POOR BLOSSOM

THE STORY OF A HORSE

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BY THE AUTHOR OF
"NEDDY AND ME;" "ONLY A LADYBIRD," ETC., ETC.

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Dedication.

TO ALL WHO HAVE THE MANAGEMENT OF THAT NOBLE AND USEFUL ANIMAL
THE HORSE,
THESE PAGES ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

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POOR BLOSSOM.

CHAPTER I.
MY PLACE OF BIRTH.

The first thing that I remember is a green field enclosed by a stiff fence, where I was running about by my mother's side. I cannot call to mind the earliest days of my existence, but I am sure that I was not more than a fortnight old when my mother gave me my first lesson in life—a lesson I have never forgotten. My mother was a fine bay mare, the property of Mr. Bayne, a farmer, who seems to have treated her very kindly; indeed I have never heard any horse speak better of a master than my mother was accustomed to speak of the man who owned her.

'He has never laid a whip upon me,' she would say with a proud toss of her head; 'he has a heart far too kind for that sort of thing, and he knows I always do my best—and what horse can do more, I wonder.'

But to return to the lesson she gave me. I was ambling by her side when Mr. Bayne entered the field, and my mother, as she usually did, ran up to him to be caressed and fed with some trifling luxury, such as a slice of carrot or bit of sugar. I kept by her side until we reached him; then I, purely from playfulness, turned and kicked at him, lightly—you know—not by any means in a way to hurt him, I assure you.

'Woa there,' shouted Mr. Bayne; 'vicious are you, my youngster? the mother's blood don't seem to run in you.'

He said nothing more, but having fed and stroked my mother, he went out of the field, and left us together. Then I received the lesson to which I have alluded.

'How very wrong of you,' she said, 'to kick at so good and kind a master.'

'It was only in play,' I replied, hanging my head and feeling rather foolish.

'I know it was so,' she returned, 'but it was wrong of you nevertheless. Some men are so stupid that they do not know play from vice, in a horse, and only few of them seem really to understand us. They often reprove us when we endeavour to do right, and you will be beaten if you do not curb your propensity to play.'

'Were you ever beaten?' I asked.

'Once I had a very cruel master,' said my mother with a sigh; 'but I do not care to talk about it. If ever it should be your lot to find such a man you will know enough about it then.'

'But why did you endure it?' I asked; 'are you not stronger than man? Why did you not kick?'

'My child,' said my mother impressively, 'do not talk so idly: we are created the lawful servants of man, and it is our *duty* to submit. If he is kind we repay him tenfold; if he is cruel we must do our duty still, and the sin of cruelty be upon his head. Besides we are in his power—he has so many things at his command, and if we disobey him he can put us to great pain. You will learn that when you come to be broken.'

'What is that?' I inquired.

'Your training so that you may be useful to man,' returned my mother; 'you will have to do your work one day with the rest of us.'

There was a pause after this, and my mother cropped the sweet grass while I meditated. My curiosity was aroused with regard to this creature who ruled over us, and I soon renewed the subject.

'Tell me more about our master, man,' I said; 'I am very anxious to learn something about him.'

'He is a strange creature,' said my mother—'as much a puzzle to himself as to the rest of the created world. He is very clever in some things and very stupid in others; for instance, he knows nothing of *our* language, although we understand *his* perfectly. If Giles—that is Mr. Bayne's foreman—bids me go here or there, I understand him without rein or whip; and yet when he was ploughing in the ten-acre field, and I pulling up told him as plain as I could that we were near a piece of hollow ground, he would not understand me, but made me go on—and then the ground gave way and we were almost buried alive.'

'How did you know it was hollow?' said I.

'By the sound,' said my mother; 'I don't think they ever found out what the hollow was—but there it was, as the uneven ground will testify. Giles afterwards did me the credit to tell his master that I had pulled up, and my doing so was considered to be remarkably clever, but I thought nothing of it.'

'Giles must be very, very stupid,' I remarked.

'Not more than most men,' said my mother; 'but they are very clever at some things—they build houses, make carts and harness; but still they are inferior to us in many things. Now there is Mr. Martin's Boxer, who is very clever indeed; you know Mr. Martin?'

'The farmer who drinks so?' I said.

'That's the man,' rejoined my mother. 'He goes every Saturday to market, and returns home in a state of helpless intoxication; *he* doesn't know the way home a bit, but Boxer brings him safely to the door, along the dark roads, and through the narrow lanes, much better than any man could do, and yet that fellow Martin—I cannot call him anything less—very often beats Boxer most cruelly.'

'I am sure *he* ought to be kicked,' I said indignantly.

'*Duty* forbids, my dear child,' replied my mother; 'a proper-minded horse never kicks one who is appointed to be his master; but some kick and bite too; many of these are naturally bad, *but I am certain that most of them are made bad through ignorant and cruel training*. But even that is no excuse; if man forgets his duty to the horse, the horse never ought to

forget his duty to man: remember this, my child, act up to it, and you won't regret it in your old age.'

I promised to remember, and although I was young and therefore rather thoughtless, I really took this lesson to heart, and found it of excellent service to me throughout my varied life.

It is not my intention to dwell upon my early days, but I must say a few words more about the paddock—the dear old paddock where I first breathed the pure air. Ah! I can see it now, and would that I was there. I can see the narrow peaceful stream gliding away from the water-mill, as if in calm satisfaction of having at least for the time performed its duty. I hear the murmur of the wheel as it turns and turns, now in the shadow, now in the sunlight; and the lark's song is in my ear again, and I smell the sweet-scented clover in the field, and the mignonette growing by the cotter's garden gate; and I see the sloping roof of the old farm-house peeping out from the ivy clinging lovingly to its walls. Oh, home of the spring-time of my life, it is all before my mind. But these eyes of mine shall never see thee more, nor shall my ears be charmed again with the hum of the bee, the song of the lark, or the murmur of the water-wheel. It is all over now. But let me not anticipate, or waste time in useless regrets, for I have a long story before me and but a short time to tell it in.

To resume. When I was about five months old, another mare and foal were put into the paddock. The mare was an old acquaintance of my mother, and the two were soon gossiping together; but the foal was of course a stranger to me. He informed me that his name was Rip, and I told him—what I might have told my readers before—that Mr. Bayne had named me Blossom. This introductory business over, we became excellent friends, and capered about the paddock in fine style. Rip was a better looking foal than I was—he was better bred, and had I believe something of the race-horse in him; he told me that his great-grandfather, on his mother's side, had nearly won a big race once, and this Rip seemed to be very proud of. I felt sorry for him on account of this weakness—it was so much like a man to be proud of such a ridiculous thing.

Rip told me a deal of news which he seemed to have picked up from a number of horses in farmer Martin's meadow, where he had been with his mother. He knew Boxer, and spoke highly of him as a long suffering and much-enduring horse; but he said that Boxer was getting tired of doing all he could for the farmer at night and getting beaten in the morning.

'I should not be surprised,' said Rip in a whisper, 'if he upsets the farmer in the pond by the "Wheatsheaf," and leaves him there.'

A few weeks before I should have expressed my approval of this; but my mother's lesson had borne fruit, and I earnestly hoped that Boxer would not so forget himself. Rip, however, favoured the idea of the pond trick, and said that if Boxer did not carry out his threat he should think he was but a poor, mean-spirited thing. In all this I detected, as my readers have doubtless done, the racing blood of Rip's great-grandfather on his mother's side.

Those were very happy days in the old paddock. Rip and I enjoyed ourselves amazingly, even when we were left alone, which occasionally happened if our mothers were put into the waggon; but sometimes Giles fetched them for the plough, and then we youngsters went with our mothers and saw the earth ripped up by the terrible implement and smelt the fresh soil as it was turned over into the sunlight. I was always of a sober and reflective

turn, and never lost the chance of ruminating upon anything which came under my notice; but Rip was rather giddy—I am afraid I ought to say thoughtless too—and gave his mother a deal of anxiety and trouble. I have heard the poor creature declare a hundred times that he would be the death of her; but Rip always laughed at such declarations, and said that he would grow better some day.

'If we don't have some fun now,' he would say, 'we never shall. It is all very well for those old fogies to talk, but they were not always so sober as they are now, I give you my word.'

I could not help laughing at Rip, he was so very droll; but I really feared that he was getting into a bad way, and it seemed such a pity, for Rip grew handsomer and handsomer every day, while I, although improving, was but a poor plain animal at the best.

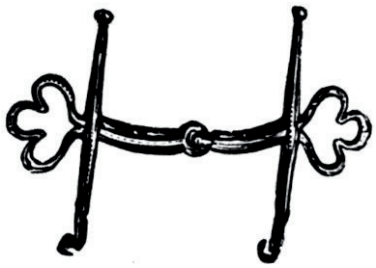
'Rip will have a gentleman for a master,' I heard Mr. Bayne say one day to Giles.

'And who will have Blossom, sir?' asked Giles.

'I think Mr. Crawshay will have him,' replied Mr. Bayne, and all that night I wondered what Mr. Crawshay was like, and whether he was as good, or better, or worse than a gentleman. Rip pretended to know him, and told me that he often drove his horses to death; but Rip frequently said idle things when he was in a joking mood, and I did not mind him.

We passed the winter in the farm belonging to Mr. Bayne, and during the long evenings my mother prepared me for the life which was now not far ahead. She told me to be tractable when the horse-breaker took me in hand, and I should escape a deal of punishment and pain. She also prepared me for our parting, and told me that when it came we should probably lose sight of each other for ever. The example of her fortitude gave me strength, and for her sake I did my best to conceal the pain the prospect of parting gave me. As for Rip, he seemed to trouble his mind very little about it, but looked forward to the new life as something to rejoice over.

One day in the spring the parting came. A tall, strong man, clad in velveteen, made his appearance on the farm, and Rip and I were sent with him to the paddock to be 'broken in.'



CHAPTER II.
‘BROKEN.’

Resolved to be tractable, I yielded myself to the man in velveteen, and he put some leather straps over my head, and a piece of iron in my mouth, and then he got upon my back. His weight was very disagreeable to me, and seemed to destroy in a moment the sense of freedom which I had hitherto enjoyed. My first impulse was to kick out and try to throw him, but the warning I had received from my mother, with the addition of the iron in my mouth, checked me. Obeying the rider’s touch, I made the best of his weight, and ran to and fro in the field, turning when he pulled the reins, which he did unnecessarily hard; and obeying even the pressure of his knees—in fact, acting in accordance with his wishes to the best of my ability.

In about half an hour Mr. Bayne came into the field, and the man in velveteen guided me up to him.

‘This will be a capital nag for a lady,’ he said; ‘a young lady learning to ride will be very glad of him.’

‘I have sold him to Mr. Crawshay,’ replied Mr. Bayne, ‘and they will use him both to ride and drive.’

‘Just the very hanimal,’ said the man, and then he got off my back and went to Rip, who all this time had remained fretting and fuming with his head tied to a gate. Mr. Bayne took charge of me, and the man in velveteen released Rip.

‘Woa there,’ he cried, as my friend gave a violent plunge; ‘steady there—will you? Here’s a horse of another colour. Quiet there!’

But Rip would not be quiet, and I was sorry for it, as I knew what would but to surely follow.

I was spared the scene, however, for Mr. Bayne, loosening the halter round my neck, led me back to the stable; but as I left the field I heard the man in velveteen shouting in an angry tone, and then I was certain that Rip had foolishly shown resistance. By the stable door we came upon Giles the ploughman, who inquired with an air of interest how I had behaved.

'Like a good-tempered little fellow,' replied Mr. Bayne, patting me, and a thrill of satisfaction ran through my body. I felt that I had done my duty.

They left me in the stall, and I had nearly an hour to think over the process of breaking in. I cannot say that I liked it; the weight of a man upon my back seemed to take away my liberty, as I said before; and yet it was not entirely inharmonious to my nature—it was more novel than disagreeable.

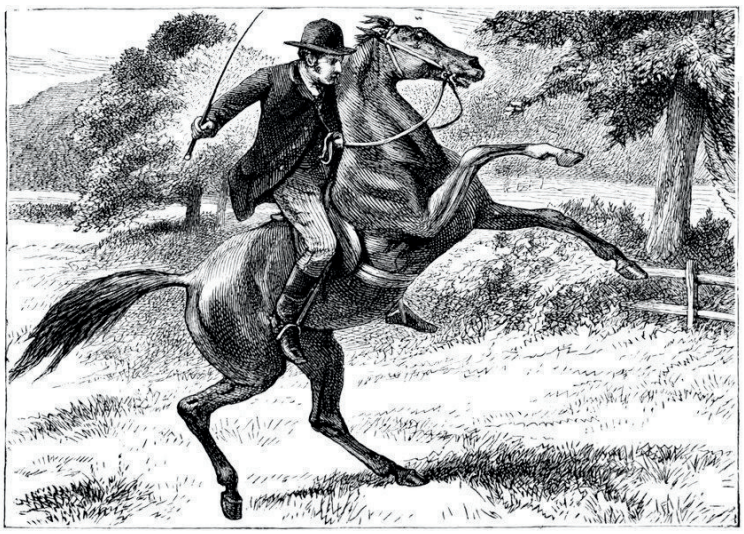
'Man is certainly created our master,' I thought; 'he was quite at ease upon my back, and sat as if it were perfectly natural to him, and that is the reason, no doubt, why my back is so long and broad. Man was certainly *not* created to carry *us*. Then he has hands to drive, and we have not. Yes, man is our master, and my mother is right—it is our duty to submit.'

