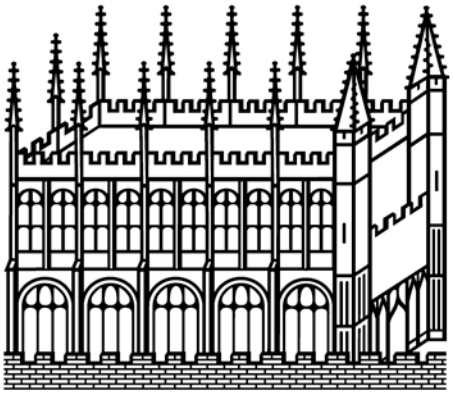

THE WASHERWOMAN'S FOUNDLING.

BY

WILLIAM GILBERT

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM SMALL


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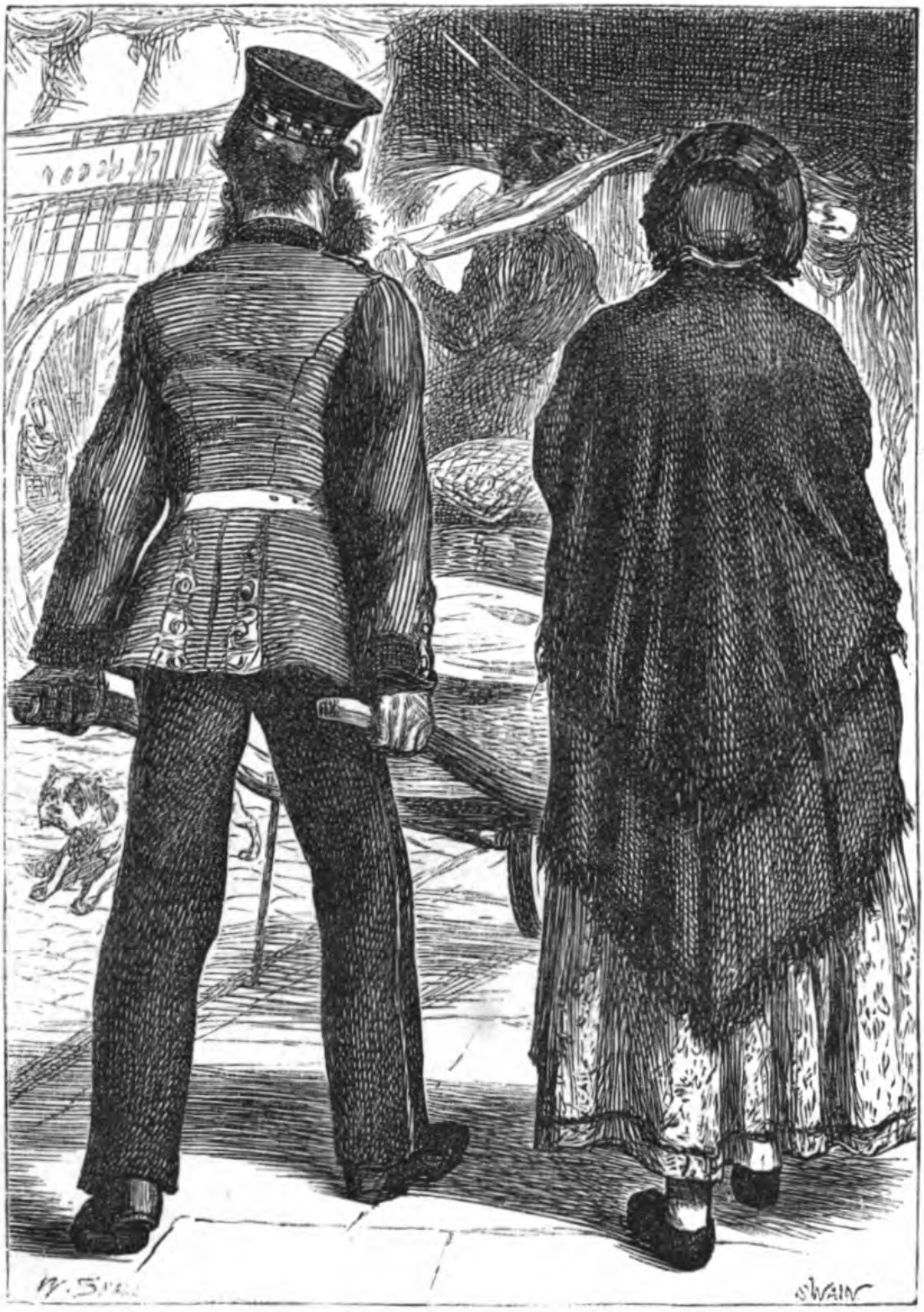

THE SOLDIER'S SATURDAY EVENING DUTY.

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THE WASHERWOMAN'S FOUNDLING

By WILLIAM GILBERT

AUTHOR OF "DR. AUSTIN'S GUESTS," "SHIRLEY HALL," ETC.

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THE WASHERWOMAN'S FOUNDLING.

I.

ONE Saturday evening, in the month of November, 1835, Mr. James Sparkes, full private in her Majesty's regiment of Scots Fusilier Guards, then quartered in Portman Street Barracks, left the house of his wife in Blue Anchor Yard, York Street, Westminster, to take home some linen which had been entrusted to her to

wash by a family residing in Dean's Yard, near the Abbey. James's duty on the occasion consisted in wheeling the barrow, on which were placed two baskets of clothes, while his wife walked by his side and watched that no light-fingered wayfarer in the Broadway or Tothill Street made free with the cargo she had charge of—no unnecessary precaution, as will readily be admitted by any one acquainted with the locality. Nothing, however, occurred on the road to cause her either alarm or uneasiness, and the pair arrived safely at the house, when

Mrs. Sparkes, having smoothed down her apron and adjusted her bonnet-strings and shawl, knocked a modest single knock at the door, which was opened by a neat maid-servant.

Mrs. Sparkes entered the house, requesting her husband to follow her with the baskets. James, who was in the habit of obeying the orders of his wife as implicitly as he did those of his colonel, and as silently, immediately took up one of the baskets and carried it to the further extremity of the passage. When there, he found his wife and the maid-

servant engaged in the usual dispute about something which had not been sent home the week before. As Mrs. Sparkes was apparently getting the worst of the argument, she appealed to her husband for support, and requested him to indorse her statement. This, as usual, he did without the slightest hesitation, and without in the least understanding the merits of the case; not from any disregard to truth, but from the settled conviction in his own mind that everything his wife said was right. The girl, however, stuck to

her point, without in any way convincing Mrs. Sparkes, or in the slightest way shaking the dogged testimony of her husband. The argument continued for some minutes without much advantage to either side, when the girl remarked that as the night was cold and the door was open, it would be better for Mr. Sparkes to bring in the other basket, and they could talk over the matter afterwards.

James immediately acted on her suggestion as far as going for the basket was concerned, but he delayed so long in returning, that both

Mrs. Sparkes and the maid became uneasy at his absence, and went to the door to enquire the cause. When they looked into the street they were greatly surprised to find that James was nowhere to be seen. Mrs. Sparkes was at first greatly alarmed, thinking a robbery might have been perpetrated, but the next moment her fears were allayed, not only by finding that the basket was still on the barrow, but also that the clothes contained in it had not been disturbed.

If, however, her fears were allayed by the certainty that the linen was

safe, her surprise was proportionately increased at her husband's absence, as there now appeared no plausible cause for his singular behaviour. After waiting a few minutes longer, great as her surprise was before, it became much increased when she saw him return, carrying in his arms a strong lively child, about three months old, who was crying lustily.

James, without being questioned on the subject, shortly explained the cause of his disappearance. On going to fetch the other basket his attention had been attracted by a child's cry,

when, to his great surprise, he found the baby lying on the basket of clothes before him; but how it came there puzzled him extremely. He looked hastily around him to find out who might have been likely to have placed the poor little creature in the position in which it was found; but not a soul was to be seen. Still, as it could not have dropped from the skies, some one must have placed it on the basket, and he determined, if possible, to find out the culprit. With this intent he took up the child in his arms, and ran with it into the adjoin-

ing street, but no one did he see who, with the slightest possible reason, could be accused of the heartless trick which had been played off on the poor infant.

A council of war, consisting of Sparkes, his wife, and the maid, was immediately held in the passage. In the first place the infant was carefully examined, not only by the maid, but also by the more experienced and matronly tact of Mrs. Sparkes; still nothing could be found that furnished the slightest clue to its history. This was the more annoying,

as the foundling hero of every tale is traditionally clothed in linen that shows its parents to be in a somewhat superior condition in society; but here was an extraordinary exception to the rule, as the poor baby had on but one garment, and that was not only coarse in quality, but dilapidated in condition. It need hardly be stated, also, that the purse of gold which is generally found in the drapery of novel-foundlings, as well as the scrap of paper with the Christian name of the infant written in pencil and pinned on to its dress,

were both wanting. There was also another peculiar circumstance—it had not the delicate lineaments of gentle birth so commonly characteristic in light literature of infants in its unfortunate position. It was, on the contrary, a remarkably common-place, sturdy, dirty, unattractive little creature, with vast power of lungs, which it was then exercising with so much energy, to prove that it was cold and hungry, that Mrs. Sparkes was fain to wrap it up somewhat tightly in her shawl to prevent it disturbing the family up-stairs. The

result of their deliberation was that it was a very serious affair, and that nothing ought to be done in it without the best legal advice; and, as determination in action was one of Mr. Sparkes' principal characteristics, he immediately brought in the other basket of clothes, and, without terminating the question about the things which had not been brought home last week, he, with his wife and barrow, started off in search of a policeman.

