The King of Diamonds

BY LOUIS TRACEY.

Author of Wings of The Morning, The Pillar of Light, The Great Mogul, Karl Grier.

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CHAPTER I.

No. 3, Johnson's Mews.

"There no hope, doctor ?"

"Absolutely none—now."

If he had gone to the—the workhouse infirmary—would she have liv-

The doctor paused. The gulp before the fateful word was not lost on him. With professional severity, and be-stowing some care on the buttoning of

"I am surprised," he said, "that an intelligent woman like your mother should encourage your feelings of—er vengeance toward — er— Constance. My boy, have you no relatives or friends ?"

"No, sir. We are alone in the world."

"Then hard up, eh ?"

The boy dug a hand into a pocket and stolid indifference of despair produced two shillings and some pennies. He picked out the silver, and the man reddened in protest. "You must be stupid. Philip. That is your name, is it not ? When I want anything I will ask for it. Your mother needs a nurse, wine, chicken broth. You are old enough to realize that a doctor practicing in a neighborhood like this might want such things as eggs and whistle for them. But in the infirmary they are provided by the State."

"Would my mother have lived had she consented to be taken there a week ago ?"

Perhaps the man wondered at the persistence of the questioner, a bright-looking active boy of fifteen, clothed in worn clothes too small for him and wearing an old pair of boots two sizes too large. The strong, face, pinched with vigils and pain, the large, earnest, heavy eyes, the lips, quivering with resolute compression over a mouth indicated great strength of character, appealed far more to the doctor than a whimpering terror with the children of the poor usually have the grim vision of death.

He wrestle with the glove ceased, and a kindly hand rested on Phillip's shoulder.

"No," came the quiet answer. "May God help you, she would not have liv-ed."

"That does not help anybody," was the startling retort.

The doctor was shocked, visibly so. "It is a foolish and wicked statement," he said sternly. "Do not let another hear such awful words. Your mother lived and will die a true saint. I have never met a woman with her natural charm and real refinement. She has suffered so much that she merits the life eternal. It is a sin to be not a punishment. Cast away such terrible thoughts; go, rather kneel by her side in prayer."

For an instant the gerat brown eyes looked fiercely at him.

"Do you pray that my mother shall be taken away from me ?"

"I pray that, if it be God's will."

A storm of passion yielded to utter helplessness. The boy again drew forth hi stiny store of money. "Sir," he said, "I can buy some small amount of wine. In the shops they sell all things in tins that make chicken broth, don't they ? I have a fire and a kettle. Would you mind attending to—"

"There, there! You go to your mother and endeavor to cheer her up. I will see what I can do. What! Do you argue with me ? Go at once, I insist. Listen, she is calling you."

In that poor tenement there were no servants. A rickety staircase, crudely built against the retaining wall of the living room on the ground floor, led by ply to an apartment above, illuminated in an opening that served as a trapdoor. The walls, unpaneled, were well provided with shelves and pegs. The back door was opened with a latch, a contrivance rarely seen in the London of to-day. The front window looked out into a dismally-paved court girt by tumble-down stables. A smaller window at the back revealed a dismal yard hemmed in by lofty walls. Although no more than a stone's throw removed from the busy Mile End Road, the place was singularly quiet. It was the deadly dead, and only waited the coming of men with pickaxes and carts to sweep away the ruins.

The boy heard his name whispered rather than spoken. The sound galvanized him into vivid consciousness. "Yes, doctor," he said, earnestly, "you will come back ?"

"Yes; within half an hour. Tell your mother to expect me."