Thus I reasoned until the hour was passed and Rip was brought home. Giles and the man in velveteen led him in and put him into the next stall to mine. The man in velveteen looked very hot, but he was not angry—in fact he had rather a pleased look upon his face.

'I don't care to have 'em all easy like this chap,' he said, addressing Giles and pointing at me; 'I like to have 'em try a trick or two on me, and then I can show who is master. The rougher they are the more I can come out—and it was by breaking in the rough 'uns that I made my name.'

'Rip is full of play,' said Giles.

'Is he?' replied the other sarcastically. '*You* may call it play, but *I* don't; when a horse kicks out at all sides of the compass, and bites at you like a fury, I calls it vice, and that's the thing I know how to cure. I gives them plenty of physic for it—whip and spur without stint, and they soon gives in.'



BROKEN.

He then left the stable in company with Giles, and I, knowing that Rip had gone through a fierce fight, waited for him to speak of it. But he was silent, and after the lapse of five minutes I peeped over the partition to get a look at my friend. Poor Rip! never shall I forget the change which had come over him. His handsome head was no longer erect, but hung low in a dejected manner; the fire had left his brilliant eye, and his fine velvet-like mouth was bleeding; it was plain the fight had gone against him.

'Why did you resist?' I asked in a sympathising tone.

'It is cruel work,' he replied, with a big sob which seemed to shake his frame. 'It is not fair—he had a whip and spurs, and the bit cut my mouth like a knife. Look at my sides.'

I looked, and saw that the satin coat was scored and scratched by the spurs, and broad weals of flesh stood up where the whip had been. I was so sorry for my friend that I could say nothing, but only shed a few quiet tears.

'If he had been kind,' sobbed Rip, 'I would have obeyed him; but he began by saying that he knew I should give him a deal of trouble, and that he would stand none of my nonsense. How could he expect a horse of spirit to endure such language?'

'Perhaps you showed that you meant resistance,' I said gently.

'I may have done so a little,' replied Rip; 'but what could be more natural? and when I gave in—which I was obliged to do, for what can we do against the bit, and whip, and spur?—when I gave in he was not easy, but continued to beat me until liquid fire seemed to run through every vein of my body: it was cruel—cruel.'

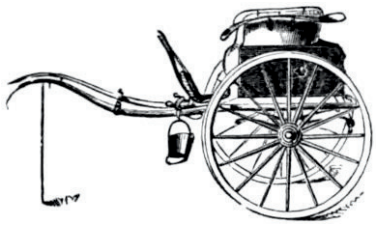
I did my best to console Rip, and after a time he became calmer. We were left to ourselves during the evening, and I took the opportunity to reason with him, and before we lay down to rest I had the satisfaction of hearing that it was his intention to abandon all resistance in the future.

On the morrow we were taken in hand again, and I was put into the shafts of a cart and driven to and fro. The rattle of the wheels was very disagreeable at first, but I resolved not

to show any signs of fear lest my movements should be taken for resistance, and eventually I became accustomed to it, and received a second kind acknowledgment from my master in the form of a patting and a piece of sugar.

Rip underwent a second course of the saddle, and wisely gave in to the hand of his master; but the resistance of the day before had gone against him, and nobody seemed to place entire faith in his docility. I heard the man in the velveteen tell Mr. Bayne that Rip was a tricky youngster, and would require a tight hand to be kept over him for a year or two; so much for first impressions!

About a week after this I left the farm. My going was very sudden, and I had neither time nor opportunity to take leave of any of those I loved. A man came for me, and I learned that he was Mr. Crawshay's groom. He put a saddle upon my back, and got into it with the easy confidence of a man who could trust the animal he was riding. My mother was away in a team which Giles was driving to some distant town, and Rip was in the hands of his trainer; so without a single word of adieu I turned my back upon the farm and left it behind me— for ever.



CHAPTER III.

MY NEW MASTER.

Of course I had been picturing to myself the style of home I was going to, and as might have been expected I found it quite opposite to the creation of my mind. I had portrayed to myself a house something like that upon the farm, but larger and grander, and surrounded by trees and flowers all carefully arranged, with a fine lawn in the centre; but instead of this I found that my new master lived in the heart of a large country town named Upton, and the ground around it, instead of being devoted to the cultivation of flowers, was sacrificed to the art of making beer. My new master was, in short, a brewer, and his house adjoined his place of business.

I am not going into the question of strong drink,—a little concerning that will be found further on; for the present I confine myself to my master and his family. Mr. Crawshay was a stout, florid man, with a loud voice which many people called genial—perhaps it was, sometimes—but I have heard that same voice address his wife and daughter in a tone anything but genial.

Personally I had no connection with the brewery, but was especially reserved for the use of Mrs. Crawshay and her daughter. Mrs. Crawshay was an invalid, and only went out in a waggonette, which I had the honour of drawing, and when not required in that capacity, Miss Crawshay put on her habit and used me for equestrian purposes. Both these ladies were kind to me—I liked them very much, and used to prick up my ears whenever I heard their voices. The young lady was especially fond of me, and often came to the stable to feed me with some nicety, an apple and so on, out of her delicate hand. Mrs. Crawshay being quite an invalid was unable to perform the same kindness, but I have heard her, at least fifty times, tell the servant, as I stood at the door, to bring me a biscuit; and whenever the morning drive was ended she was always very particular in her injunctions to the groom to

take great care of me, and he being in that respect a very excellent fellow, certainly made me as comfortable as a horse could be.

I cannot tell how it was, I suppose it was instinct, but from the first moment I entered this service I felt sorry for my two mistresses. There was a quiet, patient look on their faces which I did not understand then, but which I thoroughly understand now—and Mr. Crawshay and his loud, genial voice had something to do with the look you may be sure.

I never was a great favourite with the brewer—he did not dislike me, but, he took no interest in me. Never once did he either ride or drive me, but he kept for his use a tall, conceited creature, who always turned up his nose at my quiet ways, and called me a 'draught horse;' and whenever we met, as we sometimes did with Mr. Crawshay on his back, he passed me as if he had never seen me before, although we spent our leisure time in the same stable.

Little pitchers have large ears: so have horses, and I soon picked up enough from the groom and the housemaid, who were often chatting together, to learn that genial Mr. Crawshay was a perfect brute to his wife and daughter, and he had bought me because he had a great dislike to have anything, even a horse, in common with them. To the outer world a horse and chaise for his wife and daughter was an act of liberality, but to the inner life of that wretched home it was deliberate isolation.

Looking back, I remember with mingled joy and pain the kindness I received from that mother and child. Never a morning passed without the daughter visiting the stable, and as I have declared before they always expressed a vast amount of anxiety respecting my condition and welfare, which was very delightful to hear. My home, in short, apart from the little anxiety and grief I felt for my two kind mistresses, was a very happy one.

The groom's name was Richards, and he was a very fair groom in a general way, but he had a failing very common to his class—he was fond of drink. Sometimes he would be sober for a month, and then he would, as Mrs. Crawshay expressed it, 'break out'—that is, he would begin drinking early in the morning and do little else throughout the day, and tumble into his bed, which was in a room above the stables, in a state which would have disgraced the very lowest order of brutes; I am certain that even a pig would have been ashamed of it.

Mrs. Crawshay very often reproved him in a quiet way, and did her best to reform the man; but he was too near the brewery—he lived in the very centre of temptation, and he was not strong enough to resist it. From Mr. Crawshay he received nothing but oaths and threats, which had less effect upon the groom than the kind admonition of his mistress; and he would go on in this sad way for about a week, and then suddenly turn to sobriety again. I have often wondered what possible gratification Richards could derive from this outburst, for it always made him very ill and wretched, and for days afterwards he would skulk about more like a criminal burdened with crime than an honest, hard-working man.

This habit proved fatal to him, and brought a great misfortune upon me. One night, when Richards was in the stable putting all right for the night, Mr. Crawshay came in with a letter in his hand.

‘Richards,’ he said, ‘put Blossom into the dog-cart and drive over to Mr. Turner’s. You have nothing to do but leave the letter and bring back a portmanteau which his man will give you. Keep it in your room for the night, and bring it into the house in the morning.’

Richards, accustomed to obey, made no demur, and quickly harnessed me to the dog-cart, and drove to Mr. Turner’s residence, a house about twelve miles from Upton. The letter was delivered, and a servant brought out a portmanteau, with an injunction to Richards to be careful, as it contained deeds and papers of importance. Richards replied that he knew his business, and always took care of everything, and drove away with a self-satisfied air.

It was now about ten o’clock, and an autumn moon was shining brightly as I trotted briskly towards home. I was always of a sober turn, and never cared for late hours; some horses may like them, but they don’t suit me, so I put my best foot foremost, resolved to get home with the least possible delay. Richards also seemed bent upon getting back, until we came in sight of a roadside inn, with its well-lighted windows standing out boldly to invite him in. The unfortunate man could not resist the temptation, but steered straight for the beacon which decoyed him to his ruin, and pulled up at the door. An ostler came, and Richards, before going in, told the man that he would be out again in a minute, and that he need not trouble about me, as I would stand perfectly quiet; he then passed through the doorway and left me to my reflections.

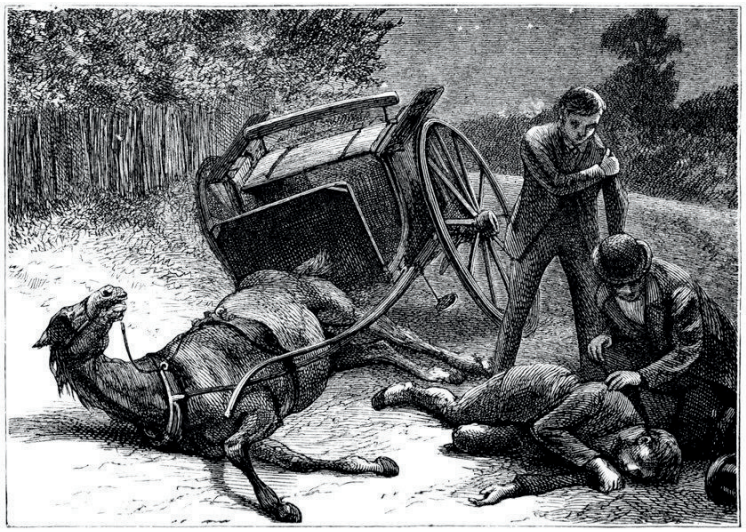
The minute passed, and other minutes were added to it, and Richards did not return.

Two other carts came up, and the drivers went in also; and then I heard shouts and laughter, and Richards asking them what they would have to drink, so I concluded that he had met with some old friends—not knowing what I know now, that men under the influence of drink make bosom friends of all comers, and spend their money in the wildest and most foolish manner.

I was kept waiting an hour, and then Richards reeled out in company with the other drivers and about half a dozen other men. They were all in a maudlin state of drunkenness, swearing eternal friendship, and declaring that every man there assembled was a glorious fellow without an equal in the known world.

Two of the men were going to Upton, and Richards volunteered to drive them home.

They got up, both in front, which was too bad, as their weight pressed very heavily upon me. Sober, Richards would have noticed this, and shifted the body of the cart; but being intoxicated, he neither knew nor cared how much their weight pressed upon me, nor how great my sufferings in consequence.



'DOWN I WENT WITH A TERRIBLE CRASH.'

We started, Richards driving with a very loose rein, and I am sure that if ever I needed help from man I needed it that night; a tight rein would have assisted me with all that weight pressing upon my withers. Bad as it was, I would have taken them home safely if Richards had let me alone. But he would not. First he shouted to me; then he shook the rein; then I felt the cruel whip about my loins and head, until pain and fright bewildered me. We came to a steep hill, but I seemed to be scarcely conscious of where I was, as Richards beat me more furiously than ever. Maddened, I sprang forward and tore down the hill: the weight behind was too much, I could not gather my feet, and down I went with a terrible crash.

For a moment all was still, and I lay panting, half-dead with fear and excitement; then I heard one of the men shouting for help. What followed I can but dimly remember, for I was in a state of bewilderment, like a horse in a dream; but I can just call to mind the arrival of several persons from a house close by, who helped the men to put something heavy into the cart, and then I, having arisen, was led slowly home. I was suffering very much; my knees were dreadfully cut, and I was terribly shaken; but my thoughts were busy with the load I was bearing home. It was poor Richards with a broken neck, quite dead!

They rang Mr. Crawshay up and told him what had happened. His first inquiry was for his portmanteau, which was safe; then he expressed a few words of regret for Richards, qualifying his sorrow by saying that it was just what he expected; and wound up by cursing *me*, as a brute who was not worth his salt. I was very tired and bruised and sore, but I had enough spirit left in me to kick him then; I should have done so, but I remembered the lesson of my mother, and wisely forbore.