Though both husband and wife kept a careful look-out, not a police-

man was to be found until they arrived at the Broadway. The one they found there could give them but little assistance in the matter. He told them he knew but little of the law in relation to cases of the kind, but he thought their best plan would be to go off immediately to the work-house in York Street, and make the parochial officials take charge of the baby; leastwise, he should act in that manner if it were his own case.

Sparkes and his wife, after thanking the policeman for his advice, started off immediately for the work-

house. When they arrived they had to wait some time before they could see any of the officials. These were at the moment admitting applicants into the tramp wards, and till that was finished they could attend to nothing else. The result was that Mrs. Sparkes was obliged to wait in the vagrant crowd that were expecting admission. This was particularly annoying to the good woman, as personal cleanliness was precious to her both from natural taste and her profession as a washerwoman, and those around her appeared by their

persons and dress to hold washing in abhorrence. She attempted to stand apart from them, but this was difficult, because the ante-room in which they were crowded was small, added to which the voice of the infant, who persisted in making himself heard, attracted round her the female portion of the crowd, all of whom exhibited the strongest curiosity to see the baby as well as to learn its history. At last, however, the admissions were completed, and Mrs. Sparkes stood face to face with the master of the workhouse, her husband

the while waiting outside in charge of the barrow.

The master listened with considerable impatience to Mrs. Sparkes' narrative, short as it was.

"My good woman," he said, when she had finished, "it's a great pity those policemen are not taught their duty better. You have no claim on the parish for that baby. How do I know that what you have told me is true? It may be so, and I don't doubt it; but you must see yourself, if I admitted your claim simply from your statement, we might have half

the babies in the parish thrust upon us to bring up. You must take that child to the police-station, leastwise that's my advice, and insist upon their taking charge of it; and if I was you I would not go till they did. Now you must leave here, for I have a good many other things to attend to."

Mrs. Sparkes, having no alternative, joined her husband and followed the master's advice. When they arrived at the police-station they asked to see the inspector, who listened with attention and good

feeling to the poor woman's statement.

"It is really disgraceful," he said, "that the master of the workhouse should have sent you here. He must have known perfectly well we can do nothing with an infant like that. You must take it back again and insist on his taking it in."

"But he said, sir, I was to insist on your doing it, and not to go away till you did it."

"Did he?" said the inspector; "then I'll prove to him he's wrong this time, at any rate. I'll send a

sergeant with you who'll take all the trouble off your hands, and you'd better go at once, as the child seems very fractious."

"Poor dear, and no wonder," said Mrs. Sparkes, "for by this time he must be pretty well starved."

Mrs. Sparkes, her husband, and a police-sergeant, now started off for the workhouse. As soon as they arrived, Mrs. Sparkes and the sergeant were shown into the presence of the master; James, as usual, waiting outside. The sergeant was spokesman on the occasion. He

showed the master clearly enough that at the station they had no accommodation for a child of that age, and that law and common humanity required that the poor-law authorities should interfere in the matter, as it would be a very hard thing for the poor washerwoman to have the child thrown on her hands.

The master replied that the humanity of the British poor laws was too well known and appreciated to need any remark from him (this, by-the-bye, was true to a certain extent); and as for the law, he was as

well up in the subject as the inspector, and indeed far better, or he should get on but badly.

The sergeant fired up at this attack on his inspector, and replied that he wanted no more conversation on the subject, but the master was to take in the infant, and, more than that, he must be answerable that it was properly taken care of.

The sergeant was, in his turn, requested to take charge of the infant himself, and some strong words ensued between the two, Mrs. Sparkes standing by the while. It is hardly

worth while to report the conversation; suffice it to say, it assumed a bitterly sarcastic tone, as was shown by the sergeant declining to take charge of the baby, none of his men being nursing at the moment; but as soon as one was he'd let the master know. It also became personal, the master informing the sergeant that his inspector was an ass, and that if he did not know the law he, the master, would teach him. Moreover, he requested the sergeant to convey that message to the inspector with his compliments. The

sergeant, who, at best, would have been no match for the master on the legal question, was now, from having lost his temper, immeasurably his inferior; and finding himself getting the worst of the argument, thought it advisable to beat a retreat, which he did, under cover of many threats of his inspector's vengeance, all of which were treated by the master with supreme contempt.

As soon as the sergeant had left the building, the master told Mrs. Sparkes that she also must go, but advised her to apply again at the

police-station, and not to leave this time till she had obtained redress.

When Mrs. Sparkes joined her husband in the street, the pair were fairly puzzled what course to pursue. They mooted the question of again applying at the police-station, but although they were somewhat undecided the baby was not, for it screamed and plunged so violently at the delay of its supper, that an impertinent boy passing by had the insolence to advise her, if she had stolen a pig and put it under her shawl, to get home with it as soon as

possible, for if she met a bobby she might come to grief. Mrs. Sparkes made no answer to this taunt, and James contented himself with casting a look of withering contempt at the culprit. The word "home," however, uttered by the boy, appeared to decide them, and they resolved to give the poor little creature a night's hospitality, and to find out properly the next morning whether the police-inspector or the workhouse-master was right in his reading of the law of settlement. Without further delay, then, they wended their way to Blue

Anchor Yard, and after Sparkes had returned the barrow he had borrowed, they arrived safely at home.

II.

When Mr. and Mrs. Sparkes reached their home they found their daughter Jemima anxiously awaiting their arrival. Jemima, who was the only child of the worthy couple, was about eight years of age, exceedingly ugly, with a freckled complexion and fiery-red hair. In figure she was very thin, awkward, and angular, and certainly far taller for her years than

JEMIMA'S RECEPTION OF THE FOUNDLING.

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the average of children. She was not a little surprised at the burden her mother was carrying under her shawl, and so great was her curiosity to see the baby, that she appeared to have forgotten the hungry state she was in before her mother had entered. Mrs. Sparkes released her protégé from the shawl; and she and Jemima contemplated the baby for a few moments with much interest. Jemima even went beyond her mother, and in spite of the screams and kicks of the little savage, almost smothered it with kisses. At last Mrs. Sparkes

said, with great determination, that as she was in for it, the poor little thing should want for nothing while it remained under her roof; and to prove that this was no idle vaunt, she then and there sent Jemima out for a halfpenny-worth of milk for it, while she in the meantime occupied herself in washing it with some warm water Sparkes had handed her, and which had been put on the fire for their tea. Afterwards she improvised some clothes for it, so that when Jemima returned, so great a change for the better had taken place in its

appearance that, had she not known it to be the same, she should hardly have recognised it.

The baby was then made over to Jemima, while Mrs. Sparkes busied herself in preparing some food, not only for the infant, but also for themselves. When ready, Mr. Sparkes immediately occupied himself with his supper, and while thus engaged he watched with grim satisfaction the operation of feeding, or rather cramming the baby, who swallowed its food with a vigour and gusto which proved that there was

not the slightest attempt at imposition in its cries of hunger. The kind behaviour of Mrs. Sparkes and Jemima was not lost on the baby; and immediately after its meal it showed its gratitude to its benefactors by going to sleep. A short consultation was then held as to its disposal for the night, which terminated, to Jemima's great satisfaction, by its being handed over to her as a bedfellow. The time had now arrived for Mr. Sparkes to leave his wife's dwelling and seek his own barracks and bed; but, before going,

he went to take a last look at the little stranger. Jemima, who was already in bed, and against whose side it had comfortably nestled itself, cautiously drew down the quilt that her father might see it. The old soldier gazed at it thoughtfully for a moment as if it brought something back to his memory of great interest; then, stooping down, he kissed his daughter and the child, and immediately afterwards left the house.

After breakfast the next morning Mrs. Sparkes donned her bonnet and shawl, and proceeded to the work-

house with the baby in her arms. Jemima, who had already conceived a great affection for it, cried bitterly when it went ; and, notwithstanding the strict military discipline usually maintained in Mrs. Sparkes' establishment, the girl grumbled most audibly and mutinously when her mother refused to allow her to accompany her. Her sorrow, however, was not of long duration ; for it being Sunday, there was no superior official at the workhouse, and the question of the baby's admission could not therefore be entertained. Mrs. Sparkes also

called at the police-station, but with no better success, for she found the inspector quite as resolute on the subject as he had been the day before; perhaps even more so, from the report he had received of the conversation which had taken place between the sergeant and the master of the workhouse. The poor woman, finding herself without an alternative, then turned her steps homeward, hardly to her own sorrow, for she began to feel an interest in the baby, who was received by Jemima with intense joy and satisfaction.

During the whole of Sunday baby behaved in a most exemplary manner, and thereby gained considerably on the good opinion of Mrs. Sparkes, who, having no washing to do, occupied herself principally in nursing it, occasionally, as a treat, entrusting it to Jemima. In the afternoon, when baby was asleep, and Jemima at the Sunday school, she, without the slightest intention, and indeed quite mechanically, found herself in the act of cutting up some old linen, and afterwards running it together into that extraordinary form of shirt

which experienced matrons appear to consider so perfectly adapted to the infant form.

Sparkes at the usual time reported himself to his wife in the evening, who, with something like womanly pride in her face, held up the baby to him in its hastily made clothes, and said something to him in a whisper which was evidently not intended for Jemima to hear, and to which Sparkes replied by drawing his cast-iron visage into the nearest approach to a grin its natural rigidity would allow it to assume. The evening

passed pleasantly enough, and before Sparkes left baby had been undressed and again placed under Jemima's care for the night.

On the Monday morning Mrs. Sparkes' first duty was to collect the linen from the three houses for which she washed, and to receive the amounts due on the last week's bills. All this, however, was finished by eleven o'clock, and then, having put on the baby its new bib and tucker, she started off with it to the workhouse, this time, in her own phraseology, determined to stand no non-

sense. She was in one respect more fortunate on this visit than she had been before, for she contrived to obtain an interview with the clerk of the Board of Guardians, who listened with both patience and civility to her tale. When she had concluded, he asked her if he had rightly understood her, that she had found the child in Dean's Yard. "I think you must be mistaken," he said. Mrs. Sparkes assured him on her word of honour that it was a fact.