Then he ran up the stairs. Long practice had enabled him to move with the minimum noise. It was pitiful to see the manner in which he crept, with stealthy activity, into the smoking loft above. Here, at first glance, there was an astonishing degree of comfort. Odd pieces of worn carpet, neatly joined, covered the floor. Two windows, facing only to the front of the dwelling, were curtained. The white-washed walls were almost hidden by cuttings from the colored periodicals published during the previous Christmas season. A screen divided the room into two compartments, each containing a tiny bed. On one of these, propped up with pillows, lay the wasted figure of a woman over whose face the shadows were falling fast. The extreme thinness, the waxen pallor, the delicate texture of debilitated skin and unnatural brilliancy of the eyes, gave her a remarkably youthful appearance. This fantastic trick of death in life accenuated the resemblance between mother and son. The boy, too, was sharply outlined by hunger, and, in the fading light of a March day, the difference between the dread tokens of approaching collapse and the transient effects of a scanty regimen on a vigorous youth was not readily distinguishable.

"Do you want anything, mother dear ?" said the boy, laying his hands tenderly on the clammy forehead.

"Only to ask you, Phil, what it was that the doctor told you."

The voice was low and sweet—the diction that of an educated woman. The boy, too, though his tones were strong and harsh, spoke with the accent of good breeding. His manner and words gained some distinction from a slight touch of French elegance and precision. This was only noticeable in repose. When excited, or moved to a deep feeling, the Continental veneer acquired at the Lycee in Dieppe instantly vanished, and he became the strenous, emphatic Briton he undoubtedly was by birth and breeding.

"He said, dearest, that what you wanted was some good wine — nice things to eat. He is an awfully fine chap, and I am afraid I was rude to him, but he didn't seem to mind it a bit, and he is coming back soon with chicken broth and port wine, and I don't know what."

His brave words were well meant, but the mother's heart understood him too well to be deceived. A thin hand caught his wrist and feebly drew him nearer.

"You say you were rude to him, Phil ? How can that be possible ? What did you say or do to warrant such a description ?"

He hesitated for a moment. With rare self control in one so young, he fiercely determined not to communicate his own despair to his mother. So he laughed gently.

"We are so jolly hard up, you know, and it sounded strange in my ears to talk about expensive luxuries which I could not buy. He has often told us, dear, that you would be better cared for in the infirmary. I am afraid now he was right, only we couldn't bear — to be parted. Could we, mother ?'

Not all his valor could control his tremulous lips. A beautiful smile illuminated the face of the invalid.

"So you are trying to hoodwink me, Phil, for the first time. I know what the doctor said. He told you I could not recover, and that I had not long to live; in a word, that I am dying."

Then the boy gave way utterly. He flung himself down by the side of the bed and buried his face in the coverlet.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he wailed, and his passionate sobs burct forth with alarming vehemence. The poor woman vainly strove to soothe him. She could not move, being paralyzed, but her fingers twined gently in his hair, and she gasped brokenly:

"Phil, darling, don't make it harder for me. Oh, calm yourself, my dear, if only for my sake. I have so much to say to you, and perhaps so little time. Be strong, Philip. Be strong and brave, and all will be well with you. I know you will miss me—we have been all in all to each other since your father's death. But my memory must be sweet, not bitter to you. When you think of me I want the recollection to inspire you to do that which is right regardless of consequences, to strive always for honor and for the approbation of your own conscience. My own dear boy, we must bow to the will of God. We have indeed been sorely tried, you far more than I, for I can look back on years of perfect happiness with a loving husband and a delightful child, whereas you have been plunged into poverty and misery at an age when life should be an opening to you, with every promise of a successful career. Perhaps, Phil, your trials have come to you early, as mine have found me late. I trust I have borne reverses of health and fortune with patience and resignation. My present sufferings will be a lasting joy to me, if in the life to come, I can know that my example has been a stimulus to you amidst the chances and changes of your career. Promise me, darling, that you will resign yourself to the decrees of Providence even in the bitter hour of our parting."

Her voice failed. Tears stood in her eyes. The knowledge came to her anew that natural emotions can at times conquer all restraints. The maternity strong within her clamored for the power to shield her offspring from the dangers that would beset him. There was a maddening pain in the thought that a few brief hours or minutes might unclasp her arms from him forever.

It was Phil who first gave utterance to the wild protest in their souls.