Mr. Crawshay did give me shelter for the night, but I heard him declare he would have no broken-kneed beast about his place, and that I should be taken away on the morrow to be sold. He carried out his threat, and early on the morrow a small ferret-faced man came and led me away before I had an opportunity of having a parting glance at my mistresses. This act I have always believed to be in accordance with Mr. Crawshay's general conduct

towards his wife and daughter; it was one more link in the chain of unkind deeds with which he had burdened their lives. Mr. Crawshay knew his wife and daughter were fond of me, and would gladly have kept me in spite of my misfortune; but the opportunity for an unkindness offered, such as could safely be performed in the face of the world, and he seized it. Strange it is, but true, that some men will spend a deal and go far out of their way to give pain, when they could bestow happiness with less trouble and half the expense.

CHAPTER IV.

I AM SOLD.—MR. HARKAWAY.

The ferret-faced man, before removing me, put some ointment upon my sores, and painted my legs with something which hid my accident from the eyes of casual observers; then he led me through the town into the country, where we joined company with another ferret-faced man who had several horses of various sizes and ages under his charge. I was tied to the rest with a halter, and then we jogged quietly along the road, the two men smoking and chatting as we went along.

My companions were strange to me—strange in the strictest sense of the word, for they had all been brought up in London, a place I had heard very little of; but I was certainly not impressed with any favourable notion of it when I saw their flippant pert ways, and became acquainted with the style of their conversation. Naturally I, as soon as I joined company, wished them good day, and made some remark upon the fineness of the weather and the excellence of the second hay crop. To this they one and all responded with a sarcastic roll of the eye, and one old horse most impertinently called me a 'yokel'—an insult I resented by becoming perfectly quiet and withdrawing as soon as possible from a company where I could see I was not particularly wanted.

I gathered from what they said that they had been down to some place belonging to the ferret-faced man 'to grass,' that is, to recruit their health after a season of very heavy work in town. They all seemed to like an idle life, but some of them really cared very little for the country, and generally expressed themselves glad to return to town.

‘Another month here would have killed me,’ said a young horse with a Roman nose; ‘it is so dreadfully slow, and I cannot live without “fun.” Of course the fresh air and the green fields and the purer water we get does us good bodily—but we must feed the *mind*, you know.’

The others agreed to this, and I kept on for a long time thinking and surmising what sort of food for the mind could be obtained in the great city. I have learnt since, and I must say that much better food for the mind—food more wholesome and nourishing—can be obtained in the country than in the town; but we must not be astonished at poor ignorant horses expressing such an opinion, when we know that thousands of intelligent men declare the same thing.

We did not walk the whole way to town—London was a long way off; but on our arrival at a place much larger than Upton, we were taken to a tremendous barn-like place roofed in with glass, and filled with large boxes upon wheels, some of them with chimneys to them, which puffed and snorted in such a way that I could not help jumping about in a fright, much to the amusement of my companions. The ferret-faced man, probably with a view to restore my calmness, beat me about the head with a stick, and then hustled me into one of the boxes with another horse, and closed the door.

I found myself shut in with one of the best of my late companions—a horse who had in snubbing me rather followed the leadership of others than obeyed the dictation of his own feelings. He told me not to be alarmed, that there was nothing to fear, and that we were going to travel about a hundred miles by railway. I asked him what a railway was, and he told me it was something which man had made to imitate the horse, to do its work in transmitting men and goods.

‘But it is a very poor imitation,’ he said; ‘they cannot trust it anywhere off the particular road and rails laid down for it; and there is no grace, no action in it, and whatever it does it makes a frightful noise about. I know that any horse would blush to make half the fuss. When man first made it, he said that he could do without the horse; but he made a great mistake. Horses,’ added my informant with some pride, ‘have since the establishment of railways become worth double the money.’

I asked a deal more about this railway, and my companion gave me a very good general idea of this base but fortunately unsuccessful attempt to supersede the horse, with which I do not intend to trouble my readers; and just as he finished, the train started.

Oh! the agony of that journey!—the shaking, the jolting, the screaming, the roaring, and the noise and rattle of other trains as they passed us—it was dreadful, especially to me who had never undergone the ordeal before. My companion suffered less—he had travelled upon, many occasions, and was more composed. In about four hours we arrived in London, and I being released, took my first peep at the big city.

The impression was not favourable. The place looked large, and very, very dirty; the dingy courtyard of the railway station gave me the heartache to look at it, and the promise of a most miserable place to live in was fulfilled when the ferret-faced man led me into the streets. Many horses I have met with, knowing that I have a literary turn of mind, have asked me to describe the great city; but I always decline to do so—it defies description: volumes might be written upon every foot of its paved way, and libraries filled with the

wonders of a street. It is at once a paradise to pleasure-seekers, a desert to the friendless, a gold mine to the successful, a pit of destruction to the unfortunate; it contains every vanity and every pleasure of human existence; the poorest, the richest, the proudest, the meekest—the lost in vice, the raised in virtue; the very depths of vice, the highest aspiration and the noblest thought, can alike be found within its gates. Joy, hope, love, hatred, malice, and despair are all in the shadow of its walls, and lie hidden in the hearts of men not scattered here and there, but gathered close together in teeming millions.

The very thought of attempting to describe such a place drives me to despair: I leave it for an abler horse.

We kept on for half an hour, with nothing but houses on either side, and then I was led into a paved yard, where I saw a long row of stabling, all very clean and nice—more so than I could have expected, considering the place was in the heart of the great city. I spent ten days there, and then I, with a number of other horses, was put up for sale; but in the meantime my broken knees had been attended to by a very clever veterinary surgeon, who put them right in the most astonishing manner. I heard one of the ferret-faced men declare that it would take a very good pair of eyes to tell that I had been down, and as far as *my* sight went I was perfectly restored. I felt a little weakness, and nothing more.

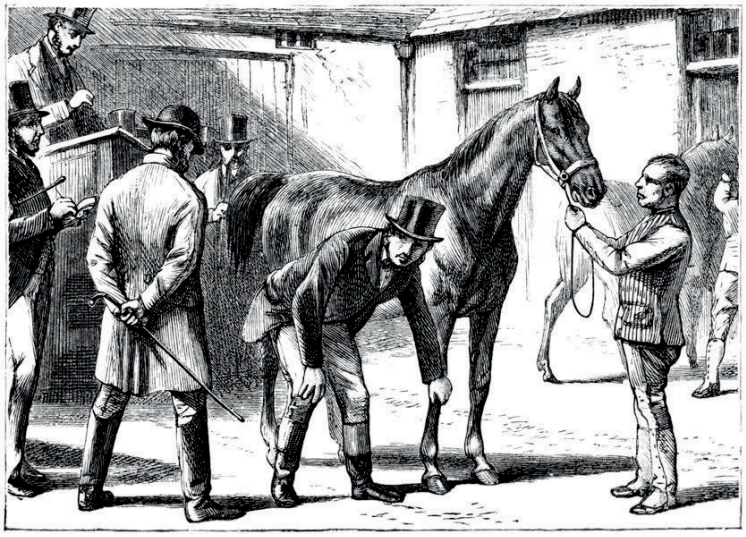
A great number of people attended the sale, and we were all made very spruce for the occasion. The grooms trotted us up and down, and made us show off ourselves to the best advantage. Several of the bystanders seemed to take a great deal of notice of us, and these I afterwards noticed were the principal buyers.

One of the horses which accompanied me from Upton was put up first, and the bidding began—but slowly. Neither the auctioneer—a tall, stout, florid man—nor the public seemed to think much of him, and after a little haggling he was knocked down for twenty pounds. As he was led back to his stall I was led out, and the disgust written upon his face found vent in words.

'Twenty pounds!' he said, with an indignant neigh; 'there's a price! If I had dreamt of such a thing a month ago, I believe I should have drowned myself in the river.'

I shook my head to express my disapproval of such light talk, but could say nothing, as the groom who led me gave me a thump with the halter, and bade me 'come up'—which I did by breaking into what was really a very pretty trot.

'Now here, gentlemen,' said the auctioneer, 'is a very valuable lot, named Blossom, reared by Bayne, of Upton, a man who, as you are fully aware, never sends a bad lot into the market. This horse is rising four, and has never been in private hands, but he is thoroughly fit either to ride or drive. Take a look at him, gentlemen. Don't be afraid of it; he can bear it—sound from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail.'



THE AUCTION.

Oh! the falsehood of this man—to say that I had never been out of private hands, and that I was thoroughly sound. I really felt as if I could have kicked him—not very hard, but in such a way as to warn him not to tell such fibs again. The groom trotted me to and fro, then pulled up, and a number of men proceeded to examine me.

'He's been down, ain't he?' asked a short, thick-set man, who spoke in a husky voice, as if he had a hair or straw in his throat.

'I believe he knocked himself in the paddock, Mr. Harkaway,' replied the auctioneer; 'a mere graze, though—the skin was barely broken.'

'He grazed a tenner off him,' said Mr. Harkaway, with a short laugh; adding in a whisper to a man, apparently his friend, who stood beside him, 'But he is the sort of nag I want; and I will have him.'

The bidding for me, in spite of the signs of my fall, was very brisk, and I soon ran up to forty pounds; then a few fell away, and I increased to fifty. At this sum all left me but Mr. Harkaway and a man in a sort of grazier's suit, with a face so positively cruel, that I shudder even now when I think of it. Mr. Harkaway had a dissipated, reckless look, which reminded me of Richards; and if I could have had my will, I would have chosen another master; but he was better than the grazier, and I earnestly hoped that he would show the longer purse.

'Fifty-five,' said the grazier.

'Six,' said Mr. Harkaway.

'Seven,' cried the other.

'Eight,' returned Mr. Harkaway.

'Nine,' shouted the grazier.

Mr. Harkaway hesitated, and looked at me. I turned an imploring eye upon him, but I might as well have looked at a brick wall—he was as stupid as the rest of the men, and did not understand me a bit; but the auctioneer came to my rescue.

‘Come, Mr. Harkaway,’ he said, ‘put another pound on—you won’t get such another chance this season; the horse is young, sound, good-tempered, and ready for any amount of work. Shall I say sixty?’

‘Sixty be it,’ said Mr. Harkaway, and the hammer to my great joy fell. The grazier seemed to be rather disappointed—his face expressed that feeling; but he said he was glad he had not bought me, as I was a poor thing at the best, only fit for a dust cart. This hurt me a little, for none of us like to be depreciated even by those we despise; but since then I have heard a story about a fox and some grapes, which sufficiently explains the insulting expressions of the grazier.

As the rest of the sale has no interest to my readers, or any connexion with my life, I will pass it over with the simple declaration that it was a very painful thing to witness. Falsehood and deceit were rampant; not a single horse was honestly represented to the public, and some poor things, long past work, were doctored and stimulated for the occasion, and then solemnly described as horses in excellent condition—fit for any amount of service. Most of the men collected there were too sharp to be deceived; but I am afraid that more than one was that day sadly swindled and deceived by the artful horse-dealer and the glib-tongued auctioneer.

As I have since become thoroughly acquainted with London, I may as well now call places by their proper names; such a course will help those of my friends as know the metropolis to a more definite idea of my wanderings, and assist me in making my story more graphic to the rest of my readers.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Harkaway fetched me from the horse-dealer’s yard, and tying my halter to the tail of a common cart, drove away. There was a big brown horse in the shafts, whom he called ‘Sam’—rather a knowing-looking animal, I thought, and one certainly accustomed to the noisy ways of this bewildering place. We travelled over an immense stone bridge near the Houses of Parliament, and turning to the right went through a maze of street, for the most part poor, dirty, and miserable, making me wonder how any one could live in such tumble-down houses. This was Lambeth, and Lambeth was to be my home; for my new master halted at a house by the corner of a street a shade better than most we had passed through, and shouted out for Jim in such a way that I knew the house must be his own.

CHAPTER V.

THE FURNITURE DEALER.

The whole of the front of my master's house seemed to be devoted to business. The ground floor was quite open, with furniture of every description piled up to the ceiling; and from the windows above hung hearth-rugs, pieces of carpet, long strings of tinware, brushes, and so on, sufficient in my eyes to supply the entire population of Great Britain.

He seemed to deal in every household requisite; the number and variety of articles for sale were quite bewildering, and to an unpractised eye appeared to be piled up anyhow on either side, without any regard to law or order, leaving a small narrow lane only to travel in and out.

Down this lane came the boy Jim, Mr. Harkaway's son and heir, a lad of twelve years, who hailed his father with a sullen visage, and the inquiry, 'Now, then, what do you want?'

'Take the nags round,' said Mr. Harkaway, 'and give 'em both a feed. You need not be particular with the new one, Blossom—he's done no work to-day.'

'Will he kick?' asked Jim.

'Quiet as a lamb,' replied his father; and the boy, with rather a suspicious look at me, led Sam round the corner, and I perforce followed.

Mr. Harkaway's stable was certainly a most abominable hole, bad enough to kill any horse fresh from the country with the look of it; but as I afterwards learnt from Sam and my own sad experience, there were hundreds of worse places, where even man himself

was glad to dwell—indeed, an entire family lived and slept in a wretched room over our wretched stable.

Jim gave Sam a pretty good feed, and me a handful of hay; after this he made up two slovenly beds for us, and retired for the night. I was glad when he was gone, as I wanted to be alone with Sam, for I was burning with curiosity to hear what sort of life was in store for me.

Sam attacked the food given to him as if he were in need of it, and went on munching for some time without a word; and I kept silent, fearing that any remarks I might make would be deemed intrusive, and thus defeat the end I had in view. We were only divided by a pole, so that even lying down it would be easy to converse, and I waited patiently. Sam munched his food to the last wisp of hay and kernel of corn; then settling down, condescended to address me.