"I am sorry for it, for your sake," said the clerk, "for Dean's Yard is

extra-parochial, and as such pays no poor's rate, consequently a child from it has no claim on the parish for relief."

"But what am I to do with it, sir?" said Mrs. Sparkes. "We cannot afford to keep it, we are too poor for that. Just imagine the expense—besides time and trouble, which is much the same thing—it would occasion to bring up a poor little creature like that by hand."

"It's a hard case, certainly, I admit; but I can't act as your legal adviser and that of the guardians as

well. Still, I do not mind saying, if I were in your place, I would go to the police-station, and insist upon their taking charge of it. They will give in if they find you are resolute and civil at the same time."

Mrs. Sparkes, without any great hope of success, went again to the police-station. This time she saw only the sergeant, for the inspector was absent on some errand to head-quarters in Scotland Yard. She attempted to show both firmness and dignity in her behaviour, but she

signally failed in both. Firmness, except to James, was by no means a prominent attribute in her character, and dignity sat but badly on the meek-minded washerwoman. To the sergeant's kindly expressed determination that they could not take charge of the baby at the station, she told him she trusted he would at least advise her what to do.

He would do so, he said, with great pleasure, but he was no lawyer. Still there was one course open to her, which could by no possibility do harm, and which might do good if

she adopted it: he would, if he were in her place, do it, and without losing a moment; and that was to apply to the magistrate at the Westminster Police Court. He was a very kind man, and would hear her patiently, and assist her if he had the power, he was sure. If she went at once she would be certain to see him without any delay, as the night-charges were by that time ended and the remands would not yet have been called on. Mrs. Sparkes, convinced that the sergeant spoke conscientiously for her good, followed his

advice, and marched off immediately to the police-court.

When she arrived, she found she could not obtain the ready access to the magistrate which the police-sergeant had promised her. Not that the night-charges were not finished, nor yet in consequence of the remands having been called on, but simply from the fact that his worship was discussing a chop in his private room, and the course of justice had to be stopped the while. This behaviour on the part of the magistrate was perfectly excusable to

every honourable and well-regulated mind. It is true that his worship had only seven hours' duty a day imposed on him, and which he shortened by invariably arriving at the court an hour after his time; it is true, also, that, not to allow his mind to be overwhelmed by fatigue, a beneficent legislature had allowed him two hundred and twenty days' holiday out of the three hundred and sixty-five days which compose the year, with the liberal payment of fifteen hundred pounds for the days he was on duty, compensating him so

munificently in order that bribery to do dishonest actions should be inert upon him—pity the same theory is not carried out to a similar extent in other professions and occupations as well as the law;—still it was only just that another hour should be deducted from his services in the most valuable part of the day to keep his nature from utter exhaustion.

Mrs. Sparkes waited patiently till his worship's lunch was over: not so the baby. He seemed to have an instinctive idea that hunger in his

case was as worthy of sympathy as in his worship's, and he expressed his opinion, if inarticulately, at least loudly, and with such energy that the usher, fearing that the noise might disturb his worship at his repast, somewhat rudely told Mrs. Sparkes that she must either keep the child quiet or take it away. Fortunately at that moment his worship entered the court, and his attention being attracted by the noise, he ordered Mrs. Sparkes to be brought before him.

The magistrate listened with pa-

tience and attention to Mrs. Sparkes' statement.

"If," said he, "what you tell me is true, it is certainly a very hard case that you should be subject to so much inconvenience for acting, as you appear to have done, a most humane part on the occasion. At the same time, the behaviour of the workhouse officials appears so contrary to what I generally hear of them, that I cannot help thinking there must be two sides to the question. I will immediately send a messenger for the relieving officer,

and after I have heard him I will decide what you had better do."

A messenger was immediately despatched to the workhouse. He, however, did not succeed in finding the relieving officer, or, indeed, any of the superior officials, but after some delay he returned with the under-porter, and a clerk from the office of the parish solicitor. Mrs. Sparkes was then requested by the magistrate to repeat her statement, which she did lucidly enough.

"I have no occasion, your worship," said the law clerk, "to ask the

witness any questions; on the contrary, I admit everything she has stated to be substantially true. At the same time, I must submit to you, that as Dean's Yard is extra-parochial and maintains its exemption from poor's rates, the power to oblige the parish to take charge of the infant does not come within your worship's jurisdiction."

"If you can show me that," said the magistrate, "I am afraid I cannot afford the poor woman any redress, or I should certainly have made an order for the parish to take charge

of the child. At the same time, it appears a hard case that the infant should be thrown upon her hands for support."

"It certainly does so, your worship; but we have no more power to depart from the law than yourself. It is certainly a very hard case, but we can do nothing in the matter."

"But I hope, sir," said Mrs. Sparkes to the magistrate, "you will advise us what to do. We are too poor to bring up the baby ourselves, and yet, God knows, we should be very loth to treat it unkindly."

"The only advice I can give you," said the magistrate, "is to consult a solicitor."

"But I suppose I must pay him, sir, if I do?"

"Certainly," said the magistrate. "It is not to be expected he would give you his services without remuneration."

"And if you paid one," said the lawyer's clerk, "you would only be throwing your money away. Our case is too good a one to be easily shaken, I can tell you."

"But pray tell me what I am to

do, sir," said Mrs. Sparkes. "We cannot afford to keep the child. I am only a poor washerwoman, and my husband is a private in the Guards, and we have to manage very carefully to keep the wolf from the door, as it is."

"What you are to do, my good woman, as I said before, is a subject for your consideration. I advised you to consult a solicitor, and I can say no more. Call the next case."

The law clerk, finding he was no longer wanted, left the court, and

Mrs. Sparkes, in a great huff, started off to take the baby home, who was now in a famishing condition. The weather was bitterly cold and it was raining fast, so she broke off into a run to get home as quickly as possible. But rapid as was her pace, she was overtaken by the workhouse porter before she had arrived at the corner of York Street. When he had reached her he tapped her on the shoulder, and said he wanted to speak to her, or rather she understood him to mean so, for he was a fat man, and scant of breath from the

exercise he had taken. As soon as he had recovered himself, he addressed her as follows :—

"It is certainly a very hard case that a working woman like you should have a child thrown on your hands for support; at the same time if you act legally you may make the parish take it yet. As I speak only for your benefit, you must not tell any one what I am going to say, or you will get me into trouble. There is no occasion for you to employ a lawyer, and the law clerk who told the magistrate that the guardians

could not be obliged to take it, talked nonsense. I know the law as well as he does; perhaps better. Now I'll tell you what to do. You stay here for a minute or two with the child, and I will go on to the corner of York Street. As soon as I see a policeman coming up, I will hold up my hand. Do you immediately lay the baby on the ground under that archway—take care no one sees you, by-the-bye,—then come up to the policeman and tell him you saw a baby lying on the cold stones crying, and you think some one has

deserted it, and if it lies there much longer it will die of cold. The policeman can't do less than go and take it up. The deserted child being found by him within the parish boundary, the guardians must take it; and they can't hurt you if they find out afterwards that you did it, for the child ain't yours, and they can't prove any legal obligation on you to contribute to its support."

"And you would advise me to put the baby on the cold ground there?" said Mrs. Sparkes.

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"The colder and damper the better," said the workhouse porter, "as it will show the greater inhumanity in the policeman if he does not take charge of it."

Mrs. Sparkes gave no other answer to the porter than an indignant glance. She folded the baby somewhat tighter in her shawl, and bending her head to the wind and rain proceeded homewards with a decided and somewhat stern expression of countenance. All doubts as to what she should do with the baby had now vanished from her mind.

The porter's proposition had decided her. Her womanly feeling had been so shocked at the idea of the helpless little creature being treated in the manner suggested, in addition to the objections which might be raised against it by the parish authorities, that she resolved to keep the child herself. "Where there is enough for three," she reflected, "there is enough for four; and God never makes mouths without giving something to put into them." Jemima could take care of the baby, and as for Sparkes, she knew him too well

to fear any opposition on his part. No, she was resolved she would bring it up as her own. At any rate, there would be nothing on her conscience if she took care of it; and perhaps, after all, God had sent it to her on purpose—who knows? More unlikely things than that happened in the world.

With these and other reflections of a like character she occupied her mind till she arrived at home.

III.

It has been before stated that the dwelling of Mrs. Sparkes was in Blue Anchor Yard, York Street, Westminster. To judge from its entrance from the street, a more undesirable residence for a person fond of a picturesque locality could hardly have been imagined. The narrow gateway by which it is entered has a most squalid appearance, and the houses in the yard, all of which are densely inhabited, give, with the majority of their tenants, an idea of dirtiness

hardly in keeping with the reputation which Mrs. Sparkes had acquired of being of the strictest personal cleanliness, as well as a neat and skilful washerwoman. The fact is, she would hardly have rented the house she occupied had her taste only been consulted, but as good house accommodation for her line of business was extremely scarce in Westminster, and as the house she lived in suited her occupation admirably, her own private feelings were set aside by her on the occasion, and she was only too well content with her good

fortune in being able to obtain it at the moderate rent she was charged.

It was situated on the right-hand side of the court, nearly as you enter it, and the last house in it. The messuage or tenement abutting on Gardner's Lane, as the owner called it in the agreement she held of him, consisted of four rooms, two above and two below, with a small back shed, and a narrow yard about thirty feet long, for drying the clothes. The yard was enclosed by windowless backs of houses on the northern,

eastern, and western sides, but open to the south, with the exception of a wall, fortified by broken bottles, and about seven feet high, so that it formed a strong barrier against dishonest visitors, but was not so high as to impede the rays of the sun when she wished to draw upon them for drying the linen entrusted to her charge.