"Mother," he mourned bitterly, "I don't want to live without you. Let us die together. If you cannot stay with me, then I swear——"

But a scream of terror, so shrill and vehement that it seemed to be almost miraculous from so frail a form, froze the vow on his lips.

"Phil! What are you saying ? Oh, my son, my son, do not break my heart before I die. Kiss me, dearest I am cold. I can scarce see you. Let me look once more into your brave eyes. You will be a great man, Phil I know it. Who should know your character like your mother ? But you must have faith in God, always. I have prayed for you. If you are in danger my spirit will come back to you across the void. We cannot be parted. Oh, God, it is impossible! You are the life of my life. I am not dead while you still live.

Even as she spoke, her left hand and arm, hitherto untouched by the cruel blight which had made her a helpless invalid during many weary months, became numb and rigid. She was dying now, not with the struggle against the king of terrors which often marks the passing of humanity, but with a slow torpidity more akin to sleep.

Her brain was clear, but the stock of nervous force had sunk so low that her few remaining words were spoken with difficulty. They were most endearing expressions, appeals to her loved one to hope and pray, to trust steadfastly in the all-wise power that would direct his destiny. With the last flicker of existence the maternal instinct became dominant again, and she asked him not to forget her.

The boy could only murmur agonized appeals to the merciless unseen not to rob him of the only being he held dear on earth, but even in that awful moment he had the strength to cease his frantic protests when they seemed to cause her pain, and he forced himself to join her in prayer.

When the doctor brought a nurse and some small store of the much-needed delicacies, Mrs. Anson was already unconscious.

The boy, aroused from frenzy by the steps on the stairs, shrieked incohertently:

"I have kiled my mother. See! She is dead. I killed her. I made her cry. You told me to look after her until you returned. She cried and screamed because I spoke so wildly. It is all my fault. I——"

'Hush. Your mother is not dead, but dying. Not all the skill of man can save her. Let her die in peace."

No other words could have checked the wild torrent of lament that surged from that wounded heart. There remained a faint flicker of life. Not yet had she passed the dreadful barrier of eternity. Through his blinding tears he thought he could discern a smile on the worn face. The doctor watched Phil more narrowly than the sunken frame on the bed. It was best that the paroxysm of grief should go untrammeled. The nurse, a young woman unused as yet to the inevitableness of death, moved timidly toward the windows and adjusted the curtains to admit more light.

At last, when Phil's strength yielded to the strain of his sorrow, and the very force of his agony had spent itself, the doctor leaned over the inanimate form and looked into the eyes.

"It has ended, Phil," he whispered. "Your mother is in heaven!"

In heaven! What a tocsin of woe in a mesage of faith! The boy suddenly stood up. Hope was murdered within him. His tears ceased and his labored breathing came under control wit ha- mighty effort. He stooped and kissed the pale cheeks twice.

"Good-by, mother," he said, and the dull pain in his voice was so heartrending that the nurse's sympathies mastered her. She burst out crying. Professional instinct came to the doctor's aid. He sharply reprimanded the half-hysterical woman and sent her off on an errand to bring those whose duty it is to render the last services to frail mortality. The boy he led downstairs. He was a busy man, with many claims on his time, but this strange youngster interested him. Many citizens did not know thoughts forcibly away from the all-absorbing horror of his mother's death.

"Have you a tumbler or a cup ?" he said ,sharply. Phil handed him a tumbler. The doctor poured out some wine taken from the nurse's basket, soaked a piece of bread in the liquor, and gave it to the boy with an imperative command to eat it instantly.

Somewhat to his surprise he was obeyed. While Phil was devouring the food of which he stood so greatly in need, the doctor reviewed the circumstances of this poverty-stricked household so far as they were known to him. Mr, and Mrs. Anson had occupied a fairly good position in Dieppe, where Philip's father was the agent of an old established London firm of coal shippers. About two years earlier, both husband and wife were seriously injured in a motor car accident. Mr. Anson sustained concusion of the brain, and practically never regained his senses. though he lingered for some weeks and was subjected to two operations. Mrs. Anson's spine was damaged, with the result that she changed from a bright and vigorous woman into a decrepit invalid doomed to early death from slow paralysis.