'Well, youngster,' he said, with a sort of grunt, 'where do you hail from?'

'Upton,' I replied.

'Country,' returned Sam. 'Ah! you will find it different here.'

'I am afraid so,' I replied softly, with a sigh.

'There is a little life here,' continued Sam, who apparently had not heard my remark. 'No trotting about for miles and seeing nothing but hedgerows and trees and fields full of grass and corn, tantalizing a hungry horse to death; no brooks to wet your feet and legs by crossing, and not half the flies to bother you. We have flies, of course, but they don't seem half so hungry as they are in the country—it's the air, I suppose.'

'The country air is supposed to give an appetite,' I remarked, not caring to say too much in praise of the country at present.

'That is why I hate it,' growled Sam. 'Harkaway goes into the country sometimes, and brings me home so horribly sharp that I could eat my halter, but he gives me no more corn: a feed is a feed to him, although it may not be more than half a feed to me. Harkaway is wretchedly stupid; but most men are like him.'

I coughed an assent to this, and Sam went on for awhile grumbling about the short allowance of corn he received, until I thought I might venture to ask for a little information about my master. Sam, to my joy, received my inquiries in a very amiable spirit.

'Harkaway,' he said, 'is a furniture dealer, principally second-hand. He will buy anything, from the lid of a saucepan to an entire house of furniture, and will gladly sell the same if he can realize a fair or an unfair profit. He calls it "turning an honest penny;" but honest as it may be, I have heard him tell the most abominable falsehoods while transacting the most simple acts of business. He will declare, with all the solemnity of a man upon oath, that he gave so-and-so for such a thing, and that he will lose by the transaction, when he knows it did not cost him half the money, and that he will realize a very respectable profit.'

'It is very sad,' I said.

'And it is also absurd,' returned Sam; '*for no man believes him*—they know as well as he does that he sells for profit, and profit alone; as for any motive of philanthropy, you won't find such a thing in men of the Harkaway class.'

'You say the furniture is second-hand,' I said; 'where does he get it from?'

‘Mostly from homes where *ruin* has stepped in, an unwelcome guest,’ replied Sam solemnly. ‘When a man gets into difficulties, his landlord seizes his furniture, and sells it for rent. Upon these occasions the goods are generally put up by auction, and then Harkaway buys with the rest of the public. But very often the ruined tenant is not only ruined, but a man of bad principles; then he calls in my master, sells everything he has, and goes away with every debt unpaid. These are very profitable transactions, for he generally gets the goods at his own price.’

‘But are not some of these seizures oppressive?’ I asked.

‘Very,’ replied Sam. ‘Some landlords are very harsh, and turn the widow and orphan into the streets without the least remorse.’

‘What becomes of them?’

‘Don’t ask me,’ said Sam, shaking his head; ‘when you have been in London a year or two, you will have seen enough to guess what becomes of the helpless and unfortunate.’

‘Tell me something about Mr. Harkaway’s family,’ I said; ‘give me an idea of his character.’

‘Call him Harkaway—we have no misters this side of the water,’ replied Sam. ‘So you want an idea of his character and family. Well, here it is. Harkaway is a sordid, grasping man, who has not an idea beyond making money; it is never out of his thought—he dreams pounds, shillings, and pence, I think. His idea of everything is, what is it worth, and what will it fetch? He would die of despair in Paradise, if there was nothing to buy and sell. His wife is just like him, and when a bad bargain is made, which sometimes happens, they mourn together like parents bereaved of a promising family. Jim is their son. Nursed and cradled upon the pounds, shillings, and pence idea, he has no love, no sentiment, no religion—he possesses nothing which helps to make man noble; and I verily believe that, young as he is, he would sell his parents for five shillings, if anybody would be rash enough to buy them. He feels no love or gratitude towards them; he is cold, crafty, and cruel to a terrible degree; he tortures insects, beats dogs, and pinches children like a little ogre; and the day is not far distant when he will prove a thorn in the side of the parents who have made him what he is.’

‘In what way?’ I asked.

‘I cannot precisely tell,’ replied Sam. ‘But such children mostly develop into lovers of low dissipation; they haunt music halls and low dancing saloons, spending, in a manner quite at variance with their sordid nature, the money accumulated by the craft of their parents. I have known many such, and I can see this boy is already in the downward road.’

I said I was sorry to hear it, and hoped Sam would prove to be a false prophet for the boy’s sake. Sam grunted something in reply, and gave out signs of falling asleep. As I had now learned all I cared to know for the present, I said no more, and we were soon both enjoying sound repose.

CHAPTER VI.

SAD SCENES OF LIFE.

I was awakened in the morning by a knocking overhead, which Sam, who was already up and stirring, told me proceeded from the head of the family in the room above, who was a cobbler. I also heard the tongue of a loud-talking woman, and the murmur of the voices of several children.

'How many up there?' I inquired.

'Father, mother, and six children,' replied Sam. 'The father works hard, and is a patient, quiet man; but the mother drinks and scolds, and the home is a wretched one. Home I called it—ah! a poor home it is, and many a pig would turn up his nose at it.'

Mr. Harkaway and his son entered and interrupted our conversation. Jim, under the eye of his father, gave us a fairish grooming and a feed of corn; then I was taken out, harnessed, and put to my first day's work in the furniture line. Mr. Harkaway drove me to a house in the Old Kent Road, with the walls all plastered with bills, and leaving Jim in charge of the cart, went in.

Everything was so novel to me that the time passed very quickly. A street in London or the suburbs is a perfect panorama to any observant creature, and no one need languish for want of food for the mind. The faces alone are sufficient to amuse and interest any thoughtful horse or man. Watch two as they meet and salute, and you will see whether they be friend or foe. Mark their style of greeting, their faces as they meet and part, and you will

have a very good idea of the true nature of the feeling between them. The varieties of life are endless, the shades of emotion numberless, and he who cares to study the book of nature may read on throughout his days, and find in the end that he has but imperfectly scanned a single page.

There was much to study in the other horses I met with daily, and the dogs too were very interesting; but my great study was man, and I shall devote the principal part of these pages to him. I hope my experience of our lord and master was a very exceptional one, but I am sorry to say that I found very little good in him.

My life with Mr. Harkaway was for the most part very monotonous; he worked me very hard, and fed me as little as was consistent with the amount of work required of me. Sometimes Sam and I were taken out together in a large van to move the goods and chattels of some tradesman; but as a rule we were employed apart on small jobs, Mr. Harkaway driving me, and Sam being under the guidance of that atom of vice, the boy Jim. I do not care to speak ill of any one, but I must say that the training of this lad was fatal to every good quality which must have been born in him. He was cruel, crafty, and fond of low self-indulgence; he smoked and even drank with men—some of whom were old and grey, and ought to have checked the boy in his evil ways.

Sometimes it happened that I fell into his hands, and his father took Sam, and then I had a very pretty day of it. He would make me gallop until I flagged, and then beat me until I galloped again, and this with a heavy load behind me too, without the least remorse; and often I have returned to the stable in such a condition that I did not expect to leave it again alive.

I used to complain to Sam, but he said it was a common mode of treatment towards horses in London, and that thousands died yearly from overwork and neglect, or gave in with a broken heart, the result of unnecessary cruelty.

'A good horse does not need the whip,' he said; 'but there are some people who use it upon every possible occasion. If a horse is tired, they lash him without mercy—they must have an idea that there is virtue in the whipcord, and that it gives us a renewal of the strength we have expended in their service.'

'That wretched boy, Jim,' I remarked, 'must use a deal of whipcord.'

'That boy is fond of giving pain,' returned Sam; 'if he is grooming me, and wants me to stand over, he does not say so, but to save his tongue kicks me in the ribs as if I were a log of wood or a feather bed. I have known the day when I would have repaid him amply, but this miserable life has taken all the spirit out of me. Heigho!'

'You have had a very hard life,' I said.

'Very,' replied Sam. 'I was born in the country, but left it quite young. A dealer, Putney way, broke me in; he was celebrated for such work, and a cruel fellow he was. The bits he used were fearful, and I can almost feel his spurs now; as for his whip, it used to cross my ribs like a thin band of red-hot iron—ugh! What horse could stand it? So we all gave in; and he was celebrated as a trainer of horses. Isn't it disgusting!'

'Men will be wiser some day,' I said consolingly. 'How old are you, Sam?'

‘Somewhere about twelve,’ said Sam; ‘not at all old for a horse well used—but I am almost worked out. I heard Harkaway tell his wife to-day that I was scarcely worth my feed. Well! the knacker may come for aught I care.’

‘What is a knacker?’ inquired I.

‘A horse *murderer*,’ replied Sara. ‘When a horse gets old and past work, this man is sent for, or we are taken to him. In either case it is his business to kill us, and he makes very short work of it. But we are useful to the end; they make shoes, glue, and all sorts of useful things out of our very carcases; and if man had any real love or gratitude in his composition, he would treat us all well when we are alive.’

‘But all masters are not cruel, Sam.’

‘No: many are very kind, and keep their stables in better condition than they do their cottages for the labouring poor; and some keep both horse and labourer well, but these are the exception, and not the rule. For my part, I do not care for a rich master; give me a quiet family of the middle class, living, let us say, at Finchley, Hampstead, or somewhere about eight miles the north of London; these are the people who feed and treat a horse well.’

‘Were you ever in such a family, Sam?’

‘No; but once I was almost bought by a gentleman of that class, but the chance went by, and I am now too old to hope for such a thing. I have, however, heard a deal of this life, and I am sure nothing could be more agreeable. Now you are a likely fellow to drop upon this sort of thing, if ever Harkaway makes up his mind to sell you.’

The picture drawn by Sam pleased me very much, and I earnestly hoped that such a lot might befall me.

So my life passed on. I dragged furniture about—now from a general sale, now at midnight from a fraudulent debtor’s house, and once from a ruined home, where the law had deprived the widow and fatherless of the comforts of life. Sometimes Mr. Harkaway beat me very cruelly; but he was generally sparing of the whip, as he had an idea that it knocked some of the value off a horse—as rubbing removes gilt from gingerbread; still he did not hesitate to overload me, and gave me such burdens to bear that I often felt I must die beneath them. Yet I kept on, supported by youth, I suppose, and endured this life for four long years.

During this time I had not forgotten my place of birth, or those connected with it. Of my mother I thought a great deal; but I had no anxiety on her account, as I had often heard Mr. Bayne declare that he intended to keep her all his life. Rip was very often in my mind, and a thousand times I wondered what had become of him, with a yearning such as one true friend feels for another. I loved Rip; he was so full of life, so spirited, so brilliant in action, that any one with an eye for beauty must have admired him. Ah, noble Rip! I did indeed love you, and wonder if the humble companion of your youth, pining in the dingy stable of a furniture dealer, ever entered your thoughts. Nor did I forget the beauty of the scene where I was born: the paddock, the stream, the old mill, and the rich surrounding foliage oft rose before me, and never faded away again without leaving behind an aching heart. Often and often I have, in fancy, smelt the sweet meadow flowers, and heard the melodious beating of Rip’s feet upon the soft turf, as he gaily pranced about the field; and such memories, if they

have brought pain, have had a softening influence too, and I have lain down to sleep a sadder but a better horse.

The four years gave me a good knowledge of the great metropolis, as business at various times took me to every part of it; and the more I knew, the more I wondered at the magnitude of the place. I have learnt more since, and I have not ceased to wonder.

About this period a very terrible thing happened. I had been out all day with my master, and was back in the stable quite worn-out, thankful for the prospect of rest, when Jim, now a morose, sullen, dissipated young man, came into the stable, and without putting any harness upon me led me away. The act was so novel that my mind became full of vague terror, and the terrible knackers talked of by Sam arose before my eyes; but I dismissed the thought as a piece of folly—for I was yet active and full of work, and Mr. Harkaway was not the man to waste capital by useless slaughter—and looked about me for a more reasonable solution of the mystery.

With his head down, Jim Harkaway slouched beside me, giving no clue, and I wondered in vain as we walked the length of several streets, and came at last into the presence of a small crowd of people. An opening was made for Jim, and he led me through. The first thing I saw was a cartload of furniture resting upon the shafts; the next, a horse lying in the road, quite still.

The shock was dreadful. I read the truth at once. Poor Sam was dead—had died in the midst of his daily duty. It was indeed terrible, but I found no tears then. My sorrow was tempered with a dawning conviction that this sudden death was to him a merciful and happy release. In the morning before starting he had complained of a pain in his side, but such a form of suffering was common to us both, and I did not dream of finding him dead that night. Jim harnessed me in, and drove away, leaving poor Sam in charge of a man in a very dirty blue slop—a knacker's assistant, I have since been informed.

That was a long night for me, and I slept but little. Sam, and Rip, and mother, and home were alternately in my thoughts through the long dark hours; and when the morning came, it found me but little prepared for work. Prepared or not, there was the work to do, and during that and many days following I toiled early and late, until I began to give out signs of really breaking down; and then Mr. Harkaway, still influenced by the pounds, shillings, and pence idea, kindly sent me into the country for a month's rest and fresh green food.

DEATH OF POOR SAM.

CHAPTER VII.

MY NEW MASTER, BENJAMIN BUNTER.

