

SOME LITTLE ONES OF THE STREET.

THE MATCH-SELLER.



If you were to go in search of the place where Michael Macarty and his sister Jemima live you would take a long time to find it. You would first have to ask the way to the Tower of London, and next to turn up a street close to the Mint, where all our money is made, and then you would come into a very strange neighbourhood, full of little dingy shops, where they sell second-hand clothes, and patched boots, and old furniture, and cooked meat, and great coarse loaves with raisins stuck in them so that they look as though they were pretending to be plum cakes. The children of the streets in this part of London have to make a meal of a slice of this bread, and are very glad to get it. Sometimes, as a great treat, they have a penn'orth of fried fish, or a saucer of pickled whelks from a stall. On Sundays there may be a bit of meat for them, if enough wages have been earned in the week, but mostly bread-and-dripping and a little tea or cocoa are their meals, with now and then some soup or porridge, if their mothers know how to make it and there is money enough to buy coals for a fire.

Mrs. Macarty is more clever than some of her neighbours, and much better off, too, or at least she *was* better off when her husband was at work. He was a carman, and earned eighteen shillings a week, before he had a wooden leg.

Poor Macarty lost his leg—his flesh leg, I mean—through an act of courage and kindness. One of the stable-keepers in the yard belonging to his masters had left a lantern burning in a corner of a stable, and when the horses were shut in for the night after a hard day's work, one of them—a fresh, young horse—began to tramp about his box and to kick up the straw. He had been tied up to his stall by a halter, but he contrived to get this loose and to back out. This disturbed the other horses, and one of them got loose, too, and gave a kick that overturned the lantern and broke the glass. The lamp inside was overturned, and set fire to some loose straw, and in a few minutes the whole of the great range of stables was full of smoke and flame.

Jim Macarty had been out late with his van, delivering goods at the other end of London. As soon as he reached the door he saw in a moment what was the matter, and rang the stable bell as loudly as he could make its iron clapper sound. The man who had the keys was at the public-house, three doors off, but the sound of the bell brought him and his mates running

into the yard. The only thing that could be done was to open the stable doors and let the horses out, but when the doors had been unlocked and wrenched open the flames that had been flickering and stealing up the woodwork and into the mangers, shot up with a roar and a fierce hiss, and set light to the hay in the loft above, so that the roof began to crackle, and great fiery flakes to fall on the horses' backs, as the poor creatures stamped, and neighed, and kicked the sides of their wooden boxes into splinters. The young one, who had first done the mischief, was rearing and kicking the wall with its hoofs, and galloping from end to end of the small space between the stalls and the stable wall. Till that horse could be got out nothing more could be done, and nobody liked to try it, for the flames were leaping through the roof, and there was some danger of falling beams.

Jim Macarty unwound his woollen comforter from his neck, dipped it into a pail of water, and bound it round his face over his mouth. Then, holding his head down, he made a rush for the door nearest to where the horse was kicking and plunging. The men outside saw him leap at the animal's head; saw him clutch the halter and almost pull the brute out by main force, then they saw him sway off his feet—just outside the stable door—saw the horse lash out with its hind hoofs; and there lay poor Jim senseless on the ground, as the beast went careering down the yard, and then stopped close to the gate, trembling and pawing the stones.

Jim Macarty, poor fellow, lay in the hospital for many weeks, and his leg was so badly hurt that the doctors told him it must be taken off. That was how Jim came to wear a wooden leg. All the time he was ill his wife went to see him as often as visitors were allowed at the hospital, and sat by his side, and sometimes she took Michael and little Jemima; and the poor woman always had a smile on her broad, good-humoured face, though she found it very hard to keep her home together, for Jim's employers paid him no wages while he was lying there, and when she went to the office she found that one of the men had said Jim Macarty was the only man in the stable-yard when the fire broke out, and it was believed that he had been the cause of it. It was very likely the man who left the lighted lantern among *the straw who said this*, but poor Jim was left unnoticed. Mrs. Macarty went out washing at a laundry a good

way from home, and all she could do was to leave enough food for Mike and little Jemima till she came home to a late tea, and by that time both of the children had left school and gone out to their work—for they both became match-sellers while their father was in the hospital. Michael went to the boys' school belonging to the church round the corner, and Jemima to the infant school, but they left early every day, and after eating their slice of bread-and-dripping, and drinking their mug of cocoa that Jemima made warm in a saucepan over their landlady's fire, they left the key of their rooms with the landlady herself, and went down to the city, where Mike's cry of "A penny for two—whacks!" soon sounded quite bold, and made people from the country wonder what in the world he meant by it, till they heard Jemima, who had caught the way of crying out in her shrill little voice, "Buy a box o' liarts! Wax liarts, two boxes a penny!"

Their poor mother didn't at all like their going into the streets, but what was she to do? She had to go about to seek work at first, and then her great hope was to save a few shillings, so that by the time her husband came out of the hospital, and wanted good food, she could give him some, and he might get strong.

It was a little German boy who first showed Mike how to become a match-seller. Poor little fellow, he lived with his brother, a travelling glazier, who often used to starve and beat him, and their room was in the same court, so that good-natured Mrs. Macarty had often given the ragged dirty child a slice of bread or a drop of soup, for she was a good manager, and made soup and porridge, and nice warm comfortable meals, on less money than other people spent for little scraps of ready-cooked meat. The poor German boy was grateful, and when he heard of Jim Macarty's accident he offered to take care of Mike and Jemima, and to show them how to buy and how to sell "Two wax a penny."

Some of the boys and girls in this trade sold "vesuvians," or "flamers" as they are called—matches with a great black knob at the end, and a red dot on the black knob which lights directly you strike it. These are for lighting pipes or cigars in the open air, but they are of no use for lighting gas or candles, and are not so neat or in such small waistcoat-pocket boxes as the wax lights, which are now sold by most of the match-sellers.