When the great expenses attendant on these mishaps were paid, she found herself not only absolutely poor, but rendered incapable of the slighest effort to turn her many and varied talents to account in order to earn a livelihood. She came to London, where her late husband's employers generously gave her rent-free possession of the tenement in which she was lying dead, helped her with funds to furnish it modestly, and found a clerkship for Philip with a promise of early promotion.

But the cup of sorrow is seldom left half filled. Barely had the widow settled down to a hopeful struggle on behalf of her beloved son than a quarrel between partners led to the sale of the firm's business to a limited liability company. Economies were effected to make way for salaried directors. Philip was dism'ssed, with several other junior employees, and the stable yard was marked out as a suitable site for the storage of coal required by the local factories.

The development took place early in the New Year ,and the new company allowed Mrs. Anson to occupy her tiny abode until the last day of March. It was now March 5th, and how the widow and her son had lived during the past two months the doctor could only guess from the gradual depletion of their little store of furniture.

It was odd that such an intelligent and well-bred woman should be so completely shut off from the rets of the world, and his first question to Phil sought to determine this mystery

"Surely," he said, "there is some one to whom you can appeal for help. Your father and mother must have had some relatives—even distant cousins—and, if they are written to, a friendly hand may be forthcoming."

Philip shook his head. The mere taste of food provoked a ravenous appetite. He could not eat fast enough, The doctor stayed him.

"Better wait a couple of hours, Phil, and then you can tackle a hearty meal. That's the thing. I like to see such prompt obedience, but you certainly have wonderful control for one so young. I may tell you, to relieve present anxieties, that a few employees of your father's firm have guaranteed the expenses of your mother's funeral, and they also gave me a sovereign to tide you over for the next few days."

Funeral! The word struck with a force. Phil had not thought of that. He remembered the dismal pomp of such events in this squalid locality, the loud sobbing of women, the hard-faced agony of men, the frightened curiosity of children. His mother, so dear, so tender, so soft-cheeked—the bright, beautiful, laughing woman of their life in Dieppe—to be taken away from him forever, and permitted to fade slowly into nothingness in some dreadful place, hidden from the sunshine, and the flowers she loved! For the first time he understood death. When his father was killed his mother was left. Anxious tending on her dispelled the horror of the greater tragedy. Now all was lost. The tears that he hated were welling forth again and he savagely bit his lips.

"You have been—very good—to us, doctor," he forced himself to say. "If ever—I can repay you——"

"There, there, not a word! He glanced at his watch.

"Four o'clock! I am an hour late on my rounds. Don't go upstairs. There are some women coming. Wait until they have tended your mother. And—one last word. It will do you no good to keep vigil by her side. Best think of her as living, not dead. You will be grateful for my advice in after life."

The women arirved, coarse but kindly-hearted creatures. One of them gave them gave the boy a packet of letters.

"I found 'em under the dear lydy's pillow," she said. Neither poverty nor death robbed Mrs. Anson of the respect paid to her by all who came in contact with her.

He sat down, untied a string which bound the letters, and looked at the address on the first envelope. It bore his mother's name and a recent postmark. Wondering dolefully what correspondence she could have had during these later months that demanded such careful preservation, he took out the letters. Suddenly he hesitated. Perhaps these documents alluded to something which his mother did not wish him to know. For an instant his impulse was to consign the packet to the fire. No; that might be wrong. He would glance at their general purport and then commit them to the flames if he thought fit.

The letter in his hand was headed: "The Hall, Beltham, Devon," and dated about a month earlier. It read:

"Dear Madam: I am requested by Sir Philip Morland to ask you not to trouble him with further correspondence. This is the fourth time I have been desired to write in these terms, so please note that your letters will in future remain unanswered.

"Yours truly,

"LOUISA MORLAND."

