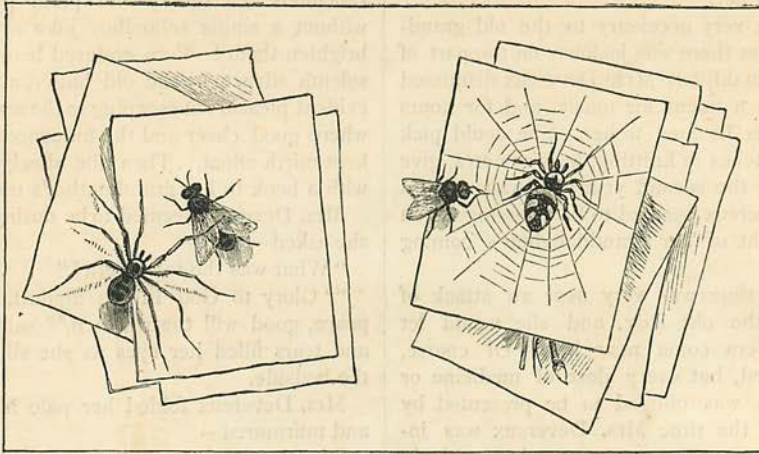


TWO POINTS OF VIEW.



SPIDER: "Sorry it's only a drawing!"

FLY: "Glad it's only a sketch!"

SOME LITTLE ONES OF THE STREET.

THE FLOWER-SELLER.



It was one of those wild wet nights that we have sometimes in the autumn. The steel-blue sky showed cold and bright now and then as dark clouds went slowly

across it, blown by the wind that swept in sudden gusts and caused the rain to drive in sharp showers that lashed the pavement and filled the roadways with little glittering pools.

Standing as near as she could in the shelter of the houses where the lights in a shop window fell upon her little battered hat and thin scanty dress, a girl held a shallow basket made from the lid of a hamper, which hung from her neck by an old and knotted string.

In the basket were a few of such flowers as are to be found in country gardens when the roses have ceased to blow, tied up in small bunches, and looking quite pretty under the gaslight, though the rain and the wind had tumbled them a little.

It was a crowded street, where many people passed on their way to and from a great railway station, and cabs and omnibuses went splashing along at such a rate that it seemed as though somebody must be run over. But yet the moment the rain had ceased the child darted out, and with some of the flowers in her hand was in the roadway, and dodging in and out between the horses and the foot-passengers, reached the other side in a few moments, crying out with her shrill voice—

"Only a penny a bunch! Buy a bunch of me

to-night, sir," she said to a gentleman who was looking in at a window opposite; "buy a bunch of sweet violets, or else a autumn rose for a penny, just to help me to sell out: they're all fresh, sir; do buy a bunch!"

Her quick eyes had seen the opportunity of finding a customer when she ran scuffling across the road in her poor worn shoes. But other eyes as quick had seen it too, and there were soon two other girls, each with violets, three boys, who shouted, "A penny for two wax!" two more who fought with each other while they screamed—"Fourth edish-urn!" and thrust newspapers into the gentleman's waistcoat, and kicked the mud over his shoes with their feet; and a big loutish fellow, who called out, "Yer, yar, sir!" and came dashing up with more newspapers over his shoulder.

Whether it was that she was first, or that there was something in her manner or her little pale, pleading face that made her more attractive than the others—who can tell?—at all events, the gentleman bought two bunches of violets, and seemed to be wondering how he could escape from the eager throng, when the boys, the girls, and the lout suddenly retreated in all directions, scampering like rabbits, and the little flower-seller, hitching her basket under her arm, went quickly along the edge of the footway, and was presently heard several yards off, still crying—"A penny a bunch!" The cause of this hurried retreat was a policeman, who came leisurely along, not seeming to look at any-

body or anything in particular, but with his eyes fixed on something far ahead of him. He held his hands straight down by his sides, as though he carried a heavy weight or a dumb-bell in each of them, and he moved as slowly as though he were out for a stroll, and was just making up his mind where he should go.

But he had seen every one of those children, and the lout, and the gentleman buying the violets, and he knew very well that all of them, except the gentleman and the little flower-seller, had seen *him*.

Perhaps he loitered a little and made that clumping noise with his boots to warn them to get out of the way, and not to annoy people on the pavement. Perhaps he pitied the girl, and went slower that she might have time to take the twopence for the flowers. It is not likely that he wanted to hurt any of them; but if they had not dodged out into the road or retreated round the corner, he would have thought it to be his duty to drop those invisible dumb-bells, and to let the boys feel his great hands boxing their ears, and the girls find themselves pushed and driven out of the bright patch of light of the shops, till they escaped at length into some dark corner.

But our little flower-girl has not gone far. Here she is at the doorway of a large hotel, where some ladies and gentlemen are just alighting from a carriage.

As she cries again—"Violets a penny a bunch!" a young lady says, "Only fancy—violets in London! Do buy some, John, it will remind us of dear old home and the walk in the wood." And one of the gentlemen says, "How much for the lot?"

"There's four bunches left, and you shall have them for threepence," says the little flower-girl as sharp as a needle. "And, oh, sir, would you buy these four roses as well for your button-hole, sir, and give me sixpence, just to get done; they're to-day's flowers, they are, indeed!"

"What do you mean by to-day's flowers?" says

the gentleman. "Did you grow them yourself, or cut them yourself?"

"No, sir, I wish I had. But they was at Coven' Garden Market fresh this mornin', sir, they was really; and if you'd only——"

"There, get along with you," cries the gentleman laughing, and gathering all the flowers into his great hand, he throws a shilling into the basket, and follows his friends into the hotel.