The interior of the house was divided in the following manner. Mrs. Sparkes was tenant in chief. She let off the two top rooms to two under tenants, a brother and a sister.

The man was a porter in a house of business in Piccadilly. As he will not be wanted in the plot of our little drama, there will be no occasion to occupy the reader's time with any further description of him, than that he was an honest, sober, steady man, about forty years of age, possessing what, in Mrs. Sparkes' eyes, was a great recommendation,—a sincere affection for a lame sister who lived with him, and who assisted to a considerable extent in supporting herself by working for an army clothier in the Strand.

The whole of the ground-floor Mrs. Sparkes retained for her own use. The front room was used as a reception-room or parlour, and was arranged with much care for effect. The furniture was old, but not dilapidated—poor, but of exceeding cleanliness. It was, moreover, not bulky; nor in fact did it crowd up the room in an inconvenient manner. Nor was the apartment without ornament. Against the wall, and opposite the window, was a print portrait of the god of the idolatry of Private Sparkes—the Duke of Wellington.

There was also a Dutch clock, a looking-glass, and one or two plaster images, not particularly sharp in the casting; on the contrary, they had a decidedly "gummy" look about them, which would have taken a great deal from their value in the eyes of a connoisseur, should ever such a character have entered the locality—a most remote probability. But the principal ornament of the whole consisted of a row of flat-irons ranged rigidly in a line over the chimney-piece, with their plane surfaces towards the spectator. These

irons constituted the joy of Mrs. Sparkes' heart. She loved and respected them They were almost her household gods, for to them she generally turned her eyes as if for consolation and counsel on any knotty point; and apparently, from the frequent glances of satisfaction she gave them, she did not apply to them in vain. Had they been her children she could hardly have taken more pride in their appearance than she did, and the care she bestowed on them, in making their flat surfaces shine as if they had been case-

hardened, was worthy, from the industry she showed, of the greatest commendation.

The back room might almost have been termed her laboratory; for, though the coppers were in the shed before named, the hooks for airing the linen, and drying it too when the weather obliged that operation to be carried on indoors, as well as the ironing-board and clothes-baskets, were in it. The floor was boarded, which was a great advantage, as it kept off rheumatism. There was also a very good stove, which was

used not only for warming the flat-irons, but for cooking. These, with a table generally placed in a corner so as to leave the centre of the room clear, a couple of chairs, and a sham chest of drawers, which, without a harlequin's wand, was transformed every evening into a bedstead, completed the furniture of the room.

When Mrs. Sparkes arrived at home, she found Jemima, who was naturally blessed with a good appetite, in almost as famishing a condi tion as the infant itself. Nor was it without excuse, their ordinary hour

for dining being twelve o'clock, and it was nearly three before Mrs. Sparkes returned from the police office. Acute as the poor girl's hunger was, it vanished the moment she heard the baby's cry. She seized the little creature in her arms, and almost tore it from her mother before she had even time to seat herself in a chair, and immediately, in an ecstasy of delight, commenced nursing it. All attempts to quiet it, however, were useless, and poor Mrs. Sparkes was obliged to rise from her seat and take off her bonnet and

shawl, to prepare it some food, consoling herself with the idea that the cold boiled mutton for her own and Jemima's dinner, on the table, could not get colder the while, cold as the day was. In a short time the baby was fed, in five minutes more it was asleep, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Sparkes and Jemima were comfortably seated at their dinner.

Their meal over, Mrs. Sparkes began sorting out, in the back room, the linen she had brought home in the morning. This she accomplished not only in a systematic, but almost

in an artistic manner. She spread it over the floor in little heaps at regular distances, tallying them with the lists which had been given of their number and descriptions when she fetched them away in the morning. That finished, she commenced the audit of her accounts, but was interrupted in the midst. Baby had woke up, and Jemima, who had been endeavouring to pacify it, was obliged to give up the task to her mother. Mrs. Sparkes, with some little difficulty, succeeded better than her daughter, and contrived to get it to

sleep again. The act itself would have hardly been worth the narrating had it not been for the psychological phenomenon she exhibited in its accomplishment. Some have doubted the duality of the mind, but Mrs. Sparkes on this occasion went far beyond it. Taking the infant with her into the back room she commenced singing to it a ditty, in a manner that almost justified its ill-humour, thinking at the same moment how she should put the matter to Sparkes when he returned. Not that she stood in the slightest awe

of him; on the contrary, as his superior officer she knew such a feeling would be derogatory on her part. But she was sincerely attached to him, and she feared that the attention a baby would require in their establishment might be annoying to a man at his time of life. At last her dread somewhat abated when she remembered that James was only at home in the evening, and then it was more than probable that baby would be asleep. But her mind was at the same time occupied by other things than her song and her con-

siderations for her husband's feelings: she was also deliberating in what manner she should dress the child, and how she could make some of Jemima's old garments into new ones for it,—no easy matter in itself, but one requiring the deepest thought, as Jemima had a habit, not only of wearing her things till the gloss was off, but far beyond it. She also thought in what manner she could economise the time necessary for a proper attention to baby, and many other things too numerous to mention, but which will easily be under-

stood by the reader, if herself the mother of a family. But the most extraordinary fact, in a scientific point of view, was the wonderful control her brain kept over her muscular action during this complicated series of thoughts. Rocking the baby in her arms precisely and accurately *out* of time to the tune she was singing, she continued the whole time walking about the room, sometimes diagonally, sometimes up and down, sometimes across, and sometimes even backwards, without in one single instance touching one of the little heaps of

linen she had spread over the floor, rivalling by the feat, notwithstanding the active working of her mind, the celebrated hornpipe among the eggs, as danced by the renowned master of the ceremonies, Mr. Baron Nathan, of Rosherville Gardens, Gravesend, Kent.

The baby was at last asleep, the linen had disappeared, and the tea was made before Mr. Sparkes joined his family circle. After his usual caustic manner of salutation was over, he seated himself in his accustomed place by the fire. Mrs.

Sparkes drew up the table with the tea-things upon it. Her husband cast a glance on it, and in a moment detected the absence of the bread and butter. He made no remark, however, proving by his silence his naturally amiable temper, and his wife's good discipline. His patience did not go long unrewarded, for in a moment afterwards he saw his wife emerge from the back room with a plate of muffins of such proportions, that nothing but the stomach of a hungry guardsman, and a bold one too, could have had the courage to

attack it, with the faintest hope of demolishing it.

To tell the strict truth, the whole of the affair was a piece of theatrical effect got up by Mrs. Sparkes. She knew the principal weakness of her husband to be muffins,—well buttered, be it remembered, and with the best salt too,—and she determined to seduce him with them before broaching the subject of the baby. To this intent, and with an eye to greater effect, she had lighted the fire in the back room, for which, being Monday, there was not the slightest occasion,

THE EFFECT OF MUFFINS.

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and there having prepared the muffins, she brought them in unexpectedly, and placed them before him. In a moment she was satisfied with the extraordinary effect they had produced upon him, and she rightly augured that the remainder of her task would be comparatively easy.

Sparkes' eye dilated with pleasure the instant he saw the muffins, and after two or three efforts he contrived to get a smile on his face. This had already satisfied her, but assurance was made doubly sure by the glance

of gratitude he cast on her after having swallowed the first mouthful. So artistically had she arranged them, and so exactly had their equal proportions been amalgamated, that it was impossible to say whether the muffin or the butter predominated either in quality or quantity.

After tea, Mrs. Sparkes began a full, true, and particular account of her day's adventures, concealing nothing, nor setting down aught in malice. Sparkes listened attentively, and being most undemonstrative by nature, made no particular sign

of emotion until she had arrived at the episode of the police-court, and the advice given to her by the workhouse under-porter on her way home. Here visible signs of internal agitation presented themselves in the physiognomy of the gallant soldier. Strange, unnatural, spasmodic actions of the muscles of the face were seen, his brow contracted, and his eye had a particularly dangerous, threatening expression in it. Moreover, the muscles of his face hardened till they had acquired the apparent rigidity of wood.

Still not a sound did he utter. The evident emotion he was labouring under continued, and was clearly trying to develop itself in words, but for some time without effect, so inflexibly iron-like was his cast of countenance and organs of expression.

At last human nature could support the torture no longer, and he exploded with so tremendous an oath that it cracked a pane of glass, and nearly caused the row of flat-irons on the chimney-piece to vibrate. At least Mrs. Sparkes said he had

broken the glass, but James said he had not, and that it had been done a week before by a boy in the yard with a stone, to which excuse Mrs. Sparkes rejoined playfully that he only said that to conceal his own wickedness.

After a few moments' silence James again vented a volley of anathemas against parish officers and police magistrates. He kept on in this manner for nearly an hour, Mrs. Sparkes taking no notice of it, notwithstanding her aversion to bad language, as she knew it would end

in his willingness for her to take charge of the baby—and she was right. When he had acquired his equanimity, the worthy couple talked the matter over together, calmly and reasonably, and the result was that the poor little creature should no longer be the shuttlecock of parish officers and police authorities, but that they would bring it up in every respect as their own child.

The next morning Jemima, now formally inducted into the office of nurse, took the baby for an airing into York Street. She had no little

pride in the trust reposed in her, but still she did not wish to appear proud ; so she determined she would not avoid her young acquaintances, whom she might meet there, but yet would follow her mother's advice, and not thrust herself on their notice. If she really wished for anything like seclusion in her walk she was disappointed, for in a few moments a numerous auditory of little girls, varying from ten years of age downwards, had collected around her. After all it was an absurdity on the part of Mrs. Sparkes to advise Jemima

to avoid, if possible, her acquaintances, for the very sight of a baby, and a perfectly fresh one too, was too great an attraction to pass unnoticed in a locality of the kind, with so dense a juvenile female population.