The curt incivility of the note brought an angry flush to the boy's face. Who was Sir Philip Morland that he should dare to offer this insult to a lady ? Evidently a relative, and a near one, for Morland was his mother's name, and his own Christian name suggested a family connection. Yet she had never spoken of such a person.

Three other letters, of preceding dates, showed that "Louisa Morland" kept accurate reckoning. There were half a dozen more, from a firm of solicitors. Some of these were merely formal acknowledgments of letters received and forwarded, but one stated that they "were instructed by Lady Morland to inform Mrs. Anson that Sir Philip Morland declined either to see or hear from her."

That was all. Philip sprang up with face aflame. He was alone in the house now, alone with his dead mother.

He went upstairs, with the letters crushed in his right hand as though he would choke a reptile which had stung the onl ybeing he loved. He bent over the shrunken form, so placid, so resigned, so angelic in the peace of death, and the hot tears fell unchecked.

"You poor darling," he murmured, "I believe you humbled yourself even to beg from these people for my sake. What can I do to show my love for you ?"

CHAPTER II.

On The Edge of the Precipice.

On Friday evening, March 19th, a thunderstorm broke over London. It was notably peculiar in certain of its aspects. The weather was cold and showery, a typical day of the March equinox. Under such conditions barometric pressure remains fixed rather than variable, yet many whose business or hobby it is to record such facts observed a rapid srhinkage in the mercury column between the hours of six and seven. A deluge of rain fell for many minutes, and was followed, about 7.30 p.m., by a mad turmoil of thunder and an astounding electrical display not often witnessed beyond the confines of the giant mountain ranges of the world.

So violent and unnerving was the outburst that the social life of London was paralyzed for the hour. Theatre parties, diners in the fashionable restaurants, the greater millions anxious to get away from offices and shops, those eager alike to enter and leave the charmed circle of the four-mile radius, were ruthlessly hidden to wait while the awesome forces of nature made mad racket in the streets. All horseflesh was afraid. The drivers of cabs and omnibuses were unable to make progress. They had sufficient ado to restrain their maddened animals from adding the havoc of blind charges through the streets to the general confusion caused by the warring elements. Telegraph and telephone wires became not only useless but dangerous, and the suburban train service was consequently plunged into a tangle from which it was not extricated until midnight.

So general was the confusion , so widespread the public alarm, that the sudden cessation of the uproar at 8 o'clock caused more prayers of thankfulness to be uttered in the metropolis than had been heard for many a day. But worse remained. Thus far the lightning had been appalling, brilliantly lurid, but harmless. At ten o'clock the storm raged again, this time without the preliminary downfall of rain, and the lightning, though less sensational in appearance, was demoniac in effect, levying a toll on human lives, causing fires and general damage to property, accounts of which filled many columns of the newspapers next morning. This second outburst was succeeded by heavy and continuous rain. At the hour when the theatres emptied their diminishing audiences into the streets London wore its normal rain-sodden aspect. It was not until the following day that people fully understood the magnitude and terrifying results of the later display.

About a quarter to eight, while the first storm was at its height, a carriage and pair dashed into a fashionable West End square and pulled up outside a mansion cast in the stero typed mold of the early Victorian period. The horses, overfed and underworked, had been rendered frantic by the drive through the park from the further west. Fortunately, they knew this halting place, or the coachman would never have halted them. As it was, they sweated white with fear, and the footman, shouting to the occupants of the carriage that he could not attend to the door, ran to their heads after giving a vigorous tug at the house bell.

A boy, tall and thin, and scantily attired for such weather, who had taken shelter in the dark portico of the mansion, ran forward to offer his services at the carriage door. A bundle of evening papers, covered with a piece of sacking, somewhat impeded the use of his left hand, and, as it happened, in his right he held a large bun on which he had just commenced to dine.

Before he could turn the handle the cariage door opened from the inside. A man sprang out.

"Get out of the way," he said, impatiently, and the newsboy obeyed, glad that he had not followed his first impulse and flung away the bun.

A vivid flash of lightning made the horses rear and plunge.

