

CHIMNEY-SWEEPS, PAST AND PRESENT.

BY WILLIAM H. RIDEING.

THE stranger in Charleston is sometimes startled by a long-drawn, plaintive cry that seems scarcely human. On cold wintry mornings, when the city is awaking, it is heard coming from the house-tops with strange distinctness. It sounds like the voice of some great bird hovering amid the curling smoke. "O weep, wee-e-ep, wee-e-e-ep, weep O!" And it is repeated several times before one can find out whence it comes. The people of the city pass on without heeding it, and only those to whom it is a novelty pause to gaze over the wide roofs of slate and iron, in search of the throat that utters it. Far above the street can be seen a negro boy, with a round little head and a pair of narrow shoulders, creeping out of a chimney into the sunlight, singing his wild song as he comes, and brandishing a black brush with frantic energy. It is the chimney-sweep, and, as soon as his song is done, he descends again into the opening, like a genie disappearing in the flame of a wonderful lamp at the call of his master, the magician.

Later in the day, you may see the same little fellow again, moving about among ordinary mortals, but looking all the more forlorn in contrast with the bright faces of the nicely dressed people, who gather in their proud skirts as they pass too near him on the street. He looks more like an imp from some country beneath the earth, than a living boy with warm blood coursing through his veins. Nature made him black, and his occupation has deepened the shade. The soot is thick upon him—over his hands, neck, face and clothes, and deep in the roots of his crisp, curly hair. All the white about him is in his rolling eye, which has a half-comical expression mingling with its queer pathos. Who would think of associating with him, I wonder except another of his own sort? He is an absolute outcast, and as he slouches along, beating the pavement with his brush, few pitying glances are cast upon him. But he has friends of his own, comrades in his sooty trade, who love his society dearly and welcome the appearance of his dim face with a glad smile.

These three that you see in the picture are fellow-craftsmen of his, such as you may meet in Charle-

ton any day, though all are not so fat and happy. Perhaps they wanted to honor the occasion of their visit to the photographer's, and banqueted and wiped their faces with their sleeves beforehand.

Anthracite (or hard) coal makes little or no soot, and it is only where bituminous (or soft) coal is used that chimney-sweeps are needed. Soot, I must tell you furthermore, is simply condensed smoke, and is rich in valuable chemical substances. If it is allowed to accumulate, it is apt to take fire,



CHARLESTON SWEEPS. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

and hence the necessity of keeping chimneys clear of it.

In Pittsburgh, and all through the far West, the chimneys have to be swept twice a year; but the sweeps do not ascend them. A stiff brush is thrust up instead, fastened to long poles, which fit into each other like the branches of a fishing-rod. The old custom was exceedingly cruel, and it has been done away with throughout America, except in Charleston and Philadelphia. A gentleman tells me that he saw an old man escorting some boy

chimney-sweeps through the streets of the latter city very lately, and he believes they are there still.

Twenty or thirty years ago, it was a common thing in New York to see mites of boys following their masters in the street, or issuing from the chimney-tops with their peculiar wail. Some of them were not more than ten years of age, and they looked so wretched that when a child was ill-behaved its mother or nurse would threaten to give it to the chimney-sweeps.

It was the worst use to which boys could be put, and was even more terrible in its results than coal-

mining. The soft, fine powder suffocated many to death, and planted the seeds of consumption in others. I found in an old book, the other day, an account of a little sweep who was driven up a hot chimney by his brutal master. He cried out that he was burning, but continued to ascend, until he reached a point where the heat was so intense that he could go no farther. Nor could he descend. He was caught in a turn of the chimney, and was slowly suffocated. Just before he died, his employer called to him, and asked him, with an oath, what he was doing. "All right, master," he answered faintly. "I am caught up here and can't get out; but don't mind me. I'm ready to die." When he was extricated, his body showed what he had endured, but his face gave no sign of suffering.

It was as a proof that they had gone the entire length of the chimney that the sweeps were required to utter their cry on reach-

ing the top. The hard masters who depended on their earnings were much relieved when, after a long silence, they heard the sad "weep! weep!" of their little slaves echoing over the roofs.