Jemima's acquaintances, who had collected about her, had one or two characteristics in common, which almost gave them the appearance of belonging to one and the same family. In the first place, there was a certain freedom from anything like coquetry, as far as cleanliness went. The

clothes of the whole, with the exception of the very youngest, were too small for them, and the exceptions were distinguishable from having fallen into the contrary extreme—their clothes being not only much too long for them, but also too wide. But the most marked peculiarity among them, at least the elder part, was in their bonnets. In those days that article of female attire was worn absurdly large, and Jemima's friends, as far as the size of their bonnets went, were all in the height of the fashion, the preposterous size appear-

ing the greater from the diminutive stature of the wearers. At the same time it should be remarked, all the bonnets were not only lamentably out of shape, but from their limp and faded condition, they had evidently each adorned in turn several heads before they were applied to the uses of their present holders.

Jemima was, in a few moments, so completely overwhelmed with questions about the baby, that any attempt at reserve on her part would have been utterly useless. She was obliged—perhaps not much against

her will—to give a minute history of its antecedents, as far as she was in possession of them, while the dilated eyes and breathless silence of her auditors told how much they were interested in the narration. The history over, a most minute and searching personal examination of the baby was commenced, especially of its arms and legs; and afterwards its clothes underwent so careful an inspection, that the French custom-house examination on the frontiers of Switzerland in the worst time of the Bourbons, when Swiss jewellery and watch-

wheels were strictly prohibited, was trifling to it in point of strictness.

The personal examination over, each girl in her turn insisted on nursing the baby, greatly to Jemima's terror, as more than one among them seemed to be destitute of even the most rudimentary elements of the science. Nevertheless, as she was a good-natured girl, and did not wish to displease, she contented herself by watching narrowly each successive applicant as she took the baby in her arms. All went on smoothly enough for some minutes, till at last Jemima

was accused of gross favouritism in allowing the baby to remain a longer time in the arms of those she loved most, to the prejudice of those who were less dear to her. In the end the dissatisfaction increased, till it assumed the proportions almost of a breach of the peace, some attempting to take the baby by force, others loudly accusing Jemima of being proud because her mother had found a baby, and reminding her that all their mothers had, one time or other, found babies, or had got them from the doctor; so there was no call for

her to hold up her head so high about it after all. At last one agitator, with a prodigious bonnet of no particular form, having innately some vague and undefined notions of the law of "Treasure Trove" of her own, propounded the following question to the meeting:—"If the baby had been found in Dean's Yard, why should it belong to Mrs. Sparkes more than anybody else?" and, without waiting for any discussion on the subject, followed up her proposition by a suggestion that the baby should be the joint-stock property of the assembled

JEMIMA'S HURRIED FLIGHT.

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company. This proposition, infamous as it was, was received with so much enthusiasm by the meeting, that Jemima became intensely terrified, and clasping the baby tightly in her arms, she rushed off with it as fast as she could towards Blue Anchor Yard, where she arrived safely, her greater length of leg giving her an immense advantage over her pursuers.

As soon as Jemima had entered the house, she rushed to her mother, who was occupied at the tub, to inform her of the dangers the baby had encountered. To the girl's great sur-

prise, her mother appeared to take no notice of the circumstance, but quietly wiped the soap-suds from her arms, and then dried them on her apron. She then went to the cupboard and took down her bonnet and shawl, and after arranging them on her person to her perfect satisfaction, she told Jemima to get the baby to sleep if she could, and on no account to leave the house till she returned. She should not be longer, she believed, than half an honr.

The cause of Mrs. Sparkes' abrupt departure was as follows. While oc-

cupied at the tub, her thoughts had been bent on the infant she had adopted. She had reflected that one of her self-imposed duties as a mother had yet to be performed. True, she had provided the child with a home, but it still wanted not only a name, but reception into the bosom of the Christian Church. The omission being proved, and her resolution to rectify it being taken, she had to determine in what name the child should be baptized. The Christian name was soon decided on. She determined to call it James after her

husband. She had also another reason for this. She had formerly lost an infant son about the same age as baby, a misfortune which had been sorely felt both by herself and husband, and it was the reminiscence of that loss which had caused the pathetic look which Mr. Sparkes had cast on the helpless little creature, the evening they had found it, preparatory to his leaving for the barracks. So, setting aside a common prejudice against naming a second child after one that has died, she determined that his Christian name should be James.

She had now to decide on a surname, but that was a far more difficult matter to settle. She could not, or rather would not, call it Sparkes, for reasons she had determined on in her own mind; but what other name to give it puzzled the good dame exceedingly. After turning it over in her thoughts during the whole time she was occupied in washing six pairs of stockings, she finally resolved it should be called Duke; in honour, she said, of the Duke of Wellington, the being of all others she considered it her

duty, as a soldier's wife, to respect and admire. It was at the precise moment she had settled this point, that Jemima had entered the house, and as Mrs. Sparkes was an energetic woman, and accustomed to act decisively on any subject she had resolved on, she betook herself immediately to the Broadway Church to know at what hour the next Sunday the child should be christened; and after having satisfactorily ascertained all the particulars, she returned to the house, and in the evening told her husband

and Jemima of the step she had taken.

The next Sunday, at the appointed time, the procession was formed, and literally marched to the church. The ceremony came off in a proper and becoming manner. Mrs. Sparkes acted as godmother, and her husband as one of the godfathers, the other being a fifer in the regiment, who, out of friendship to James, combined with the promise of a pipe and a glass of gin and water in the evening, took upon himself the onerous duties of the other sponsor. As soon as the

child was christened, and its name duly entered in the parish register as James Duke, the whole party marched back again to Blue Anchor Yard, there to spend a pleasant evening together.

When the ceremony was over a weight was removed from the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Sparkes, as it appeared to settle the fact that the child was now part and parcel of their domestic establishment. But to Jemima the satisfaction it created was greater than to either of her parents. By some obscure reasoning

of her own, she had come to the conclusion that the registration of the child's name in the parish books gave her parents an indisputable title to have and to hold it as their own; and that now in case any of the unruly little girls she was accustomed to meet in York Street should attempt to tear it from her arms, she had only to call the attention of the police to the parish register to prove that her assailants were acting in an illegal and unjustifiable manner, and perpetual imprisonment at the least would be their punishment should

they repeat it. She then entered on her duties as nurse energetically and conscientiously, but not without the hope of fee or reward for her services, for she had been promised by her parents that if she did her duty by the baby, as soon as it began to talk it should be taught to call her—aunt.

IV.

A LAPSE of thirteen years has taken place between the fall of the curtain on the last act of our drama and its rising on the opening scene

of the present. During that period, however, several vicissitudes must be assumed to have taken place. In the first place, time had not only left its trace on Mrs. Sparkes' form and features, but sickness had marked them as well. She had become much thinner, and stooped considerably; a change the more remarkable in her as she had always imitated the bearing and walk that ought to characterise a Guardsman's wife. There was also a considerable change in her dress. She had always affected neatness and quiet colouring,

but now she was always dressed in black. Moreover, for the last twelve years she had worn a widow's cap, her husband having been gathered to his fathers about nine months after his first introduction to the reader. He had always wished to die upon the field of battle, but that was denied him. The manner of his death, or rather the accident that caused it, was in some slight way mixed up with his country's glory and its deeds of arms, which allayed in the mind of his wife any stigma that might have attached itself to his memory

from the proximate cause of his death.

On the first anniversary of the battle of Waterloo after our opening scene, he had been talking over the incidents of that eventful day with some comrades, who, like himself, had fought in it with honour to themselves and glory to their country. The arguments were long and interesting, and in the course of the debate, which was held at the "British Grenadier," they had occasion to drink the Duke of Wellington's health more than once, to show him

they did not forget him. When the party left the tap-room not one of them was the worse for liquor, and poor Mrs. Sparkes always mentioned that fact, which had been told her by Sparkes himself, poor man, on his death-bed ; but the day was hot, and the sun was in his eyes, and what with thinking of the battle, and one thing or another, his mind got so confused that he took the pathway for a brewer's dray, and the brewer's dray for the pathway, and before he had discovered his mistake he was under the dray, from whence he was

taken to the hospital with a compound fracture of the thigh, from which he never recovered. His loss was severely felt by his family. With all his little soldier-like faults he had been a good husband to his wife, and a kind and indulgent parent, not only to Jemima, but to little James as well, whom he had never ceased to regard as his own child. Poor Sparkes had possessed in his temperament a singular combination of the attributes of the lion and the lamb. A braver man, or a more devoted soldier to his country, never lived.

Fear was unknown to him. He would at any moment have laid down his life in the way of duty with as little hesitation as he would have placed his head on his pillow at night. At home he was as mild and docile as a child, and would frequently assist his wife in little domestic duties of the most antagonistic character to the profession of which he was so worthy a member. It was no unusual circumstance to see him in the afternoon busily occupied with the heavy things at the wash-tub, handling the soap, and rubbing vigo-

rously with his iron knuckles the articles committed by his wife to his charge, in a manner that few washerwomen could have excelled. But it was in wringing the greater things, such as blankets, curtains, and sheets, that his services were particularly valuable to his wife, and which made her often thank Heaven for the excellent husband it had in its goodness awarded her.