Now what do you think the child does? She is a shrewd little thing, and though, perhaps, not more than twelve years old, looks older, though she is quite small for her age. First she bites the shilling to see if it is a good one, for she can hardly believe in her good fortune. Then she has a sort of little dance all to herself on the pavement, and then she slings her basket over her back, with her thumb in the knotted string to keep it from cutting her neck. She is just about to trudge off when the gentleman comes back again down the hotel steps, where he lights a cigar.

"What, not gone yet, little woman?" he says kindly. "Well, so much the better; I want to ask you something about those violets and where it is that you get them from."

"They was honest come by," says the child, looking rather frightened. "I wouldn't go to steal anything, sir, and mother and me was at the market for 'em this mornin'."

"Yes, yes," replies the gentleman, "I dare say you're honest; I don't mean that, but I want you to tell me how you little flower-sellers live and fight your way in the streets of this big city. So begin with—what is your name?"

"Alice, sir, Alice Turner; and mother, an' Susy, an' little Jim, an' baby lives in Pulbrook's Rents, by Saint Luke's."

"And your father, what about him?"

"Well, you see, sir, father couldn't do much for ever so long after he broke his leg off a scaffold, where he fell from one day, and when he died——"



A LITTLE LONDON FLOWER-SELLER.

"Oh, is he dead? Poor child!"

"Oh, yes, sir, two year and more he's been dead, and mother *do* find it hard sometimes."

"I dare say. But how do you manage?"

There is no need to repeat all the questions the gentleman asks her, so we will listen to Alice Turner's story as though she told straight off without interruption how the little flower-girls fight the Battle of Life in the streets.

"You see, sir," says Alice, "it ain't always weather such as it's been to-night; but when it rains hard, or in the winter-time on cold foggy mornin's, them that has to go all the way to Covent Garden finds it very hard sometimes, because we have to get there so early—as early as four o'clock in the summer, and before daylight now, if we want to have the pick of what flowers is sold to such as us. In the bright warm summer it's often pleasant, though it's a good way to walk; but when you get to the market itself down by Wellin'ton Street, it's almost as good as the country, I should say; not that I've been in the country, except with our Sunday-school in the vans; but there couldn't be more flowers than there is under the great glass roof in the flower-market, only, of course, it might be more nice to see 'em growing out of the ground in a real garden with trees and birds and that, instead of being brought in carts from the nurs'ries—mother says they call the gardens where flowers is grown for the market nurseries, just as though the roses an' vi'lets and such was babies! When I go with mother to Covent Garden of a morning we take a bit of bread-an'-butter with us, an' get there early when the flowers is being brought in under the great glass roof in big baskets. There *is* a crowd there, I can tell you, and it's hard to know what to buy when we haven't much money; but mother she lays out a shillin' or two in one sort or another, according to whether she means to make 'em up for gentlemen's coats or for ladies to wear in their frocks; but that's only when she's going out herself to sell 'em at the Exchange or at the doors of the theatres and such like, and they're mostly more than a penny—the best of 'em. What we buy for me is vi'lets, or whatever comes cheapest, or else she gives me such as don't make up so well and can be sold for a penny. It takes a good while to lay out a little money, I can tell you, when you have to think how many small bunches and how many good button-holes you can make of the big bunches of one sort or another that you pay for to the market people. Often when mother and me have got our stock for the day we're tired enough, and if there's a penny or two to spare we're glad of a drop of hot coffee at the stall. But there's not always that, for you see, unless we have a good

day and sell out like I've done to-night, thank'ee, sir, we don't have much to go to market with, and that's where it is we're very bad off sometimes, and we have to go short with only a bit o' bread-and-drippin' for dinner, and perhaps not that some days till we get the money together again. But if we have a good mornin' at the market, we set down an' rest a bit in some quiet place near the market, an' mother undoes the big bunches and sorts 'em out into little ones; and then she calls home to see after baby, and to give 'em their breakfasts, or else I do; and then, after tidyin' up our room a bit, there's to see what can be done for little Jim and Susy's dinner, and mother or me has to do that, and to mind baby while Jim be's at school some mornin's; and in the afternoons mother and me is both out till the evenin', and Jim takes care of baby and Susy, and has the cold tea from breakfast, if there is any, and the same with what bread's left from dinner. It's mother's early night to-night, and I do thank you, sir, that I can take such a good day's work to her. It's been a hard day to-day, because of the rain; and us girls, when we're little like me, and not strong, get pushed about and interfered with so much. It's hard to keep from losing the money we take sometimes, and then we mustn't keep still a minute in one place, because the police won't let us; and it's often we lose a penny or so, and get our flowers thrown down in the mud so that they won't sell, through tipsy people knocking our baskets over; or else we get turned away through the people that keep shops not liking us about the doors. I do sometimes hope that little Susy won't have to go out like me. As to Jim, he do go out with water-creases sometimes when money's low, but mother hopes he'll get into the brigade, sir, and be a polish-your-shoes boy, for they often make good money, I can tell you; but he can't, of course, till Susy's old enough to mind baby."

"Well, you must run home to your supper now, poor little woman," said the gentleman to Alice, "and remember I shall be here for three mornings; and tell your mother you are to bring your best bunch of flowers here each morning till I leave. I shall look out for you at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"Trust me not to forget," said little Alice, as she once more put her basket over her shoulder. She was half across the road before she had said "Good night, sir," and the last thing she said was, "I hope the shop ain't shut up; see if I don't take home two hot sausages for our supper, and a new loaf!"

And very few of the little flower-girls in the street that night had been as fortunate as Alice Turner.

THOMAS ARCHER.