I was sent down to a place about two miles from Blackheath, on the Forest Hill side, and spent the days of my leisure in a field, sharing the welcome grass with half a dozen cows belonging to a local dairyman. It was almost as bad as being alone, having no other horse for a companion; for the cows, not very conversational among themselves, did not care to accost a stranger who spoke a language they did not understand.

It was not like my early home, but it was a paradise compared to the dungeon I lived in down Lambeth way, and I would have been well content to have spent the rest of my days there; but I had a great amount of work left in my bones yet, and it was not to be.

When the month was up, Jim Harkaway came to fetch me. I am sorry to say that he was rather the worse for beer when he arrived, and before we got home he was in a horrible state of intoxication. We met Mr. Harkaway near home, and the way his son addressed him was very shocking; you would not hear it from any creature save man—the noblest in his best condition, in his fall the most degraded.

High words ensued between father and son, and several people stopped one after the other; but they all went on again, saying that it was ‘only old Harkaway and his precious son,’ so I concluded that these scenes between them were growing common. In the end Mr. Harkaway wrenched the bridle away from his son, and led me up a turning opposite the

shop. I was surprised at not going home, and still more surprised when he halted before a greengrocer's shop, and Mr. Harkaway asked a stout woman if her husband was at home.

'He's round the yard,' was the reply; 'but he will be here in a minute.'

In less than a minute the husband came—a short, thick-set man, deeply pock-marked, and dressed in corduroy, with a flaring red silk handkerchief round his throat.

'Mornin', Mr. Harkaway,' he said.

'Morning,' replied my master. 'I have brought Blossom to you myself. Jim is going on worse than ever.'

'Sorry to hear it,' said the other. 'But you ain't half sharp enough with him. If he was a son of mine, I would give him the key of the street, as sure as my name is Benjamin Bunter.'

'Mrs. Harkaway clings to him,' said Mr. Harkaway nervously; 'she is a woman, and he is an only son; but it is a great trial—the money he wastes is enough to break one's heart.'

Not a word about the vice of the youth—it was still pounds, shillings, and pence to the furniture dealer.

"Well, what are we to say for Blossom?' said the greengrocer, stroking my fore-leg with his hand.

'He is worth thirty,' replied Mr. Harkaway. 'I am only selling him because I was obliged to buy two horses to carry on my business while he was away. He is worth thirty pounds.'

'You mean twenty,' said Benjamin Bunter shortly.

'No—thirty, I mean.'

'Twenty.'

In this style they haggled for awhile, and the bargain ended in the usual way; I became the property of Benjamin Bunter, greengrocer, for the sum of twenty-five pounds sterling.

In this manner I parted from the furniture dealer, and we never met again; but I learnt his fate in a casual way, and I may as well give it here. He was killed in a railway accident on his way back from a country sale, and having died without a will (he had put it off a hundred times on the ground of the expense), the better part of his property fell into the hands of his son, who justified his worldly training by squandering the money like dirt, and dying, while yet in his youth, mad with drink. What became of the mother I never knew.

Let me turn to my new master, Benjamin Bunter, and endeavour to describe him to my reading friends as I afterwards knew him. This master of mine was what is known as a 'free living man'—he made a deal of money in his business, and spent it almost as soon as he got it. He was very fond of eating and drinking, and delighted in such pleasure as could be found on race-courses, at pigeon matches, and so on. His wife had precisely similar tastes, and they jogged on very well together; and the half-dozen children they had brought into the world were, as far as food and clothing went, well cared for, but all else was entirely neglected.

Let me speak of the man as I found him. Benjamin Bunter had a kind heart, and he fed me liberally; but he was a thoughtless man, and many a time he has, without the slightest regard for my good or ill, kept me all day without food at a pigeon match, and then taken up half a dozen men with him for 'a lift' home. He would also drive his wife and children to

Epping for a day's outing, and the exhaustion I have felt after the efforts required on such occasions was very great.

With regard to the pigeon-shooting I wish to say, without going into the subject, that I think it a very cruel and unmanly sport. The contest is not equal in any way. What can be more cowardly than to box up a poor helpless thing for awhile, then pretend to give it liberty and shoot it as soon as it shows its head? Call that 'sport'—I wonder men are not ashamed of it!

I was employed in the business mostly, and very often I was in the Borough Market as early as four o'clock, and there I met with many horses and ponies engaged in the same trade; some were well cared for and fed liberally, but others had cruel or indifferent masters. Some of the men were given to bad language, and used the most fearful oaths whenever their animals did even the slightest thing wrong. Generally the fault lay with the masters, who perhaps had a little difficulty in fixing their carts among the rest, and instead of going quietly and easily to work, out came the whip, and the horse's head was wrenched about, until he was quite bewildered. Who can wonder if the poor creature backed into the wrong place, or showed a tendency to go opposite to the direction required? Man talks a deal about reason, but he too often forgets to act upon it, especially when he is dealing with such poor creatures as myself.

The scenes in the market were very exciting and amusing as a rule, but many of them were painful. Foul language was sometimes followed by a brutal fight, which gave amusement to a thoughtless crowd, until the police appeared. Whenever such a scene took place I noticed that the fighting men were invariably the worse for drink; the sober buyers, sellers, and labourers always did their work quickly and went away quietly.

I am now coming to an episode in my life which requires an entire chapter to itself, for it opened up to me a new train of thought with regard to the connection between horse and man, and the really important influence they have upon each other. One night, late in the month of May, Benjamin Bunter came into my stable and gave me an extra grooming, combing my coat and plaiting my mane with wonderful care. While he was at work Mrs. Bunter entered with a large bonnet covered with flowers in her hand. Mrs. Bunter, by the way, had a great love for bright colours, and was generally a walking object of envy to her less fortunate neighbours.

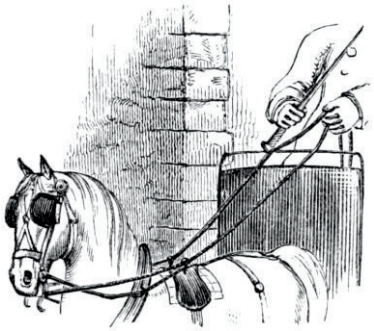
'There, Ben,' she said, holding it up, 'I think that will do.'

'It's prime,' was his reply. 'There won't be many bonnets like that upon the course. Everybody will know as we drive along that we are going to the races. Come over, Blossom—steady there.'

I AM GROOMED BY BENJAMIN BUNTER.

So I was going to the races. Here was a prospect of something new to me, and I immediately thought of Rip's great-grandfather, who had nearly won something or other many years ago; and then I wondered what that something was, and in what way it was contested; and then I wondered what had become of Rip, and I continued wondering long after Benjamin Bunter had finished work and retired to his supper in the little parlour behind his well-stocked shop.

Sleep was almost a stranger to my eyes that night. Stimulated by excitement, I continued to think and wonder until the first grey light of the morning came stealing through the window of my stable, and then I fell into a fitful doze, to dream that I was a race-horse of the purest blood, famous for my victories throughout the length and breadth of the land.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREAT CARNIVAL.

In the morning my master was up early, but he did not go to market, and it was quite nine o'clock when he harnessed me to the cart and drove round to the front door. There was a small knot of neighbours interested in our starting, and I found that a plumber and his wife were going with us. Two chairs were put into the back of the cart for the use of the ladies, and the men sat in front, with the two eldest Bunter children on the floor, making the party six in number. In addition to this was a bag of cut hay and corn for my consumption, and a large hamper of food and drink for the party.

I gathered from the conversation of the men that they were both fond of betting, and that Mr. King had received overnight a 'tip,' that is, information concerning a certain horse, which would enable him to make a large sum of money that day.

'I am told that Melrose is sure to win,' he whispered in a confidential tone to my master while they were waiting for the ladies. 'Wigen wrote to me to put every penny I have upon it.'

'I go with you,' returned Benjamin Bunter. 'I always thought there was something meant with Melrose. Now then, here is the missis; give her a hand, will you.'

Mr. King gallantly helped the ladies to their seats, then put the children in, and we started. A few idle boys gave us a cheer, the neighbours waved their hands, and then we went through the streets at a smart pace.

The load behind me was rather heavy, but I did not mind that, as there was, in addition to my curiosity being aroused, the prospect of a peep at the green fields and a few hours' fresh air. In half an hour we had left the worst part of the bricks and mortar behind us, and were travelling among the neat suburban villas of prosperous tradesmen.

It was a bright fresh morning, and everything looked nice—villas, trees, flowers, everything, down to the butchers' carts which we came upon now and then waiting at the garden gates of the houses. My party enjoyed everything; they were all in high spirits, and I have no doubt that Mrs. Bunter made the most of her bonnet, which was a far superior thing to the article worn by her friend Mrs. King. In spite of this, however, the ladies were excellent friends.

About eight miles from town we pulled up at a roadside inn, and my master fetched out a pot of beer. I felt this to be the first hitch in a promising day; not that I personally object to beer, for I do not know even the taste of it, but I have seen the effects of it upon man, and they are anything but pleasant. Never by any chance does it elevate or improve, and too often it ruins and degrades—and yet men will drink it. Here is something which I am sure man himself fails to comprehend.

Our halt was brief, and we went on through quiet lanes and broad, well-kept roads garnished with fragrant hedges and tall, graceful trees, sometimes passing and at other times being passed by other parties greater or smaller in number, and they all seemed to be in the highest possible spirits, shouting and laughing as if the world had nothing in it beyond going to the races, and they had left no sorrow or sin or shame in the great city behind them.

By-and-by we came upon a stupendous hill, and here a boy sitting upon a horse volunteered to help us up the hill for sixpence. Benjamin Bunter was in an excellent humour, and the offer was accepted; the horse was attached to the shafts of the cart, and we moved forward.

Now I do not wish to speak ill of any of my race, but I must out with the truth at all times—that helping horse was a disgrace to his fellows. He was as cunning as a fox, and made a deal of show, pretending to strain his muscles and spluttering his feet about, but he did not pull a bit. He was as bad as the boy upon his back, who shouted and pretended to urge him on, while he really encouraged him to hold back. I ventured to remonstrate in a whisper to my helper, but he only answered with a short contemptuous laugh, which I have no doubt Benjamin Bunter interpreted as a cough, and I had to do the work of the hill in reality alone. At the top my master paid the boy the sixpence, and the precious pair went back in search of other victims.

After a brief rest we proceeded, and presently came upon the downs where the races were held, and my master guided me past a long line of white booths, erected for refreshment and various purposes. In some I have been told men gamble and fight, but I have never seen such things, and I only pretend to give the results of my actual experience. There was one large wooden erection which Benjamin Bunter pointed out to his wife as the Grand Stand; it was empty then, but I saw it later filled with ladies and gentlemen most magnificently dressed.

We were very early, and my master secured a good place near the ropes, after paying ten shillings for the privilege. He and Mr. King then got down and went away, and Mrs. Bunter brought out a bottle full of rum. She had a sip, Mrs. King had a sip, and the children were induced to wet their lips with it. All this seemed to me to be very shocking, but there were many cartloads of people around doing much the same thing, and nobody cried out against it.

Turning from Mrs. Bunter and her friend, I took a look at the scene around me. Like the great city, it defies description. Early as it was thousands had already assembled, and the air was full of shouts and laughter, and cries that some might have thought the outburst of joy; but *I* could detect a wail beneath it which told me that the joy was after all but a hollow thing. I was now old enough and had seen enough to read man at a glance, and as the thousands walked by I scanned their faces and read no real satisfaction there. They were hilarious it is true, but they lacked the contented expression which true happiness brings. But even the apparently happy were in the minority; the main part of this throng were eager, restless creatures, who walked quickly up and down, and talked in low whispers to their friends, or scanned little pocket-books with a forlorn look, as if they read their doom therein. 'Knave and gamester' were written in the looks of many—alas! too many—of the young as well as old. Every amusement presented by the itinerant took the gambling form—betting was the order of the day, from pence to pounds. Some held up purses and talked of large sums to be sold for a shilling, and the thoughtless, untutored novice in race-course ways bought them, to find themselves deceived, and to hear the laughter of those who find fun in a miserable lie. Wheels of fortune, spinning jennies, cards, dice, all were there, and vice, forgetting her shame, walked boldly in the sunlight.

Opposite, the big wooden stand and others on either side were filling, and a babel of voices rose from the shifting mass. This, I was told afterwards, was the noise of betting men, who risked their money—some all their wealth, honour, good name—on the race to come. Some of the noblest names in our land have been blackened in the betting ring. Some of the richest among the people have left their all upon the race-course, and gone home to shame and ruin. And yet men call racing 'pleasure;' but who can reason with them on the subject when they call pigeon-slaughter by the name of 'sport'?

It was a strange motley scene, interesting in many points, but painful in most, for I could see that there was more folly than fun in everything around me; and folly, every thinking creature, horse and man, knows, is but the herald of ruin and shame.

I was musing on the scene when my thoughts were interrupted by a carriage which drew up beside me; it was open, and contained two young fellows barely arrived at the recognised age of manhood. Both were well dressed and in the highest possible spirits. I was immediately interested in them; but my attention was withdrawn by the horse in the brougham, who was in front of me—we stood in fact face to face.