After his death his widow had contrived to struggle on, and not only succeeded in maintaining herself and family in comfort and respectability,

but, by strict economy, she had contrived to invest a few (a very few) pounds in the savings bank. Justice, however, should be done to her daughter Jemima in the matter. She was a good and dutiful child to her mother, and in the business also, as far as the tub went. It was no fault on the part of the girl if she had not made herself equally useful at the ironing-board as well, but a physical impediment prevented her. Her body had stopped growing when she was about fourteen years of age, but her legs had continued to grow for some

years afterwards. The result was, they had become considerably too long for her body. They raised her to such a height above the ironing-board, and thereby obliged her to stoop so much when she worked at it, that Mrs. Sparkes' druggist's shopman, who generally acted as medical adviser to her family, thought such an occupation would bring on disease of the lungs, and strongly counselled that she should seek some other employment. Jemima, who was now more than twenty years of age, was an amiable, industrious, kind-hearted

creature, and of excessive simplicity. In person she was exceedingly tall, with a strongly freckled, inexpressive face, lightish green eyes, and intensely red hair; but, as she had far less vanity than her sex generally, these defects gave her but little annoyance.

James Duke had grown up from a baby into a strong, sturdy boy, about the average height, with plain, but not ugly features. He was a good, industrious boy, working hard at the clothes-basket, the only inheritance he had received from Mr. Sparkes.

The widow had retained the boy with her in the house for several reasons; the first (which, by-the-bye, she mentioned seldomest) was from the affection she bore him; the second to see that he did not get into bad company, a casualty easily met with in York Street and Tothill Fields. Another was, that she could superintend his education as far as sending him to school and paying for it went. And lastly, that he might save her getting another person to assist in the outdoor dutics of her business. In temper young James was somewhat

self-willed and argumentative, but he was an affectionate, obedient boy to the widow, and excellent friends with his aunt Jemima. In his moral character but one trait gave the widow any pain—she occasionally detected him uttering the most radical sentiments in relation to the constituted authorities! And as she herself possessed, in the highest degree, respect for everything that appertained to Church and State, it may easily be imagined such language gave her considerable pain. With that exception, however, she

had every reason to be perfectly contented with his behaviour.

In the decorations and properties of our stage there is little change to report. The principal is that when James had attained his eleventh year, several shillings, which Mrs. Sparkes had accumulated towards a fund for the purchase of a mangle, were invested in a bedstead, which was placed in the ironing-room, while the transforming chest of drawers already alluded to were brought into the front room, and in them, when metamorphosed into a

bed, Jemima and her mother slept nightly.

The thread of our narrative recommences about noon one fine day in the month of July. Jemima and James were occupied in hanging up some clothes in the yard, when Mrs. Sparkes, who had left the house about ten o'clock, entered. It has already been stated that her health had for some time past been declining, and that the effect of the change was that morning more visible than usual. Her countenance was more pallid, and there was a singular

expression on it, which was more noticeable after she had taken off her bonnet, and seated herself on a chair. This it would be difficult to describe. There was something exceedingly serious about it, but it neither betokened anxiety, anger, pain, nor care. There was too much mildness about it for either. She sat quietly, apparently absorbed in thought, for more than a minute, when Jemima's voice caught her ear in the scullery, saying something to James in the yard. She turned her head gently round, and looked in the

direction of the voice, but without uttering a word. Her eyes gradually filled with tears, but she had sufficient command over her feelings to restrain them from falling; then, by a sudden effort, she rose from her chair, and having replaced her bonnet and shawl in the cupboard, she commenced quietly to occupy herself with her household duties.

Although, from the above description, little may be gathered as to the state of the poor woman's mind, the feeling that caused the behaviour was grave enough in itself. She had,

since she left home that morning, received a sentence of death, nor could the judge who gave it hold out the slightest hope of mercy in this world.

Although her health for some time past had been exceedingly delicate, she had paid but little attention to it, considering, perhaps, that at her time of life she had no right to be surprised at infirmities oppressing her, and she contented herself with what simple remedies the druggist's shopman before alluded to advised her to take. Unfortunately, however, in

her visits to the shop, she told her medical adviser only half her ailments, and, still more unfortunately, those she concealed were precisely those requiring the most care and attention. The result was, that the evil grew till she was obliged to admit its serious nature, and then at last she resolved to apply to some good medical authority for his advice.

The morning we are speaking of she had left the house soon after breakfast, without giving either Jemima or James information of her intentions, and she did not return till

nearly dinner-time. When she left her home it was for the purpose of consulting a physician of eminence, who then lived in Queen's Square, and who formerly held the appointment of accoucheur to the wives of the soldiers of the three regiments of Guards. When she saw him she explained to him without reservation her sufferings, which hitherto, with great determination, she had concealed even from Jemima. The doctor listened to her patiently, and, after going deeply into her case, concluded by saying,—

"My good woman, you are very ill."

"Dangerously so, sir?"

"Well, as I said before, you are very ill. What is your occupation?"

"I am a washerwoman."

"Then you must leave it off. It is far too hard work for you. That is to say, if your circumstances will allow you."

"I think I can manage that, sir. My daughter understands the business well, and is a good, industrious girl, and my son" (she always called James her son) "also assists in the outdoor work."

"I am happy to hear it," said the doctor, preparing to write a prescription, "for work of any kind will be injurious in your case."

"Do you consider me in any danger, sir?"

"I can't tell you more than I have done. You must, as I have said before, take great care of yourself;" and he continued writing the prescription.

Mrs. Sparkes was silent for some moments, but taking courage she again addressed the doctor:—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I

should be so much obliged to you if you would tell me if my complaint is dangerous. I don't ask for myself, but when I am gone my two children could not carry on the business by themselves, and I should like to see them in some respectable employment before I die."

"All cancers are dangerous," said the doctor.

"Thank you, sir; for some time past I feared it was cancer, and now I know the worst."

"I am glad you take the intelligence so courageously," said the

doctor, handing her the prescription.

"Oh, sir," said Mrs. Sparkes, taking it up, "I am the widow of a soldier who fought for his country at Waterloo."

She then thanked the doctor for his kindness, and proceeded to her home.

Perhaps, reader, you have never mixed much with that singular class of beings—soldiers' wives. They present, as a body, the most singular contrasts—the extremes of good and evil being found among them. At the same time it should be under-

stood that the good is their own; the bad, the infamous neglect of the War Office authorities to their well-being, acting on beings possessing an average amount of human weakness. All of them are courageous. Talk of the courage of the British soldier! It is vast, certainly; but quote an act of heroism the bravest of them may have performed, and another done by some soldier's wife can be quoted that shall equal or surpass it. Theirs is a courage apart. They do not defy death. They do not hold him in contempt. They have none

of that courage which oozes out of an insensibility to danger; on the contrary, they keenly appreciate it and avoid it if they can, calmly and quietly it is true, and yet occasionally not without great dignity. They do not boast; they rather affect timidity, and yet they have not simply the courage of the lion, but superior to it. If by chance they are in any great danger, and the shock of the intelligence has not been so sudden as to shake the acute sensibility of the female nervous system, they are cool and collected. Even on the

battle-field these women have frequently been seen to stand fire with the courage of the veteran soldier without the excitement of the fight to stimulate them. Under pain, their heroism is wonderful. Examples of it might be quoted so astounding that, although perfectly true, the author who would describe them would probably incur the accusation of gross exaggeration, even if the subject were suitable for a work of light literature. But the grandest feature in their courage is the astonishing resolution they show in meet-

ing inevitable death from sickness. They may frequently be seen standing quietly before the king of terrors face to face, without the tremble of an eyelid, and without an appeal or look for mercy or pity.

Of these last was Mrs. Sparkes. When she left the doctor's she knew perfectly well she was condemned to death. All women understand, instinctively, something of medicine, and she knew too well the meaning of the word "cancer" to think there was for her, at her time of life, the slightest chance of escaping. The

certainty of the result did not in the least disturb her. God had given her his order to leave the world, and the route, and she was quite ready to obey Him. The only thing that weighed on her mind was that Jemima and James would no longer have her to assist them.

When seated on her chair, after her return from the visit to the doctor's, it was not simply fatigue that caused her silence. She was offering up the while, in her simple phraseology, a prayer to the Almighty; so silently that He alone heard it. It was not

PERFECTLY RESIGNED.

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to escape her doom: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," was her address to Him, without one thought of the text which she had translated into her own vocabulary, and was quoting. She was perfectly resigned; her petition to Him was for counsel and help in providing respectably for her two children, the thought of whose helplessness had filled her eyes with tears before she rose from her chair.

She then busied herself in preparing the dinner, and, before they were seated at their meal, she felt certain

in her own mind that her prayer had been answered; certainly she had resolved on her course of action. During the dinner she was cheerful and contented, but made no mention of her visit to the doctor's, nor the resolution she had arrived at. If there was any difference observable in her behaviour, it was that she appeared in better spirits than usual. The meal over, Jemima and James went to their previous occupation, and after Mrs. Sparkes had occupied herself in removing the dinner-things, she quietly, and without informing

either of her children of her intention, left the house.

Her first visit was to the barracks in St. James's Park, where with some little difficulty she contrived to obtain an audience of the Adjutant of her husband's regiment.

She told him simply that Sparkes had been for many years a soldier in it; that he had also served at Waterloo: this was always a great card with her. Her husband, she continued, was now dead, and she also felt her end was rapidly approaching; but

before it occurred it would afford her great happiness if she could see her son, or rather a boy that both she and her husband had brought up as their own, admitted into the regiment as a drummer. The Adjutant listened to her with great good humour. He remembered her husband, he said, perfectly well. He was a very steady man, and a good soldier. He should have much pleasure in aiding her in the object she had in view, and if no unforeseen obstacle presented itself —and on his part he did not anticipate any,—such as medical or other

objections, over which he had no control, he had no doubt he should in a short time be able to present her son with a pair of drum-sticks in that renowned regiment—the Scots Fusilier Guards.

