Don't you go to Sunday school ever?'

'No.'

Jim thought he might confidently answer 'No,' though he had very vague notions of what Sunday school was.

'I thought most boys went to Sunday school now—all sorts,' said Ella in a reflective tone. 'I have known of little sweeps' boys going, and they're nearly as black as you when you're dancing, Jim.'

'Wery nigh, miss.'

'Doesn't your mother care for you to go to Sunday school?'

'Mother's dead, miss,' said Jim simply.

A sad look passed quickly across Ella's face,

and she did not immediately speak again. Then she said—

'Doesn't your father like you to go to Sunday school?'

'I don't know rightly, miss. I don't think he'd like as I should go to any sort of school. He'd think it would hinterfere with business. He ain't my right father—only my step-father.'

'Is he kind to you, Jim?'

'Middlin', miss. He ain't so bad as some.'

At this moment Mrs. Raymond came out of the house and approached, and began to talk with Jim.

'Are you obliged to return to Broadbeach to-night?' she asked presently.

'I dunno as it 'ud much matter, so long as I was back by morning,' answered Jim, wondering a little what was coming next.

'You look very tired still. Would you like to rest here all night?'

'Yes, ma'am, I think as I should,' replied Jim, who had gained greatly in confidence since the beginning of his talk with Ella.

'Oh, yes, mamma, that will be capital. What a clever thought of yours, mamma, dear!' exclaimed Ella in what was quite an excited manner for so grave and quiet a little girl.

'MacDermot will make up a bed in the stable for Jim by and by, then,' said Mrs. Raymond.

'I'll 'ave to be away pretty early in the morning, ma'am,' said Jim. 'Father's awful riled when he is anyways put out, you see.'

'I'll see that you are called in good time, Jim,' said Mrs. Raymond, smiling. 'You're not a late riser usually, are you?'

'No, ma'am, I don't often git the chance,' answered Jim with a twinkle in his eye responsive to Mrs. Raymond's smile.

'And now, Ella, I think it's time you were

attending to your own tea. I will have to ask Kitty to make you some more; the teapot must be quite cold by this time. Come along then, Jim, and see your night's sleeping quarters.'

Jim followed in the rear of Mrs. Raymond and Ella, up the garden, towards the house. Everything about Mrs. Raymond and her daughter's manner was at once so gentle and so cheery, in a quiet, bright way, that the little waif—for he was not much more—had felt quickly reassured and at ease in their presence. A soothing influence, of which he was aware, with a kind of wonder, seemed to steal over him at the sound of their voices.

Mrs. Raymond led Jim round to the back of the house, where there was a small stable and outhouses. MacDermot, the old lame gardener, was soon found, and Mrs. Raymond explained to him her wishes in regard to Jim. Ella had entered the house, but was quickly

beside the others again, having despatched her tea in a very brief space. She carefully watched MacDermot while he made Jim's bed. The old gardener, who could be stiff and contrary enough with most people, never thwarted his young mistress in anything she wished, for he seldom found that she set her heart on foolish or selfish things. The bed was composed of clean sweet straw, with an old carriage-rug spread over it. When it was quite ready, Mrs. Raymond said—

'I think, Jim, you should be pretty soon in going to bed, since you have to be up so early.'

'I wouldn't mind going at once, ma'am. I am pretty done out to-night, someways.'

'Very well, then, we shall leave you. How much longer are you to remain in Broadbeach?'

'On'y two or three days more, I hear 'em say. We'll be off on Saturday, I reckon.'

'Well, you can come and get your supper here to-morrow and the next night, if you can get away, and care to come so far.'

'I'll do that, ma'am, pretty fast, hif I can on'y manage it. I dunno what to say, ma'am, you've bin so good, and—and I am jest a little nigger.'

Mrs. Raymond and Ella were moving away, when Ella paused and said—

'You won't forget to say your prayers, will you, Jim, though you are so tired?'

Jim stared blankly.

'Prayers?' he repeated slowly and vaguely.

'Perhaps you don't know any prayer, Jim?' said Mrs. Raymond gently.

'No, ma'am; nobody ever learned me no prayer—not as I remember, leastways.'

'Oh, no; how silly of me to forget! Jim has never been to any Sunday school, mamma, and—his mother is dead,' said Ella.

'Would you like to know a prayer, Jim?' said Mrs. Raymond.

'Yes, ma'am—if you learned it me.'

'I will. Mamma, may I?' said Ella gravely. 'Jim, if you come to-morrow, I will teach you a prayer—quite a short one, you know.'

'I'll come, miss; anyways, I'll try hard to.'

Jim did not go to sleep that night prayerless, for prayer was made for the young motherless, fatherless wanderer, who could make none for himself.