There was a form a little more developed than I had hitherto known it, but quite familiar, from the tip of the well-shaped nose to the end of the ample tail. No need for that amused expression of face to guide me to a recognition; I knew him at once—it was my old friend Rip, and involuntarily I uttered a loud neigh of joyful surprise.

‘Hush! pray do,’ remonstrated Rip. ‘Don’t be so vulgar. You really astonish me with your want of breeding.’

‘I was overcome with joy,’ I apologised. ‘Oh, Rip! how often have I longed for such an hour as this!’

‘Dear old Blossom,’ said Rip affectionately, ‘it is just like you to think of your old friends. No one, looking at your quiet ways, would imagine that you had half the emotion in you; but your sort of emotion is like still water—it runs deep.’

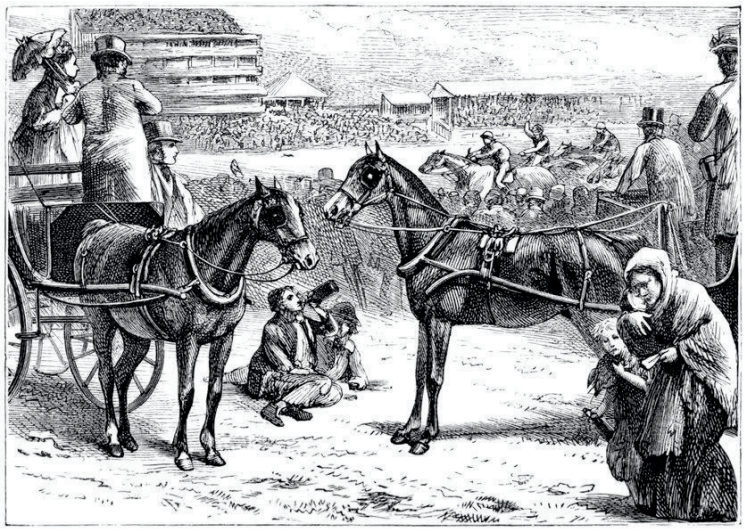
‘But where have you been—and what sort of masters have you had?’ I asked.

‘I have had only one master since I knew you,’ replied Rip. ‘Squire Tracey bought me of Mr. Bayne, and I am with Squire Tracey still. I have brought his two eldest sons here to-day.’

‘From Upton?’ I exclaimed.

‘Stupid old Blossom,’ said Rip, with a good-natured smile in his eyes. ‘No, Upton is a deal too far away; we came from town this morning. We always spend the fashionable months in the great metropolis—West-end of course. I have never cast eyes upon the east side of Temple Bar.’

‘And they treat you well, Rip?’



THE RACE-COURSE.

‘Nobly—from the squire to the groom,’ replied Rip. ‘As for the groom, he is so kind to me that I positively love the fellow. He carries a whip as part of the furniture of a brougham, but I really cannot tell you if there is a lash upon it or not.’

‘I congratulate you upon your good fortune,’ I said, repressing a sigh. ‘My lot has not been so pleasant as I could wish, but I won’t complain.’

‘There never was such a horse as you to endure,’ returned Rip; ‘and yet it’s not from want of spirit; you have a tremendous deal of work in you, and you always did your duty nobly.’

'It is only right to do so, Rip,' I said, feeling rather foolish over this unmerited praise; and then at his request I gave him a brief outline of my life, and just as I concluded, Benjamin Bunter and his friend the plumber returned.

'Melrose is first favourite,' he said to his wife. 'I have put the money in, and we are safe to win. The men who ought to know say he can't lose;' and the man's face beamed as if the race was already over and he a winner.

'Poor fool,' said Rip contemptuously; 'one of the numberless thousands who make the betting knaves of the turf rich. He is a sporting greengrocer—earns his money with toil, gets a tip or hint from a trainer or jockey, who perchance knows no more than he, and risks not only his own money, but that which is due to others in the way of business. I have seen many like him, Blossom, and I know full well the expression in his face—he is elated because he is hopeful; but if his hopes in this case are foiled, he is a ruined man.'

'I hope not,' I said.

'It is a fact,' replied Rip. 'See how he licks his lips and nervously presses his hands together; now he takes a sip from the bottle, as if *that* could help him. Poor fellow! there are thousands like him to-day upon this course, and in an hour more than two-thirds of them will realize their folly, and return home dejected, ruined, miserable—unless they drink, which but wards off the pain for the time, and brings it back tenfold on the morrow. But hush! here come the horses—the noblest and most graceful of our race.'

Then there filed past upon the course, which the police had previously cleared, a line of the most beautiful horses I had ever seen, each with a rider in a coloured jacket and cap upon his back. The glossy coats of the horses shone like rippling water in the sunlight, and their light fawn-like limbs trod the turf as if they supported creatures of air. Their appearance was greeted with a shout. The ladies uttered little ecstatic cries of admiration; but the men were busy looking out for some particular horse on which their fortunes that day depended.

'There—there,' I heard Benjamin Bunter cry, 'that's Melrose; isn't he a beauty? There is not another horse in the field like him. The red jacket wins!'

Melrose's rider wore a red jacket, and many a tongue shouted out to him a word of encouragement as he went by; but other horses and riders had their supporters, who were as sanguine as Benjamin Bunter as to their success.

The horses passed on, and left the belt of turf called 'the course' perfectly clear. Half an hour's restlessness ensued—the police moved up and down, urging the crowd to keep quiet and not break in upon the open space. Every face was turned to the starting point, and every eye was full of eager hope. Then came a cry, 'They're off!' and ere I had fully realized the meaning of these words they came flashing by—a line of panting horses, with frantic riders remorselessly using both whip and spur. The colours of the men were mingled, and I failed to single out the red jacket of Melrose as the body swept past me, and the next moment the air was full of shouts and cries, and the race was over.

Then came a brief lull, and I saw some numbers hoisted on a board opposite. Benjamin Bunter, with a borrowed field glass, scanned the figures for a moment, and then fell back with a groan.

‘I thought so,’ said Rip quietly to me; ‘your master is ruined. Melrose is not one of the first three. I saw him bringing up the tail of the race, looking as if every bit of life had been beaten out of him.’

I made no reply, for my thoughts were laden with sorrow: on the whole my master had been kind to me, and his misfortune was mine. Under any circumstances I must have grieved for a ruined man, but the ruin in this case was brought near home to me, and my heart was very heavy indeed.

I was made sad too by what I saw and heard around me. Thousands of tongues were busy with the race, and disappointment was the general tone. It was horrible to hear the cursing heaped upon the horses. Some cursed the winner, some cursed the losers; but no one in my hearing spoke one kind word for the horses who had shown such matchless powers—not a word of their beauty, or the ease and grace of their movements, or of the spirit they had shown in the efforts made.

After the first excitement of the race was over, hampers were unpacked in all directions, and both men and women began to eat and drink—the winners to celebrate their success, the losers to drown their grief, and the ruined to stave off thought until the morrow. Wandering minstrels began their songs—women and girls in tawdry finery danced upon the turf to the music of cracked instruments—sunburnt gipsies with babies in their arms stole from carriage to carriage and told fortunes as truthful as the ‘tip’ my unhappy master had received; women laughed, men shouted, children cried; the cornet, the drum, the flute, the tambourine—one and all lent their sounds to the general tumult, and all was riot and confusion.

My eyes ached, my ears tingled, and lifting my head above this distracting scene, I fixed my gaze upon the clear blue heaven above. Oh! how calm and peaceful—how glorious—how beautiful! and far away against a patch of white cloud I saw a speck, and knew by its fluttering movement that it was a skylark singing; but his song was drowned in the popping of champagne corks, the beating of drums, and the thousand and one other noises of the worshippers of Folly. The votaries of the race thought as little of the grateful hymn of the bird as they did of the great Giver to whom it was instinctively addressed. ‘Oh! man, man,’ I cried, ‘look up and read your lesson there!’

I became so absorbed in my reflections that I had forgotten Rip, until he gave utterance to a very indignant snort, and asked me if I had taken up with sulky ways. This I laughingly denied, and Rip, after pretending for a moment to be very angry with me, chatted on about old associations and his present life, until his two young masters, who had been away for awhile, came back again. They seemed to be indignant and vexed about something, and the younger, as he put his foot upon the step, said aloud—

‘John told me that Madcap was sure to win—and he was not one of the first three.’

The same song my master sung, but the name was different. Melrose was sure to win, Madcap was sure to win, and neither of them were near it. Surely there must be roguery somewhere.

Rip’s young masters were so annoyed that they would stay no longer, and I had barely time to say a few affectionate words to him ere they gave their servant orders to drive away. Rip, in obedience to a jerk of the reins, turned round, nodding to me carelessly as he

did so; but I saw a tear in his eye, and knew that a kind and tender heart lay under his flippant air. I am very fond of Rip, and I am sure he was fond of me.

My party by this time were in a very bad way; all had drunk a deal more than was good for them, and I heard Mr. Benjamin Bunter challenge Mr. King to fight. The ladies, however, interposed, and nothing came of it. After this they had more drink, and my master sang a song in a loud, cracked voice, and cut a lot of antics which made him appear very foolish. A few thoughtless people laughed and encouraged him, but I saw more than one man look at him with bitter contempt.

I do not care to say any more about the race-course, the very memory of it sickens me now—it was such a seething mass of folly, drunkenness, and vice; but I know that I was very glad when we turned our backs upon it, and started for home.

RETURNING FROM THE RACE-COURSE.

The road was crowded with vehicles full of men and women, most of whom were dressed up with paper feathers, false noses, as if the great object of the day's holiday was to make themselves as ridiculous as possible. A great many in the garb of gentlemen were very much the worse for drink, and amused themselves with pelting the other wayfarers with bags of flour, cheap pincushions, and similar acts of folly—unworthy of men.

A mile from the course we got into a quiet road; but there were still many carts and carriages before and behind, and every public-house we came to was full. I can see now the number of horses waiting patiently outside for the masters who were drinking themselves into a mad or maudlin state within; I can hear their oaths and repetitions of their curses upon the horses which failed to win; I can smell the smoke of the cheap filthy tobacco which curled in great clouds from the open doors and windows;—that hateful scene and hateful day has haunted me ever since, and will haunt me till I die.

We stopped at many of these public-houses on our way home, and it was late—almost dark—when we arrived at Clapham, and then it began to rain. The clouds had been

lowering for some time—but to men who are the worse for drink clouds and sunshine are the same. The people who had assembled to see the holiday-makers return were dispersed by it, and when we reached home even the streets were clear.

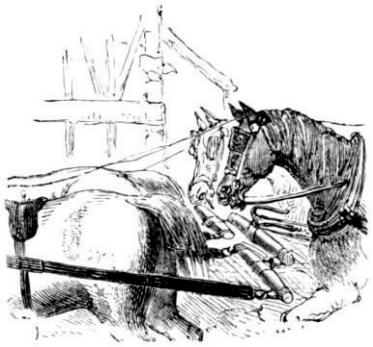
The rain was now falling fast; the whole of the party were soaked with rain; and when Benjamin Bunter pulled up at his door, his friends the Kings got out without a word. They just nodded a good-night, and as they passed on I heard Mr. King mutter to his wife that he hated going out in a common cart—there was no comfort in it, and it was not fit for a respectable tradesman.

Poor Mrs. Bunter! her bonnet was quite spoiled, and she was crying in a weak maudlin manner as her husband helped her out. He was in a sulky humour, and when the children came out to greet him he asked them what they meant by sitting up so late, and bade them go to bed at once. Mrs. Bunter supported this rebuff, and went even farther, threatening personal chastisement if she saw them again that night.

My master put me into the stable, tossed a feed into the manger, raked out my bed in a careless manner, and left me for the night. I was very wet and uncomfortable; but a horse has no right to complain, so I munched my food quietly, and made the best of a bad case.

Mr. Bunter's back parlour window was near the stable: the night was warm, and the window was open, which enabled me to hear a deal of what was said. When my master went in his wife was crying still. He asked her what was the matter in a coarse brutal tone, such as I had never heard him use before. She replied in a querulous angry voice, bewailing the loss of her bonnet and the bad behaviour of Mrs. King, who had said something or other of a very personal nature on the way home.

Then there was a silence for awhile, interrupted only by the half-stifled sobs of Mrs. Bunter. This silence was suddenly broken by my master, who had apparently been brooding. I heard him rise up from his seat, and kicking over the chair, tell his wife to hold her crying about her bonnet and save her tears for something worse, for he had that day betted with and lost money which was not his own, and he was a bankrupt and a ruined man.



CHAPTER IX.

HERE AND THERE.

Five days later the bailiffs were upon the premises, and a week afterwards I was put down in the inventory and catalogue of an auctioneer as Lot 96. Everything was to be sold off, for Mr. Benjamin Bunter had told the truth when he informed his wife that he was a ruined man. Always a careless liver, he had allowed debt to accumulate, and when the pinch came, sought to retrieve his position by gambling. The result was what any sane man might have expected—he made matters worse, adding disgrace to his misfortunes.

Several of the neighbours came to look at me, and I heard many of them speak with great censure upon the fact of my master having so near his bankruptcy wasted his money upon the race-course; but with all of them the sin lay with the betting so near his bankruptcy—against betting itself they said not a word; indeed I found this fearful evil had taken very deep root among the people, and that most of them, both high and low, indulged much or little in the baneful habit.