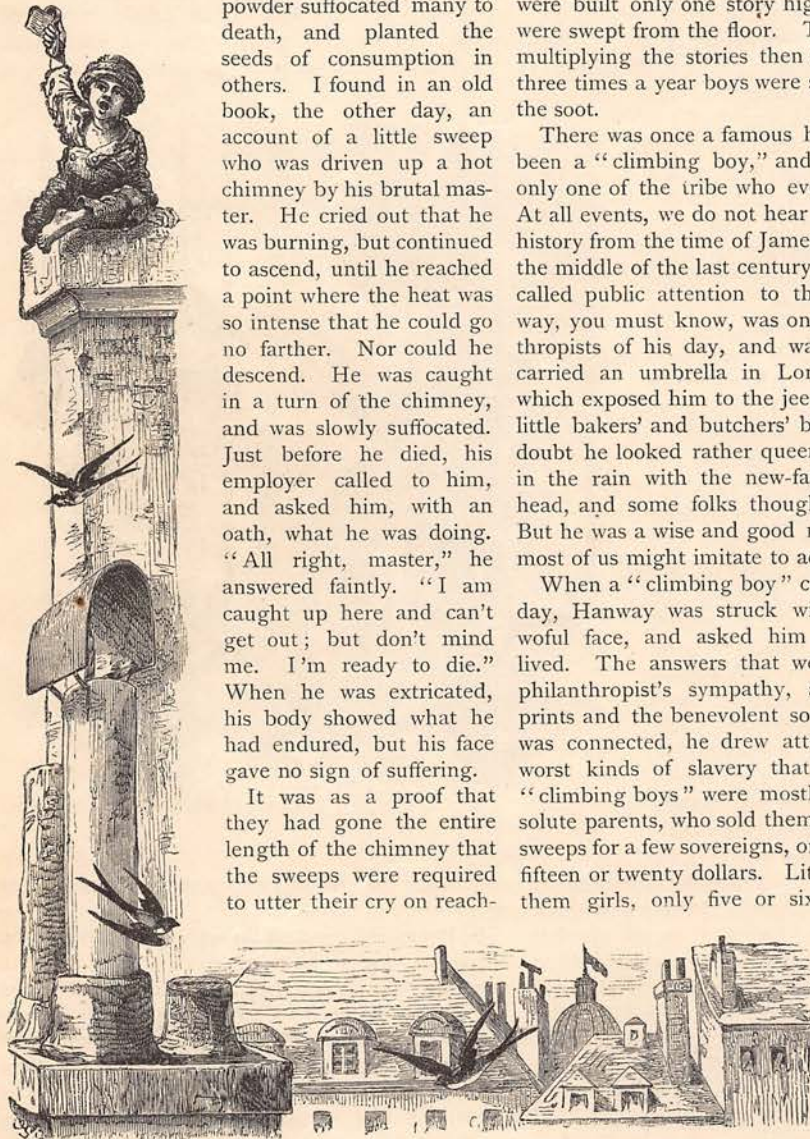
In Germany and France, small boys are still employed in cleaning chimneys. In Great Britain a law has been passed forbidding the practice; but less than fifteen years ago the sweeps, or "climbing boys," were very numerous; and I can remember seeing a bit of a lad crawling out of one of the tallest chimneys in London, such as you see in the picture on this page.

Until the reign of James the First, the houses were built only one story high, and the chimneys were swept from the floor. The Scotch fashion of multiplying the stories then came in, and twice or three times a year boys were sent up to sweep down the soot.

There was once a famous highwayman who had been a "climbing boy," and I think he was the only one of the tribe who ever became notorious. At all events, we do not hear more about them in history from the time of James the First until about the middle of the last century, when Jonas Hanway called public attention to their condition. Hanway, you must know, was one of the great philanthropists of his day, and was the man who first carried an umbrella in London, a performance which exposed him to the jeers of all the impudent little bakers' and butchers' boys in the city. No doubt he looked rather queer as he trotted along in the rain with the new-fangled thing over his head, and some folks thought him utterly crazy. But he was a wise and good man, living a life that most of us might imitate to advantage.