Next day, somewhat after the Raymonds tea hour, Jim presented himself at the garden gate. Ella saw him approach, for she had been watching for him for the last hour. Jim got his supper in the same comfortable, cosy fashion as on the previous day. And then, after a little talk, Ella set about teaching him his prayer. It was a very short one, as she

had said it should be; but Jim had not only to commit it to memory, but to be, to a great extent, taught its meaning. It was probably the first religious teaching of any kind he had ever received—at least, he could not recollect having ever been thus taught before. It took some time to convey to his mind the exact and full meaning of the simple prayer; but when that was accomplished, he learned the words themselves pretty readily, for he was quick-witted.

'Do you think you will remember the words, Jim?' said Ella earnestly.

'I think so, miss; some on 'em anyways.'

'I do hope you will. When you have asked God to take care of you every night and morning, you have nothing more to fear or trouble about, you know—you just feel quite safe. You'll say your prayer at night when you go back to London, won't you?'

'Yes, I will. P'raps some nights I may forgit, 'cos I'm that tired sometimes when I goes to bed that I drops right off; but I guess I'll mostly remember. I'll think of you, miss, and the lady, and how good you was to me; and then, I bet I'll remember.'

'Do you know for certain on what day you leave Broadbeach, Jim?' said Mrs. Raymond, who had sat by while Ella was giving Jim his lesson.

'Yes, ma'am, we go to-morrow arternoon.'

'So soon! Then we shall not see you again,' said Ella with a little note of sorrow in her voice. 'Ar'nt you sorry, Jim, to go back to that great, noisy London?'

'I dunno, miss,' answered Jim slowly. 'It's much the same everywhere with niggers. Places don't make much difference. It's mostly the same thing over and over again

wherevers we are. We won't be fair settled in London till the winter's on.'

Ella paused a moment, with a look of deep thought in her face, before she spoke again.

'I wish I could write a letter to Jim in London, mamma,' she said presently; 'only he wouldn't be able to read it, and he wouldn't be likely to get any one to read it to him, would he?'

'I am afraid not, my dear,' replied her mother with a slight smile. 'I suspect the postman is not a frequent visitor in your court—is he, Jim?'

'No, ma'am; it's mostly the policeman,' said Jim simply, with no intention of satire.

'I'm afraid I'll need to give up the thought of sending you a letter, Jim,' said Ella with a little sigh. 'I think you would have liked to have got one, though. But perhaps you will come back to Broadbeach this time next year,

and then we'll see you again. I shall look out for you.'

'Yes, maybe we'll come back; business has been good with us this year—we've made quite a pot of money,' said Jim with a faint sense of pride in the professional success of the Sacramento Serenaders. 'I hope we do come back; but I'll never forget you, miss, and the lady, anyways.'

'Well, Jim, I think you had better get to your bed now, and we can only hope that we shall see you again at Broadbeach some day,' said Mrs. Raymond. 'You will be away before Ella or I can see you in the morning. God bless you, my boy! Try and remember your prayer, and think that God is caring for you, even when you are most tired and sad. Good-night.'

Mrs. Raymond bent over the ragged boy and gently kissed him on the forehead. Ella

held out her hand and pressed his. Jim lay down upon his straw bed in a sort of dream. Mrs. Raymond's kiss still lingered on his brow. He felt it still—tingling through all his frame like a gentle warmth. He still felt the pressure of Ella's soft fingers on his rough hand. He was aware of a choking feeling in his throat, and as he passed his hard knuckles across his eyes he knew that they were wet.

'Oh, I wish it was going to last. I wish I hadn't got to wake up in the morning,' he thought, and then, being not less tired than usual, he fell asleep.

He slept soundly, but a little after midnight he was awakened by a familiar sound—a sound that he had many a time heard in London streets, and which his quick ear immediately recognised. It was the crackling, rustling sound of fire. He was upon his feet in a moment. Glancing quickly around him, he

saw that the fire was not in the stables. He ran to the door, when the sight that met his gaze was the house wrapped in flames. People were rushing hither and thither, among whom he beheld Mrs. Raymond.

He ran up to her, and found her in a sad state of terror and bewilderment, pressing her hands together, and gazing at the burning house with a death-white face.

'What is the matter, ma'am? Where is miss?' exclaimed Jim.

'Oh, Jim, she is still in the house! We have all escaped but her. She had not time to get out, and I cannot reach her from inside—the staircase has given way. She is in her room now. In a few minutes more the flames must reach her. Oh, my child! my child! what can I do to save her?'

'That is her room there, ain't it?' said Jim quickly, pointing to an upper window

of the house, which consisted of two storeys.

'Yes.'