Mrs. Sparkes then left the barracks with a thoroughly grateful heart: one-half of her wish was now accomplished; if she only was as fortunate with the other she would then have but little to wish for in this world. She now directed her steps to the dwelling of one of her customers who kept a lodging-house in Pimlico, a

person in whose judgment and respectability she had implicit reliance. Fortunately she not only found her at home, a very common occurrence with lodging-house keepers, but found her unoccupied as well, a far rarer circumstance, at least for any who do not come to look at the apartments. Mrs. Sparkes told her that she wished to find Jemima a housemaid's situation, but as the girl had never yet been in service, she was afraid there might be some difficulty in finding her a good mistress. Could the lady help her in the

matter? If she could she would be doing her a great favour.

Singularly enough, the housemaid of the lodging-house keeper had given warning that morning on the plea that with her weak knee, it was too fatiguing to work from six o'clock in the morning till twelve at night. This little fact the mistress omitted to mention to Mrs. Sparkes, but she promised her that as soon as her present servant's month had expired, she would take Jemima in her place and give her a fair trial.

Mrs. Sparkes sincerely thanked her

for the promise, and then returned home with a grateful heart. When she laid her head on her pillow that night, she offered up thanksgivings to the Almighty, the fervour of which it would have been difficult to exceed, for the bounty and goodness He had shown her that day.

The disease now progressed rapidly, so much so that Mrs. Sparkes began to fear her death might take place before her plans for the future of Jemima and James were carried out; but in this she was fortunately mistaken, for she not only lived long

enough to see her daughter obtain her situation in the lodging-house, but also James receive his appointment as drummer in the Scots Fusilier Guards. She had not seen him since, as the regiment was in Windsor, but it was expected shortly to arrive in London, and would then be quartered in Wellington Barracks, and in consequence be very near her.

As soon as the children were thus provided for, Mrs. Sparkes' health began to sink with great rapidity. Hitherto her mind had apparently

struggled with the disease, and although it did not stay its progress it seemed at least to retard it; but now that her doubts were at rest with respect to her children's welfare, she gave up the contest, and quietly determined to smooth her pillow for her approaching death. It must not be imagined that she wanted either assistance or nursing in consequence of the absence of Jemima and James. Those must know but little of the respectable poor who could arrive at such a conclusion. Not only all her neighbours respected her, and would

have assisted her to any extent in their power, but her two female lodgers, both needlewomen, attended her with great kindness and consideration. One of these (Mrs. Murphy) had been with her since the commencement of our narrative; the other supplied the place of Mrs. Murphy's brother, who had died about six months after Sparkes. It is true it would have been more lucrative for Mrs. Sparkes to have taken a single male lodger, but dreading the slightest appearance of scandal, she resisted the temptation, and accepted a seams-

tress; although so much delicacy of sentiment was hardly necessary on her part, as any one acquainted with her appearance and manners would readily admit. Fortunately, the little money she had accumulated in the savings bank supplied her with what little superfluities or delicacies she required, and in all respects she was as comfortable as the circumstances of her case would admit.

Perfectly aware of her situation, she determined to examine into the state of her soul, and to prepare herself for the serious change which

would shortly take place. She first spoke on the subject to Mrs. Murphy, her lame seamstress lodger, who was herself a woman of great piety. She immediately advised Mrs. Sparkes to procure the assistance and advice of a minister of religion, and proposed to send for one whose chapel she had constantly attended for several years. But Mrs. Murphy was a Dissenter; and it struck Mrs. Sparkes, that as her husband had been in the army, the assistance of a clergyman of the Established Church would be more effectual—not that she

meant any disrespect to the dissenting minister. Mrs. Murphy being a liberal-minded woman, she immediately called on one of the parish curates, and told him how anxious her friend Mrs. Sparkes was to see him, and she hoped he would call on her. This he most readily promised, and the next day kept his word.

The curate, who was a kind, amiable man, with great experience among the poor of his parish—remained with the sick woman for a considerable time. He left her much easier in her mind,

having (to use her own phraseology) talked very comfortably to her. In fact he was too well acquainted with the respectable working classes of the district, not to know how large a vein of pure Christianity existed among them with all their faults, and he soon discovered that his penitent, by her very humility, was one of the best of that class. He left after advising her to examine carefully the state of her conscience :—whether she had acted unjustly to any one, and if so, to pray for forgiveness and make all reparation in her power; to forgive her

enemies as she hoped to be forgiven, and if she had acted unkindly or uncharitably to any, either by word or deed, not only to repent of it, but to ask pardon, if possible, of the person offended. He gave her further instructions respecting her sins in general, and after leaving her a few short printed prayers applicable to her situation, for daily use, he took his leave, promising, to her great satisfaction, that he would call and see her again.

As soon as he had left the house, she commenced the examination of

her conscience, taking each subject separately. On the forgiveness of injuries, with two exceptions, she—the one slight, the other of far graver degree—had little to blame herself. No doubt she had occasionally received offences which had irritated her, but she soon remembered that no doubt she had frequently annoyed others: and so the account was balanced.

The first exception alluded to was as follows:—She had for a long time refused to forgive, and had borne malice against Mrs. Saberton,

whom she had allowed to take home some linen to wash which had been entrusted to her, Mrs. Sparkes. She did it because she, the said Mrs. Saberton, was at that time nursing her sick baby, and could not leave it to work at Mrs. Sparkes' own tub. When Mrs. Saberton, who could do her work well—that it was only fair to say of her—had got up the linen, instead of honourably taking it back to Mrs. Sparkes, she most dishonourably pawned it. Afterwards, instead of acknowledging her fault and returning the duplicates,

she allowed her children (she was always a slovenly, careless woman) to play with them, and they were either burnt or lost; whereby Mrs. Sparkes not only lost an excellent customer, but some very unpleasant remarks were made as to her integrity besides. Upon hearing this, Mrs. Sparkes immediately offered to pay for them, but she was told that of the things lost a pair of cuffs and a collar had been worked by a married daughter of the customer now in India, and that no money could replace them. However, though she

had cherished her anger against Mrs. Saberton for a long time, she had forgiven her years ago, for the poor woman after all had a large family and a drunken husband, and was much to be pitied.

The other case was a far more serious affair. Here, without the slightest doubt, she had nourished hatred and malice for many years; and although since Sparkes' death it had remained almost dormant, the original cause of offence had never been forgiven. It was altogether a sad story, but as this is a faithful

history, it must be given without concealment.

The reader will remember that Mrs. Sparkes took great pride in a long row of flat-irons, which were arranged over the chimney-piece in her sitting-room. These were at least twice as many as were required for her business. But beyond the pride she had in them as an implement of her trade, for several years they were the symbols of a revengeful triumph over a rival washerwoman. About four years before Sparkes' death, a Mrs. Jackson set up in business as a

laundress in Gardner's Lane. She was a showy, handsome woman, a widow, about five-and-thirty years of age. She talked plausibly and well, and soon made many acquaintances in the neighbourhood, and among others Mrs. Sparkes, who at last began to entertain for the new-comer a great friendship. Mrs. Sparkes had no jealousy as a washerwoman, for there was, she said, room enough in Westminster for both. She did more. Finding that Mrs. Jackson had but little custom, she introduced her to more than one family. But she was

after all but a double-faced creature, and attempted also to get into Mrs. Sparkes' connection, and succeeded in more than one instance, which caused a breach in the friendship which had hitherto existed between her and Mrs. Sparkes, and the rivals no longer spoke when they met. The behaviour of the women during their estrangement offered a singular contrast. Mrs. Sparkes was cool and dignified, Mrs. Jackson flaunting and impertinent. One thing Mrs. Sparkes at last discovered, that caused her the greatest pain and uneasiness. Al-

though Mrs. Jackson never attempted to speak to her, she not only made an invariable point of speaking to Sparkes, but even put herself in his way in York Street when he was coming home from the barracks. Terrible as was this offence, she was guilty of another immeasurably worse. She was once heard to say, when she knew Sparkes was within hearing, "What a pity it is that such a handsome fellow as that soldier should have such an ugly, cross-grained brute for a wife, when he might have had the handsomest

girl in Westminster for the mere asking!"

The fact cannot be disguised that this remark caused in the bosom of Mrs. Sparkes the most intense hatred against the aggressor. Against her husband she had nothing to say. Sparkes evidently treated the remark with the most profound indifference, but the wound it occasioned to the feelings of his wife was incurable. She silently determined, if ever an opportunity of revenge should offer itself, to profit by it. It fell in her way, and she kept to her determination.

Mrs. Jackson, from her carelessness, soon lost the customers she had acquired. She got into debt for her soap, and into arrears for her rent. An execution was placed in her house, and she decamped the same day, and was never heard of afterwards. Mrs. Sparkes then took her revenge. She went to the house before the goods were removed by the broker. Among other articles were six flat-irons, and she determined to become the mistress of these, and keep them as the spoils of the vanquished. The *woman* showed herself

in the transaction. She went to an ironmonger's, and inquired the price of the article when new. She then offered the full price to the broker's man for them, knowing at the same time she could have obtained them for a smaller sum ; but, she said, she would not be beholden to her for a farthing. She took the irons home, polished them, and placed them with her own, and regarded them with pleasureable vindictiveness (a feeling she never confided even to Sparkes) till after her husband's death. Afterwards she simply looked on them

as ornamental symbols of her busi ness.

It was the knowledge of the many years of hatred and ill-feeling she had borne against Mrs. Jackson that now oppressed her conscience. She prayed she might be forgiven, frequently and fervently. At first she thought of requesting Jemima to conceal the flat-irons from her sight; but there was some difficulty in distinguishing those which had belonged to Mrs. Jackson from those which had been her own. She at last determined they should remain in their usual place, as

they would for the future remind her of her fault. Thus her sin had fallen on her own head. Those irons which had been for so many years not only her pride, but the symbols of her successful revenge, were now a remembrancer to her wounded conscience.