Benjamin Bunter and his wife and children disappeared. I heard it stated that they were living in a small street near the Borough Market, and that Bunter was working as a labourer there; whether it was true or not I cannot say—I never saw them again.

The day of the sale came on, and I was knocked down to a horse dealer—just such another man as brought me from Upton—for fifteen pounds, and he, even while he was paying the money, loudly declared that I was a bad bargain to any man for eight: this is a habit of his class, and I felt in nowise hurt by the declaration. He took me home, had my coat trimmed, physicked me a little, and then, as before, I figured in a general sale.

A publican named Newman bought me, but I was with him only a week—I was too slow, he said—and then he tried to sell me. Several men came to his stable, but none cared to strike a bargain, so the publican got up a raffle, with forty members at ten shillings per head. The humiliation of being disposed of in this way has haunted me ever since, but like other things I have learnt to bear it. A Mr. Somerfield won me; but he was a railway clerk, without either the accommodation for keeping or the time to use a horse, and I was sold again at once to a chimney sweep.

He took me home, and put me into a stable with a tall bony horse belonging to a carrier who worked between Hornsey and London. I tried to make friends with this horse at once, and found that I had no easy task ahead of me, for my companion, naturally rather inclined to be grumpy, was furthermore suffering from a very bad cold.

Kind words and patience, however, are capital things, and within an hour we were chatting confidentially together. From him I learned that the life of a carrier's horse was a very hard one—out all weathers, standing about in the cold and wet, and journeying a long way with very heavy loads to drag, and sometimes, especially about Christmas time, the work of the day was not over until past midnight.

'They don't think much about our welfare,' concluded my companion with a sigh; 'when one horse is worn-out they buy another, and work him to death in his turn.'

'Are worn-out carriers' horses taken to the—the—ahem!—the knackers?' I inquired.

I knew I was upon delicate ground, and tried to put the question as pleasantly as possible. My companion answered with perfect freedom.

'Some go to the knacker's,' he replied. 'But very few of us are entirely worn-out; there is a little life left in us yet, and we go to the cab proprietors generally for night work.'

'To run in the night cabs?'

'Just so.'

'What sort of work is that?' I asked.

'Don't ask me,' was the reply, given with a shudder. 'If it ever be your lot you will know all about it; if you escape it, better remain in ignorance of its horrible misery.'

A strange quiver ran through my frame. I did not know then what I know now, that it was a sympathetic foreshadowing of the life that was to be.

I remained in the stable four days, and during that time saw many people who were looking after a horse. I was, however, not the horse they wanted, and none of them were the style of master I wished; so it happily fell out that I was still on hand at the end of the four days, when an elderly gentleman came to look at me.

I saw in an instant that this was the master for me. His age was about sixty, and his face was radiant with love and goodwill; there was a tenderness in the very way he looked at me, and my heart warmed towards him the moment he entered the stable.

A man who had charge of the stable came with him, and expressed his readiness to trot me up and down to show off my action or speed.

‘No, no,’ said the old gentleman; ‘there is no need for that; I can see it is the horse I want, patient and quiet. My daughter is a great invalid, and this is just the thing to suit her. I know the price, and the price will suit me. What is his name?’

‘Blossom,’ replied the man.

‘Poor Blossom,’ returned the old gentleman, patting me tenderly; ‘long passed the spring-time of life, but a good creature, I warrant, still. Send him to Maythorn Lodge tonight. Graham is my name.’

As he left the stable my heart bounded with joy at the prospect of such a master. Here at last was a hope of a long-encouraged dream to be realized—a home where I could end my old days in happiness and peace. I lay among the straw revolving this bright, pleasant hope again and again within my mind, half sleeping, half waking, with a sense of being at *rest*. I pondered thus until the evening drew nigh, and a stableboy made his appearance to take me home.

The lad bore a distant resemblance to his master; but it was in expression and not in feature. The kindness of the employer had set a seal upon the employed, and I read contentment and happiness upon every feature. If any confirmation was wanted as to the nature of the home I was going to, this gave it to me; and with a heart fast beating with joy and hope, I stepped out lightly close behind my guide.

CHAPTER X.

MY GENTLE MISTRESS.

I found Maythorn Lodge all and more than I either desired or expected. It was called a lodge, but it was in reality a very substantial and well-built family residence, about two miles on the Finchley Road.

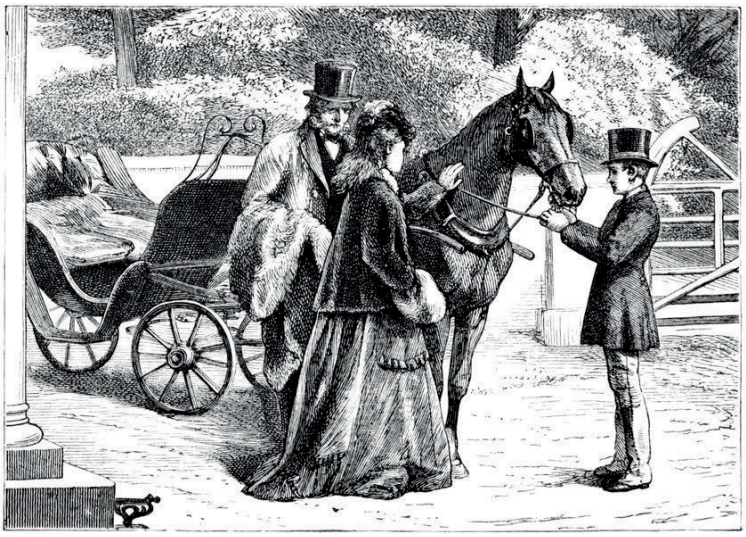
The great tidal wave of bricks and mortar which has since flooded the green fields of Finchley was yet far away, and the country round about my new master's home was very beautiful—almost as beautiful as the place where I spent the first days of my life. London was not far away it is true; but we had green trees on one side to shut out the view of the dismal smoke, and from the other the wind came over Hampstead Heath, bearing on its bosom the untainted perfume of green meadows and sweet fields. I had a small, well-kept stable for a residence, and all my wants were attended to by a lad of fourteen years of age, who in addition to this helped the gardener in his work. A few words in passing respecting this boy. I gathered from what I heard that he had been originally one of the ragged unfortunates of the London streets, and that Mr. Graham had taken him home as an experiment, to see what could be done with those wretched outcasts. The experiment was on the whole satisfactory. The boy—who went by the name of Roberts—was devotedly attached to his master, and although he had bickerings with the other servants, especially with the gardener, who most injudiciously cast reflections upon his origin, he was on the whole a well-conducted youth. For my own part, I must say he was an excellent lad to me, and we became very much attached to each other.

Mr. Graham and his daughter were the only members of the household at home; but there was a son at college, who, as far as reports were concerned, was a very fine dashing young fellow—an object of great interest to all in Maythorn Lodge. Miss Graham was, as her father had declared, a great invalid. It was in the month of May that I took up my residence at the Lodge, and the weather, warm and balmy as it was, seemed to be too keen for the delicate frame. I remember her appearing at the door as I drew up, with her fragile form wrapped up in cloaks and furs, as if there were no sun shining in the heavens, and the keen cutting blasts of winter were sweeping up from the adjoining heath. Her face was beautiful, and there was a colour upon her cheeks which rivalled the blush on a May-born rose; her eyes—blue, clear, and thoughtful—were in harmony with the rich mass of golden hair which clustered o'er her forehead, and fell in masses over her shoulders. But beneath it all there lay something indefinable, something without a name, which told me that the young life was fleeting. I read this in her face, and I saw it plainer in the tender solicitude of the father, and the anxious, sorrowful look he wore when her face was turned from his. She came down, and before getting into the carriage stroked me upon the neck. The touch, feather-like as it was, sent a thrill through my frame—it was different to anything I had known for years.

'It is an old horse,' said Mr. Graham, 'but a very quiet one. You want air more than exercise, Nellie dear.'

'It is a very nice horse, and will suit me,' she said quietly.

Then they got into the carriage.

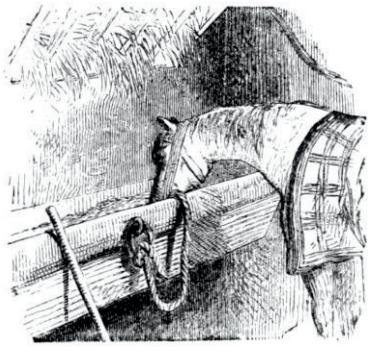


MISS GRAHAM 'STROKED ME UPON THE NECK.'

I felt by the touch that Miss Graham was driving me—a little experience soon tells a horse who is behind him; and we soon entered upon a quiet part of the road, when the gentle strain relaxed, and I was allowed to have my own way. I trotted on, with an

occasional walk, for an hour or more, and then the reins tightened, and I was turned towards home.

All the way Nellie prattled to her father, and all her talk was what she would do next summer. Next summer she would be so well and happy. Archibald—that was her brother—would take his degree and be home for a holiday; and Harry,—here her voice quivered a little—who loved her, and was over the sea, would be back again. Next summer was to be everything to her;—but she had entered upon her last summer here! To all this Mr. Graham said little; but in every word he uttered I detected a ring of sorrow and compassion: he knew what many others knew—that with her the day was far spent, and the night coming on. Oh, how I pitied them both! and I pitied them the more for the love I bore them—so kind, so gentle, so tender to me, who had known the rough road of life, and felt the thorns and briars which grow on every side. This day was but the type of many. If the sun shone and the wind was soft we invariably went out: not always the same road, but at all times seeking quiet thoroughfares, where I was allowed to travel as I pleased. A happy time for me—I had indeed fallen upon pleasant places. Well fed, well cared for, tenderly spoken to, treated as a horse *should* be, the days passed like hours, and the weeks like days, and so the summer fled. With the autumn came a change: our drives soon decreased in number, and at last entirely stopped. This was what I had feared—what I had looked forward to with dread and sorrow. My young mistress's days were numbered, and she was—to use one of the tenderest expressions from the lips of man—going home. Her father knew, and all around her knew, that there was no hope; but this doctor was sent for, and that doctor was sent for, and took their fees, until the last. The only exercise I got was with Roberts, who took me out for a canter two or three times a week; and it was through the neighbours, who stopped the lad, to inquire how Miss Nellie was, that I learnt what I did about her. The death so long threatening came at last. The time is scored deep upon my memory, and the night my darling mistress passed away I shall never forget. Her brother—who was studying hard, so they said—was kept in ignorance of her condition almost to the last. It was her wish, I believe—one of the many unselfish thoughts of hers to which I could bear witness; and so when he came, the poor flickering flame of life was nearly gone. In the afternoon of the well-remembered day I heard Roberts tell the gardener that Miss Nellie was not expected to live throughout the night. This aroused my already absorbing interest, and touching with a ruder touch than I had known before the cores of my heart, kept me alive to every word and movement around me. The evening passed on, and the sun set amidst a mass of wind-tossed clouds, and with the night came storm and rain. It raged until midnight, and then the heavens cleared, and the stars came out with their twinkling faces looking down upon the wondering earth, emblems of peace, and rest, and hope. I was gazing at them through my half-open stable door, when Roberts came in and threw himself upon the straw, weeping bitterly; and the sorrow of the boy told me that all was over!



CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER LOSS AND A DISAPPOINTMENT.

What I felt that night I do not care to tell—the sorrow of the time was too deep for words. I loved my mistress; she had come upon me like sunshine after storm—her very touch was balm to my wounded spirit—and she was gone! Roberts made a deal of noise over his sorrow, and I have no doubt he felt the loss; but his wound was not so deep as mine, I warrant you.

They buried my mistress quietly, as she wished; and then another misfortune came upon me. Mr. Graham was taken ill. Mr. Archibald did not go back to college, but remained with his father; and from this I argued that the illness was of a very serious nature. Then came a dread upon me of what was to come, and I was very unhappy indeed.

I saw very little of Mr. Archibald, and what I did see was not pleasing to me. He appeared to be very proud and imperious, and talked to everybody in a very commanding way. As for *me*, he only came once into the stable, and then he positively laughed at me, called me a 'broken-down hack,' and asked Roberts why I was not sent to the knacker's.

'Miss Nellie was very fond of Blossom, sir,' replied Roberts; 'he ain't much to look at, but he ain't a bad horse—he is very willing, sir.'

This recommendation made no impression upon Mr. Archibald, who laughed contemptuously and went away; but I felt very grateful to the boy Roberts, who preferred speaking the truth to toadying to the disparaging opinions of his young master. Mr. Graham was very ill, suffering from brain fever, the result of many months of anxiety and

watchfulness over his daughter. The illness had long been pending, and descended upon him with terrible force. He became delirious, raving night and day, until nature was exhausted, and a calm settling upon him, he followed his daughter to the grave.

This second blow, following so closely upon the first, fairly broke me down; a gloom settled upon the house, but nowhere so darkly as upon me. I not only grieved deeply for the great loss I had sustained, but there was the weight of a dark uncertain future hanging over me.

I saw nobody but Roberts until the second funeral was over; and a few days after the event, Mr. Archibald, Roberts, and another servant in livery entered the stable. The latter person seemed to be very deferential to Mr. Archibald, and I saw at once that he was his own servant—a man I had heard Roberts speak of as Mr. Archibald's Hoskins.