'Have you a ladder, ma'am?'

'Yes, but MacDermot cannot mount to the room. He is too lame. I know he would go if he could, but it would only be risking his life to no purpose,' said Mrs. Raymond in a choking voice.

Jim rushed off to MacDermot.

'Please get the ladder, sir—quick!' he cried. 'I can reach the room.'

'You!' exclaimed the old gardener, but at the same time he hurried for the ladder.

It was placed against the house just under Ella's bedroom window. Jim ran up like a lamplighter. It hardly reached the window sill, but a creeping vine grew immediately below, and by its help Jim raised himself and swung in at the window. A volume of smoke met

and almost choked him by its sudden attack.

'Miss, miss, are you there?' he cried aloud.

'Yes, here—here!' came a faint voice through the smoke and flame.

Jim dashed on, and in the farthermost corner of the room from the window beheld Ella standing against the wall, trembling in every limb, her face blanched like a sheet, her eyes fast shut, and yet with tightly drawn though quivering lips, as if she were striving her utmost to meet bravely the death that seemed certain. The flames would have reached her in a few minutes more, when Jim seized her in his arms. He tore off his old but thick stuff coat,—he had lain down to sleep, as he usually did, in his clothes,—wrapped it round her, and hurried her back through the smoke and flames, more than half carrying her in his arms. The flames wrapped them round on all sides, and

Jim, even in the excitement of the moment, felt their fiery tongues scorching and scathing him as he fought his way back to the window.

He slid rather than ran down the ladder, still grasping Ella tightly round the waist. Some one—her mother it was—took her from him when he reached the ground, and then he knew no more. Jim had fainted.

For two days Jim knew nothing of what was happening around him. During that time Mrs. Raymond had never left the room in which he lay; but Jim was not aware of her presence—did not feel the soft, cool hand upon his fevered brow, moistening his dry lips, or smoothing the pillow beneath his restless head. When at last his fever lessened and consciousness returned to him, his glance first fell on Mrs. Raymond's face bending anxiously over him, and then on Ella's close by. He cast a dazed and wondering look around, his languid

senses just taking in his immediate surroundings—the beautiful, snow-white bed in which he was lying, with its soft, spotless curtains, and Mrs. Raymond and Ella sitting by him. Then his eyes closed again: the light dazed and wearied them. He put his hand outside the clothes and felt for something. Mrs. Raymond took the weak hand and kept it in hers, and a satisfied look passed over Jim's face.

He had wandered much in his talk during these two days,—chiefly he talked of his old life, its incidents and experiences; murmured snatches of songs, and jingling rhymes, and catch expressions; and imagined himself going through a performance, slowly and wearily, trying to win the laughter of the crowd with queer grimaces and antics. Then his wandering thoughts turned on the incidents of the last few eventful days in his life, and he murmured Ella's name, and her mother's, always calling

the latter 'the lady.' Unwearied was the care which was bestowed upon the sick boy. Mrs. Raymond watched and tended by his bedside as though he had been her own son—for did she not owe the life of her child to the little wanderer who had seemed to stray to her door under the direct guidance of God's hand? And Ella waited by Jim's bed like a sister, attending to her mother's directions for his ease and comfort, with the gentle and anxious watchfulness of a woman. She had been very little hurt by the fire. Wrapped in Jim's rough coat, and shielded from the flames by his surrounding and protecting arms, they had scarcely touched her, only scorching her long hair.

But it was otherwise with Jim. He had been cruelly burnt, and all the loving care of his attendants was unavailing to win him back from the dark shadowy valley. The doctor

could give Mrs. Raymond no hope. Jim's step-father had found out where he was, and seeing in whose hands he was, had gone away again with few words of any kind.

Jim lingered on many days. He had a good deal of pain, but not so much as might have been expected, and he could listen to and understand Mrs. Raymond and Ella when they read to him a little from the Bible, or spoke some simple, comforting words. He daily asked for the twenty-third Psalm after he had once heard it. He perhaps had some dim feeling that, at last, after long travelling by rough and stony ways, he was being led by green fields and still waters to a resting-place beyond the river.

It was strange how the faint flame of life flickered up in his breast again and again, when it seemed all but out. The level rays of the western sun fell softly through the open

window one August afternoon, shedding a tranquil light upon the room and on Jim's bed. Mrs. Raymond's hand held his, and Ella sat near. Both knew that Jim was passing away. Mrs. Raymond's gaze was fixed upon his face, when the boy's eyes slowly opened and rested upon her. His face was calm and restful, but the lips were moving faintly. Mrs. Raymond bent down and just caught his last murmured words:—

'Kind God, find a place somewheres for a tired little nigger.'

THE END.

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