Of course, some of the people who deal in boxes of lights go to the great factories in the east of

London, and there buy a great many dozens at a time, some of them of the best quality, and others what may be called "wasters," that is, matches that are not quite perfect, but yet which mostly light pretty well—matches that are not of the same length, or have got a little damp in making, or do not "flame readily," but yet good enough for common purposes. Of course many of these go to the match-sellers in the streets, and can be sold very cheaply, but most of the little match-sellers are obliged to go to the dealers for them.

Mike and Jemima, who only had sixpence between them, were taken by the German boy to a woman in



LITTLE LONDON MATCH-SELLERS.

a narrow street not far from Whitechapel, where they each bought nine boxes of wax lights for twopence-halfpenny. So you see the woman, who had probably bought them of the makers for a little more than half the money, charged a farthing and the ninth part of a farthing for each of the nine boxes. Then away went the three little merchants, and Mike and Jemima contrived to sell out their stock at the price of two boxes a penny, and so took home tenpence instead of the sixpence they had brought out. The next day they had a shilling, and then the German boy, who knew all about it, took them to a shop in Houndsditch, where the foreign wax lights that are brought all the way from Germany and Italy are sold. There they bought four dozen

boxes for a shilling, and that night they were so fortunate that they sold them all, and as many gentlemen only took one box and gave a penny all the same when they saw poor little Jemima's pleading face, the two children actually took home two shillings and eightpence instead of the shilling that they had brought out.

When they had earned as much as four shillings Mrs. Macarty made that their capital to work with, and by the time their father was out of the hospital they had become quite well known in one of the busy city streets.

The four or five shillings a week earned by match-selling helped to pay for the beef tea and broth that were to make Jim Macarty strong again, and the two children soon had the happiness of seeing him able to walk. He could go up and down stairs, though his wooden leg made a great thumping, till he covered the end of it with a pad of leather. Then he went out to look for work, for he was anxious to take Mike and Jemima from the streets. In this he was quite right, for match-selling is a poor trade, and so many friendless neglected children and homeless women take to it that it is only the next thing to begging. Some poor creatures only pretend to wish to sell the two or three battered boxes of lights which they hold in their hands as an excuse for asking for pence. Worse still, there are scores of little ones who are driven out into the cold, and wet streets to sell these boxes of lights, that the money they take may be spent in drink. This is the painful side of the story, but there are some who, like Mike and Jemima, take to the business to help to earn money for the family, and then if they are quick and careful, and keep out of bad company, they are often able to go to the factory at the East End, and buy a gross of wax lights and vesuvians, so that they make a larger profit than if they bought second-hand of the dealers who sell them by the dozen.

Mike was standing at the corner of Cheapside, near the General Post Office, one rainy evening, wondering whether he would be able to afford a whole gross of matches the next day, and waiting for Jemima, who was on the other side of the road. Presently a "hansom" cab drove up close to the edge of the pavement, and he ran forward to open the door for a gentleman who was seated inside. The gentleman had an umbrella up in front of him, and what with this and a leather bag that he brought out with him he would have found it difficult to get out if the boy had not been ready to help him, and to keep his coat from the muddy wheel.

The passenger had stepped into the doorway of a shop to find the money for the fare, and perhaps two or three pennies for Mike, when the cabman

said roughly, "Now then, young feller, just you shut them doors again, or else the seat 'll get wet."

Mike tucked his match-tray more tightly under his arm, and had just jumped on the iron step of the cab when the horse made a start, and in a moment the boy was flying into the gutter under the animal's feet. There was a small crowd in a moment, but not before a small girl was seen scudding across the road, not before poor Mike had contrived somehow to scramble from under the horse's hoofs, and to lie breathless amidst his boxes of wax lights on the pavement. His face was bleeding, and one of his arms hung loose, but he could just summon courage to call out "All right, Mima!" and then he staggered to his feet towards the doorway.

"Hope you ain't broke no bones, young 'un," said the rough cabman, "becos if you have, just jump in and I'll drive you to the 'orspital."

But the passenger had led Mike into the shop, and somebody had brought him a glass of water and some clean water in a bowl to wash his face.

"I think I can get home to mother," he said.

"And where *is* your home?" said the gentleman, taking out a card and a pencil. Mike told him, and then he went out to the cabman.

"Look here my man," he said. "You must drive this poor lad home, and I'll pay the fare. He lives just behind Whitechapel Church."

"There, you give *him* the fare," said the cabman, "and I'll drive him for nothing, and the gal too, for it was partly my fault, and I'm a-going that way to put this wicious horse o' mine up."

So Mike was helped into the hansom cab with half-a-crown clenched in his hand that wasn't hurt, and he and Jemima rode home in state.

He couldn't go out match-selling for some days—and, indeed, neither he nor Jemima went again—for the gentleman who had been in the cab called to see him the very next afternoon, and again the next week; and Mrs. Macarty, who had been downstairs to open the door for him, came back with tears in her eyes, and sat down by Mike's bed.

"Why, whatever's the matter, mother?" said he.

"Don't mind me, Micky," said the poor woman; "it's for joy, my boy. The gentleman's been asking all about father, and if his words come true, we shall go to live in the City, where father's to be hall-porter and care-taker at a big house, where it's all offices but the top floor, and I'm to be cleaner, and you and Jemima—oh! oh! oh!" and here the poor soul went off again into crying and laughing together.

But the best of it was, it *did* come true, and now Jim Macarty's wooden leg with the leather pad may be heard going with a soft thud up and down the stone passages of a great building in the very centre of the City.

THOMAS ARCHER.