'There, that's the nag, Hoskins,' said Mr. Archibald; 'I make you a present of him, instead of a Christmas box by-and-by. He will fetch something for cats'-meat, if for nothing else.'

This unmerited insult was received with an approving laugh from Hoskins; but Roberts, with tears in his eyes, stepped forward and said,—

'If you please, Mr. Archibald, Miss Nellie always said Blossom was not to be sold.'

'Did she?' returned Mr. Archibald. 'And pray what was to be done with him?'

'Master said he would keep him while he lived, and leave enough money to keep him at grass in his old days, if he died before him.'

Oh, kind mistress and worthy master! you have the thanks a horse can give for the noble thought; but alas, it was never to be!

'There was nothing of the sort in his will,' said Mr. Archibald; 'and I do not feel called upon to carry out such a sentimental scheme upon your bare assertion, my lad. Hoskins, the animal is yours; get him out of the way as soon as you can, for I want the stable for my own horses.'

Having thus sealed my fate, he turned upon his heel and went his way. The cold, selfish sentence of Mr. Archibald Graham was carried out. I will make no comment upon the character of this young man, but leave my readers to judge his conduct for themselves. A few hours later I left him and Maythorn Lodge behind me.

Hoskins took me down to Smithfield, where he sold me to the proprietor of an advertising van; and for four months I dragged behind me a huge unsightly structure of light boarding, whereon was pasted the advertisements my master was employed to make known.

Sometimes we puffed a patent pill, warranted to cure every form of suffering known to man; at another time we vaunted the merits of some low wretched comic singer, who did his best nightly to degrade already fallen man; and then this gave way to a wholesale outfitter's declaration that he was the best of tailors; and so we went on, until an Act of Parliament swept advertising vans from the public streets, and my master's trade was ruined.

This was a very wretched time for me: I was badly stabled, badly fed; I was never once decently groomed all the time I was with this man. Sometimes, it is true, he scratched my back with a bit of a curry-comb, and threw a pail or two of water over my legs; but this was

all, and what with the life I led, and the wet weather and the dirt of the streets, I sank down very low and became a poor wretched object indeed.

I was sold again for so small a sum that I will not name it—none who knew poor Blossom in his earliest days would have dreamt that he could have come to such a pass. This buyer was Mr. Crabbe, livery stable keeper and cab proprietor of Hackney Marsh—the last master I shall ever know.

He kept about a dozen horses—eight of them young and in good condition; the rest were pitiable objects like myself, and we were reserved for night work.

I need not tell you that our position in the stable was anything but an enviable one. The young horses turned up their noses at us, and upon the strength of being better fed and better cared for than our wretched selves, treated us with the greatest possible contempt. Mr. Crabbe himself seemed to have no thought or care for us, and never once, from the hour I became his property to the present moment, did he ever bestow a kind word or a caress upon me.

As for my duty—my work as night cab horse—I will speak more of that presently; but just now I must tell of an incident which occurred in the stable, as it bears upon the fate of a friend who is very dear to me—I mean Rip, the noble, handsome Rip.

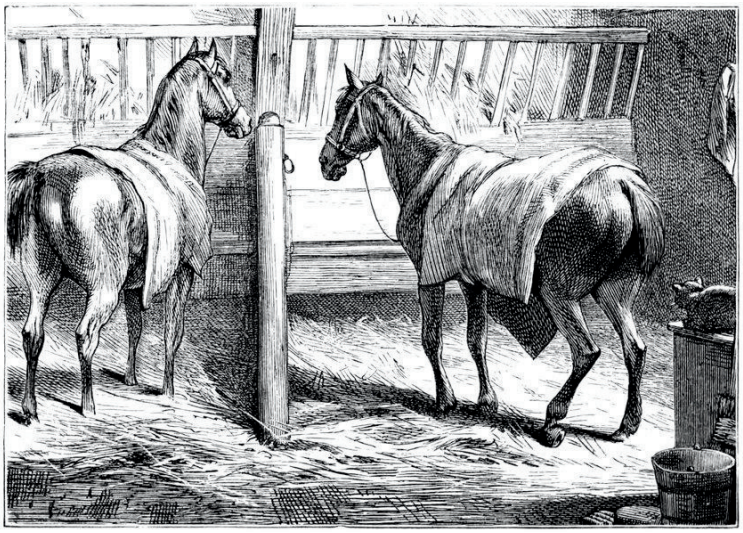
One day, late in the afternoon, Mr. Crabbe brought home a new horse, a young thing about four years of age, which he put in the stall next to mine. I just glanced at him, but made no attempt to open a conversation, as I had endured so many insults and snubbings from the better horses of our stable; and after a time forgetting him, fell into a musing mood. My fancy carried me back, as it often did, to my place of birth, and the paddock and the surrounding scene rose up before me. For a moment the quietude of the sweet place was upon me, and bowing my head I murmured, 'Oh, Upton, Upton! would that I could take these old bones down to your green fields! Would that I could lie down beside your sweet river and give up my life!'

'Who talks of Upton?' said a voice near me; and turning my head I saw the stranger look at me with an inquisitive face.

'I do,' I replied; 'do you know the place?'

'I ought to,' replied the other; 'for I have only just left it, and a bad leave it is for me, I fear. I was reared on Mr. Bayne's farm, and a kinder master never lived.'

I could barely speak for the tumultuous throbbing of my heart, but I managed to stammer out, 'Tell me all you know; is Mr. Bayne alive?' And then I asked for my mother, and the stranger told me what I expected to hear, that she had lived to a good old age, and had died a year ago.



THE TALK IN THE STABLE.

‘And Mr. Bayne?’ I asked again.

‘He is getting into years, but hale and hearty still,’ replied my informant. ‘But just before I came away a sad accident happened to a farmer named Martin. Boxer was his horse, who used to bring him home from market when he had been drinking; but Boxer was getting old and blind, I suppose, and walked out of the road into the mill-pond. Be it as it may, Mr. Martin and Boxer were found drowned together.’

I expressed my sorrow for both master and horse, and then with a palpitating heart I inquired after my old friend Rip.

‘Rip, Rip, let me see,’ said my companion, thoughtfully; ‘an old horse belonging to the Tracey family, is it not?’

It seemed so odd to hear any one speaking of Rip as an old horse: but time had flown since we met, and he, like me, was past his prime. But he could not be so worn-out as I was—his lot had fallen upon smoother places than mine; still he was old, there was no disputing that.

‘A sad accident happened to this Rip,’ continued my informant; ‘a careless groom drove him against another carriage, and a splinter entering his leg, he was lamed for life.’

‘And what has become of him?’ I asked softly, my thoughts running upon knives and guns in an instant.

‘The family with whom he lives are very kind to horses,’ was the reply—‘especially the elder branches. Rip has served them well, I believe, and they have rewarded him by making arrangements for him to end his days in the paddock where he lived when young. His leg will never be of any real service again, but it has ceased to pain him, and he limps about as happy and contented as a horse can be.’

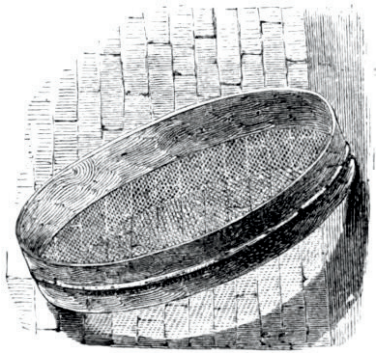
Oh, Rip, my friend, this is good news of you. Long may you live to enjoy your well-earned rest and ease! There was a choking feeling in my throat as I thought of our different lots, but I hope it was not the result of envy. Envy is as bad in a horse as it is in a man.

‘Did he ever speak of a horse named Blossom?’ I ventured to ask softly, after a pause.

‘Very often,’ replied my companion—‘wondering what had become of him—and always in terms of the greatest compassion. I fancy that Blossom is rather an unfortunate horse. Do you know him?’

I did not answer, for my heart was full, and my brain was busy with thinking of my dear old friend, high-spirited noble Rip—and generous too, for he could think of me—poor, simple, vulgar Blossom. I felt very sorry for having neighed so loudly when I met him on the race-course; but he forgave me, and what more could I want?

I ought to have been sleeping that afternoon; but the news concerning Rip drove all thoughts of rest from my brain, and I had not closed my eyes when the ostler came in to harness me for my nightly work.



CHAPTER XII.
EXIT BLOSSOM.

No harder lot could have fallen upon a horse than that which befell me. The night-work of cab horses is bad at the best, but mine was worse than the ordinary lot of these unfortunate creatures. I was driven by a man named Stevens—a coarse, brutal fellow, who could not drive a yard without using the whip and supplementing his cruelty with bitter oaths.

Then my work was in the night, when fallen man shows up at his worst. Oh! the sad scenes I have witnessed! the dreadful things I have heard! When the dark mantle has fallen upon the earth, Vice comes out boldly and walks under the stars as if there were no great Witness of its infamy far above. Then man comes out of the dark alleys and robs and plunders, and does desperate deeds of violence to others who stagger homeward soddened with drink. Then it is we hear the lewd song, the bitter blasphemy, the oath and curse and shriek for help. Then it is that woman, lost to everything but a defiant determination to live on through her shame, crawls about the streets, sinking lower and lower every moment of her life. Do the shameless and vicious think that night screens their evil deeds? Is it possible that they can think it less sinful to act under the starlight than under the broad beams of the midday sun; or is it that vice and folly *cannot*, *dare not* come out and face the pure golden light in the sky? Oh, man! have you forgotten that night was given to rest in, and not

to riot away? Better be in your graves than out and doing the things I have seen you perform.

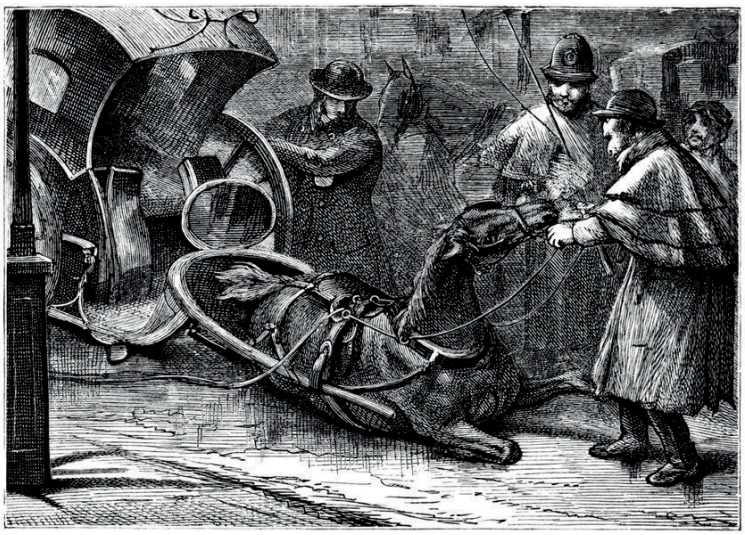
I shrink from any further record of this time—sad and cruel for me from the first, and sad and cruel still; but in the darkness, standing by the hour together in the chill fog, who could marvel that this old body sank under it, and that I am broken in health? I am not so old a horse in actual years; but misfortune, neglect, and ill-usage have brought me to the end of my life long before my time.

Last night, while dragging a fare up Ludgate Hill, my head suddenly swam round, and I staggered and fell. When I came to, there was a small knot of night prowlers around me, and Stevens the driver was kicking my ribs with his heavy boots. I got up somehow, and I staggered on, half-blind, and every bone in my body aching most terribly. The fare left the cab in Cannon Street, and shortly after I fell again. I did not faint, but I lay utterly helpless and exhausted. Stevens kicked me until he was tired; but I could not rise for half an hour or more, and when I did scramble to my feet I could not drag the cab, and Stevens, putting it under shelter, led me home.

I heard him tell Mr. Crabbe what had befallen me, and the livery stable keeper positively *laughed*—think of it, my friends, the man laughed at my misery and the brutality of the driver!

'It must have come sooner or later,' I heard Mr. Crabbe say; 'he has lasted longer than I expected. As you go home tell the knacker to give me a look up to-morrow.'

I heard my sentence almost without a quiver. I was so worn-out, so reduced by pain, so weary of my existence, that I had no wish to exist. Better die a thousand times than live on as I have lived during the past six months.



POOR BLOSSOM'S LAST DAYS.

I was resigned, but with my resignation came a sense of gross injustice. I had toiled all the days of my life for man, and when worn-out and broken, doomed to die in a knacker's

yard! It may be just—man is wiser than I am; but it seemed hard to end one's days in such a place.

In the midst of my gloom a thought arose which gives me consolation to this moment—*I have done my duty*. None of my masters, from the first to the last, can accuse me of having shirked my work or shown the least disposition to vice; and there is a companion thought to it which gives me further comfort—I am sure that many of those who knew me, most of them ignorant of my fate, will speak kindly of me when I am gone, and say a good word for poor Blossom.

I have a hope too—a hope which I hold close to my heart—and that is of Rip, dear, noble Rip, roaming over the paddock I know so well, with the gentle stream flowing at its base, and the old water-mill turning in the sunlight, and the song of the lark and the hum of the bee in his ear, and the sweet-scented clover throwing its perfume into his grateful nostrils. As you wander thus, oh, noble Rip, I hope—ah, *know*—that you will sometimes think of your old friend, who served mankind all his life, and died by the knacker's hand!