When a "climbing boy" came to his house, one day, Hanway was struck with the poor fellow's woful face, and asked him how and where he lived. The answers that were made excited the philanthropist's sympathy, and, through public prints and the benevolent societies with which he was connected, he drew attention to one of the worst kinds of slavery that ever existed. The "climbing boys" were mostly the children of dissolute parents, who sold them to the men chimney-sweeps for a few sovereigns, or, in American money, fifteen or twenty dollars. Little creatures, some of them girls, only five or six years of age, were

compelled to ascend chimneys—and, indeed, the smaller the child the more valuable he or she was, as some of the flues were less than a foot square. The traffic was so ex-



tensive that we wonder how the officers of the law never came to hear of it. Children who wandered away from their homes often were kidnapped and carried to a remote part of the country, where the robbers sold them into bondage. Their own clothes were taken from them, and some black rags thrown over them, so that when the soot was spread over their pretty little faces, no one could recognize them.

The novices had the greatest dread of ascending the chimney for the first time, and there are several instances, of undoubted truth, in which the little fellows were violently thrust in by their masters and driven up by a fire lighted under them. This seems too horrible for belief, but it was sworn to by a master chimney-sweep before a committee of the British House of Commons. The same man declared that he did not use his own apprentices in that manner, and that when the chimney was small and the boy hesitated about ascending, he simply used a stick or his fist!

Sometimes the beginner was instructed at the house of his master before real duty was required of him. An older boy would follow him up a chimney and teach him how to climb by pressing the knees and elbows against the sides of the flue. It was a most painful operation, and the skin would be torn from the child's arms and feet before he had nearly reached the top. By striving very hard he would probably succeed, but not until he had tumbled down several times and alighted on the shoulders of his stouter companion, who always kept himself firmly fixed in expectation of such a mishap. Every time he fell he had to begin anew, and, no matter how sore he was, his master forced him to reach the top.

The little chimney-sweeps of London were turned out of their straw beds and driven into the streets during the earliest hours of the morning. No warm breakfast was supplied to them; only a crust of stale bread. I remember reading in some book of two whom its author saw standing at the gate of a house at six o'clock one snowy morning. They were barefooted and shivering, and in vain they rang the bell to awake the occupants. The contrast between their sable hue and the yet unruffled snow that mantled the city streets was a more pathetic sight than the good author could endure, and he hurried away to his chambers, with tears in his eyes, after bestowing a sixpenny bit on each of them. I have often seen like unfortunates in the streets of Liverpool, and my heart has been filled with pity for them.

A story is told, that a very small boy, not more than four years of age, was once sent up a chimney in a country-house at Bridlington, Yorkshire, and that he tumbled down and hurt himself so severely

that the young ladies of the house took him from his master and nursed him themselves. Some food was brought to him, and, seeing a silver fork, he was quite delighted, exclaiming, "Papa had such forks as those." He also said that the carpet in the drawing-room was like "papa's," and, when a silver watch was shown to him, he declared that "papa's" was a gold one. At night he would not go to bed until he had said the Lord's Prayer, which he knew perfectly, and he lay awake for some hours comparing the furniture in the room to that in his own home. When he was asked how he came to leave his papa, he said that he was gathering flowers in his mother's garden, and that



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a woman came in and asked him if he liked riding. He said "yes," and she told him that he should ride with her. She put him on a horse in a lane near by, drove with him to the sea-side, and carried him on board a vessel.

The story does not tell what became of the little fellow afterward, and we can only hope that he was restored to his parents, or that the young ladies at the country-house adopted him.