She next examined herself as to her conduct as a wife and a mother. Although she did this with great rigorousness and severity, she could find nothing which gave her uneasiness; on the contrary, it was impossible for a conscience to be clearer on

both points than her own, and she dismissed the subject from her mind as one without danger.

On the question of integrity she dwelt but a short time. The most conscientious washerwoman in existence could not have acted more honourably than she had done both to her customers and the public at large. She had always given to every one his due, and nobody could accuse her of owing a penny to any one. On no occasion where a collar, or cuff, or stocking was missing, did she fail to return it with the next week's

washing, or make an offer of compensation for it if not found. Never had she offered to take her Bible oath that an article which she had lost had not been put in the bag or she should have seen it. Never on any single occasion in her life had she used any deleterious fluid or chemical, prejudicial to the quality of the linen placed in her charge, to save her own knuckles the amount of labour justly required of them. Never had she worn, or allowed Jemima to wear, any article of dress entrusted to her, although in the case of Jemima, when

budding into womanhood, she had been sorely tempted to array her young charms in some particularly becoming article of dress, for the moment in her possession; but she had resisted the devil, and he had fled from her.

The schedule of the pomps and vanities of this wicked world was not got over so smoothly. It had been gone through satisfactorily enough till she came to the article of gin, which detained her for a considerable time. She was slightly given to gin —most washerwomen are, especially

when Westminster bred and born,—but with justice it may be said that she was among the most temperate of her order. She endeavoured to persuade herself that the use of that stimulant was necessary to support her at the tub; but in this she greatly failed, for she also remembered that on certain occasions when strict economy had to be practised, she had done without it with no injury to her constitution, or injustice to the things in the wash. She now began to calculate that, small as had been the sums she had expended

on gin, in the aggregate they would have amounted to sufficient to purchase a mangle, and she might then have started Jemima in life with it in credit, independence, and respectability, instead of, as now, being obliged to work as a servant in the house of the stranger. Moreover, one particular stern, harsh fact, which there was no evading, stared her in the face. One afternoon she had been unmistakeably and decidedly "overcome"; but then, as it was upon an empty stomach and the children had not seen

her, she hoped she should be forgiven.

In many parts of her self-examination she hardly did herself justice, but this was rather due to her humility than indifference to the subject, that virtue concealing from her others of which she might justly have been proud. For example, charity, which covers a multitude of sins, was strong within her. She had frequently given the houseless female outcast shelter for the night (when she could do it without being seen, for on questions of female respectability she

affected great severity of principle), and a breakfast and good advice before she sent her on her way the next morning. She had often placed a meal of bread from her widow's store in the hands of the broken-down wayfarer. She had often done that noblest feat of charity, the finding respectable employment for the idle youth of both sexes who swarmed in the Yard; but for this she took no credit to herself, the superiority of her aristocratical connections among tradesmen around her, as well as the families she washed for, gave her

greater facilities than were possessed by her neighbours. She had given innumerable cups of water to innumerable of the little ones, and had wiped as many tears from their eyes with her coarse apron. One noble act of charity she had performed, but she omitted to take any account of it, although it had been duly registered to her credit in Heaven's chancery. Thirteen years before, she had one bleak night found in the street a wretched, naked, half-starved infant. She had warmed it at her breast, and when it was refused assistance by the

agents of an execrable law, she had taken it to her own home and fed and clothed it. She had brought it up as her own, without the hope of fee or reward. She had taught it to place its pudgy hands together and repeat after her certain infantine prayers, of which it understood not one word; but it learned, at least, from her of the existence of a Being at once both wise and beneficent, who had the power to punish, but whose greatest attribute it was to bless; who watched over it sleeping or waking, and whose every law was for

its benefit. As reason became more matured, she easily taught it to remove its adoration from her own humble person and offer it to the Divinity, whose place, in the imagination of the child, she had hitherto, without being aware of it, occupied. After the death of her husband, when poverty more frequently threatened her, in no instance did she diminish her attention and kindness to the child of her adoption. From her scanty widow's earnings she still clothed and fed it, and moreover, paid from her own slender purse

the few weekly pence necessary for its education. Industry she had taught the boy both by principle and practice, and from his earliest childhood she had instilled into him sentiments of the most perfect integrity; and when gaunt Death stared her in the face, his future welfare was one-half of her earthly care. And it was not till she had carved out for him his future career, one, in her humble opinion, of high chivalry and honour, that she wiped the subject from her mind, and applied herself to the welfare of her own soul.

Having now made all her worldly arrangements to her satisfaction, having provided for her daughter and adopted son, and moreover having strictly examined her conscience respecting her sins, she determined on following exactly the advice of the curate, in reading her Bible, and studying and repeating the prayers he had left her. In this she was assiduously assisted by the lame seamstress. The two poor women read and prayed together with earnestness and simplicity, nor could the quaint commentaries which they

occasionally expressed on the different subjects as they presented themselves to their imagination, deprive their devotions of any portion of their beautiful sincerity and humility. Although reading carefully and attentively all the parts particularly recommended by the curate, those episodes in the Scripture history especially relating to children had for the poor washerwoman attractions superior to all others. The story of Joseph and his brethren interested her exceedingly, and she somehow by some obscure reasoning of her own

assimilated the "coat of many colours" with the drummer's uniform she hoped soon to see James appear in. Samuel in his youth, and the judgment of Solomon, were both full of attraction for her; but it was from the New Testament she received the greatest pleasure and consolation. Apart from its theological aspect, the exquisite beauty of the Saviour's character must be apparent to all; but to none does it stand out more prominently in relief than to respectable women of the working classes. The quiet resignation and placid courage,

the kindness, love, and respect he showed to his parents, his dignified submission to his fate, are all understood and appreciated by them.

After the lame seamstress had read a chapter, the two women would pause and converse over it; but, the eccentricity of their remarks without the slightest irreverence, frequently approached the ludicrous. They dwelt with great interest on Christ disputing with the doctors in the temple, all of whom they imagined to be medical men of high standing, and they pondered over his

humility in submitting without hesitation to his mother when capable of arguing on such abstruse subjects with men of such eminence. Another incident claimed their great admiration and respect, the curing of the woman who had been suffering from an issue of blood for twelve years. The whole description of this miracle excited their great admiration, less perhaps, for the wonderful cure performed than for the manner of its performance. It was done in a way which told particularly on their intelligence. They pictured to themselves

the poor woman, urged by her painful malady to seek the Saviour's assistance, though surrounded by the crowd, and, to spare herself the cruel necessity of explaining it, touching the hem of his garment, in the hope of receiving assistance from it. They thought of Him turning round to her, and while perfectly understanding both her wish and her malady, saying to her in an under tone, "Woman, thy faith hath made thee whole," explicitly communicating to her, without allowing those around Him to understand the precise nature of her

affliction, that her prayer was granted The sick woman and the lame seamstress were particularly struck by this delicacy on the part of Christ. And I have often observed that the power of understanding a complaint with little explanation, is a faculty in their medical adviser which is much appreciated by respectable women.

"He might have been," said Mrs. Sparkes in conclusion, "the son of working people, but He was a gentleman in his heart for all that."

But the scene of the agony in the garden was, perhaps, the chapter of

all others which afforded them the greatest admiration. The whole current of feeling there displayed was beautifully adapted to the comprehension of the two poor helpless women. The keen apprehension of the danger and ignominy in store, the wish if possible to avoid it, the mild, amiable resignation to the terrible fate which awaited Him, were exactly such points, full as they were of the noblest characteristics of female courage, as were likely to be perfectly appreciated by them. Often and often did they read and ponder over that

exquisite chapter, and their wonder at the sublime episode it contained increased on each successive reading.

One Sunday afternoon, about a fortnight after James and Jemima had left her, Mrs. Sparkes received her summons to appear before the throne of her Maker. She meekly bowed her head to the command, but prayed that she might be spared a few hours to see her children before she died. This blessing was accorded her. A neighbour, when she heard her wish, went for James and Jemima, and both were fortunately able to

answer the summons. Jemima was the first to arrive, and the widow's heart leaped with joy when she saw her. Shortly afterwards, James made his appearance in full uniform. An expression of gratified pride passed across the old woman's face when she saw him in his (to her) magnificent dress. A host of recollections of days long past seemed to rush back to her mind for a moment, as she cast her fast-fading glance upon him. She put out her hand to him, which he took, and he then burst into a hearty boyish flood of tears. The lame

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seamstress, who was in the room, sympathising with the lad, rose from her chair, and going up to him, attempted to take the huge grenadier's cap from his head. The boy angrily turned round, and quitting the old woman's hand, he fixed his cap tightly on his head, saying, through his tears—

"Leave it alone, will you? Don't you know a soldier never takes off his cap? You ought to know that."

The old woman cast a glance of satisfaction on him, and it was the

last symptom of intelligence she showed in the world.

And thus ended Mrs. Sparkes' earthly pilgrimage. Nothing had she brought with her into this world, but she did not leave it destitute. She took with her the record of a life in which unmurmuring resignation to her lot, perfect integrity, untiring industry, charity, unceasing patience, long-suffering, and humility were among the principal items; and the poor washerwoman whose eyes a moment before had dimmed on her ungainly daughter, the tawdry

uniform of the little drummer boy, the kind-hearted lame seamstress, and the simple furniture of the room, now stood in the presence of the Almighty, as bright and beautiful a spirit as any of the seraphic host that surrounded Him. To doubt it would be to doubt the existence of a God of mercy and justice.

The funeral of the poor washer-woman consumed the remainder of the little money she had accumulated in the savings-bank, and the sale of her furniture, tubs, and flat-irons,

hardly realised more than was sufficient to provide decent mourning. Nevertheless, it would have been difficult to find a being in this world better loved or more regretted by those who stood beside her grave at her burial.

THE END.

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