The son of one of the noblest families in England was kidnapped by chimney-sweeps, and was restored to his home by an incident quite as romantic as any I have ever read of in novels. He was sold several times, and at last fell into the hands of a

man who was engaged to clean the chimneys of the house next door to that where his parents lived. He ascended one of the flues and reached the roof; but in descending he got into the wrong opening, and soon arrived in a magnificent bed-chamber of the adjoining house. The white sheets, the pillows trimmed with lace, and the splendid damask curtains, brought irresistible sleep into his eyes, and he threw himself upon the bed, forgetful of his tyrant master and the punishment that might be in store for him. While he dreamed there in blissful peace, looking like a bit of ebony inlaid in satin-wood, the housekeeper entered the room, and recognized him as the lost child of her lady and mistress.

During her life, his mother, the Honorable Mrs. Montague, celebrated each anniversary of his recovery by a grand dinner of roast beef and plum-pudding, given to the "climbing boys" at her house in Portman Square. The little fellows were all well scrubbed and freshly dressed for the occasion, and each was presented with a shilling. But when she died the festival was no more observed, and the sweeps sadly missed her kind face and the annual dinner.

"And is all pity for the poor sweeps fled,
 Since Montague is numbered with the dead?
 She who did once the many sorrows weep,
 That met the wanderings of the woe-worn sweep;
 Who, once a year, bade all his griefs depart,
 On May-day's morn would doubly cheer his heart.
 Washed was his little form, his shirt was clean,
 On that one day his real face was seen;
 His shoeless feet now boasted pumps—and new,
 The brush and shovel gayly held to view!
 The table spread, his every sense was charmed,
 And every savory smell his bosom warmed;
 His light heart joyed to see such goodly cheer,
 And much he longed to see the mantling beer.
 His hunger o'er—the scene was little heaven!
 If riches thus can bless, what blessings might be given.
 But she is gone! None left to soothe their grief,
 Or, once a year, bestow their meed of beef!"

The organization of a society to suppress the use of "climbing boys" by master-sweeps was the result of Hanway's efforts, and an instrument called the "Sandiscope," for cleaning high chimneys, was

invented. The "Sandiscope" consisted of a large brush made of a number of small whalebone sticks, fastened into a round ball of wood. It was thrust up a chimney by means of hollow cylinders or tubes, with a long cord running through them; and it was worked up and down as each joint was added, until it reached the top. It was then shortened joint by joint, and again worked in a like manner. The master-sweeps refused to use it, however, and it was not until Parliament passed a law in 1829 that the little slaves were emancipated.

There are considerably over a thousand sweeps in London to-day, but they are all grown men and women, and the little fellows are no longer seen.

I ought, in conclusion, to mention James White, who was such another friend to the "climbing boys" as Mrs. Montague. Once a year, on St. Bartholomew's Day, he gathered together all the sootkins in London, and treated them to a dinner. Charles Lamb, the gifted essayist, knew him and loved him, and I will end this account by quoting his exquisite description of the feast:

"O, it was a pleasure to see the sable youngers lick in the unctuous meat, with his (White's) more unctuous sayings! How he would fit the tit-bits to the puny mouths, reserving the lengthier links of sausages for the seniors! How he would intercept a morsel even in the jaws of some young desperado, declaring it 'must to the pan again to be browned, for it was not fit for a gentleman's eating!' How he would recommend this slice of white bread, or that piece of kissing crust, to a tender juvenile, advising them all to have a care of cracking their teeth, which were their best patrimony! How gently he would deal about the small ale, as if it were wine, naming the brewer, and protesting, if it were not good, he should lose their custom; with a special recommendation to wipe the lips before drinking! Then we had our toasts—'The King,' 'The Cloth,' and, for a crowning sentiment, 'May the brush supersede the laurel!' All these, and fifty other fancies, which were rather felt than comprehended by his guests, would he utter, standing upon the tables, and prefacing every sentiment with a 'Gentlemen, give me leave to propose so and so,' which was a prodigious comfort to these young orphans; every now and then stuffing into his mouth (for it did not do to be squeamish on these occasions) indiscriminate pieces of those recking sausages, which pleased them mightily, and was the savoriest part, you may believe, of the entertainment.

"James White is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased. He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died—of my world, at least. His old clients look for him among the pens; and, missing him, reproach the altered feast of St. Bartholomew, and the glory of Smithfield departed forever."



"SHIVERING AT THE GATE."