"Look sharp, Elf," cried the stranger, in no more cordial tone. "Gather your wraps and jump out. On a night like this these nervous brutes——"

A peal of thunder that rattled the windows interrupted him. The two animals reared and backed with one accord. The plucky footman, hanging onto the crossbars of the bits, was lifted off his feet and banged violently against the pole. He was forced to let go, and fell, staggering backwards some yards before he dropped. There was a smash of iron and wood, and the near hind wheel of the carriage jammed against the curb. A slight scream came from the interior. Certain that the vehicle would turn over instantly, the man who had alighted slammed the door and sprang clear. In doing so he tripped over the newsboy and fell heavily to the pavement. The boy, quicker to note that the breaking of the pole had given a momentary respite, rushed into the roadway, throwing away both precious bun and still more precious stock of unsold papers.

He wrenched the other door open and shouted:

"This way, Madam! Quick!"

"Madam" was quick. She sprang right into his arms, and proved to be a girl of twelve or thereabouts, dressed all in white, and wrapped in an ermine cloak.

Over went the carriage with a fearful crash. The coachman managed to jump from the box into the roadway. He retained the reins and whip in his grasp, and now, losing his temper, lashed the struggling horses savagely. This cowed them, and they ceased their antics.

The boy and girl found themselves standing on the sidewalk, close to the ruined vehicle.

"You have saved my life !" said the girl ,sweetly, and without any trace of nervousness which might naturally be expected after such a narrow escape from a serious accident.

The boy noted that her eyes were large and blue, that she wore a great shining ornament in her hair, and that she appeared to be dressed in a somewhat fanciful manner, though the cloak she wore concealed the details.

The door of the mansion opened, and servants came running out.

Suddenly the boy received a violent blow on the side of the head.

"Confound you !" shouted the man who had fallen on the pavement, "why didn't you get out of the way when I told you ?"

The boy, astounded by such recognition of his timely help, made no reply, but the girl protested vehemently.

"Oh, uncle," she cried, "why did you strike him ? He got me out of the carriage just before it turned over, He did, indeed!"

Another vivid flash of lightning illuminated the scene. It lit up the group with startling brilliancy. The boy, still somewhat shaken by the vicious blow, was nevertheless able to see clearly the pale, handsome, but disipated features of his enraged assailant, whose evening dress and immaculte linen were soiled by the black mud of the pavement. The girl, dainty and fairy-like, a little maid of aristocratic type, and of a beauty that promised much in later years, was distressed now and almost tearful.

Through the crowd of frightened servants, augmented by a few daring pedestrians, a burly policeman, gigantic in waterproof overalls, was advancing with official bluster.

"What has happened ?" he demanded. "Is anybody hurt.?"

The man answered :

"My horses were startled by the storm. I jumped out, and was endeavoring to extricate my niece when this wretched boy got in the way."

"Uncle,' protested the girl, "you closed the door on me, and the boy—"

"Shut up!" he growled, curtly. "Go inside the house!"

But his niece shared with him at least one characteristic. She possessed the family temper.

"I will not go away and let you say things which are untrue. Listen to me, Mr. Policeman. Lord Vanstone did close the door because he thought the carriage would turn over on top of him. For some reason the accident did not happen immediately, and the boy ran round to the other side and helped me out just in time."

"Confound the brat ! I think he was the real cause of the whole affair. Why was he hiding in my doorway ?"

Lord Vanstone was more enraged than ever by the girl's obstinate defence of her rescuer and her insistence on his own seeming cowardice.

"I was not hiding. I only took a shelter from the storm. I tried to help you because the footman was struggling with the horses. I do not claim any credit for simply opening a door and helping the young lady to alight, but I lost my dinner and my papers in doing so."

Everyone experienced a shock of surprise at hearing the boy's elegant diction. The policeman was puzzled. He instantly understood the facts, but dared not browbeat an earl.

"You do not bring any charge against him, my lord ?" he said.

But his lordship deigned no reply. He told the coachman to arrange for the removal of the carriage, grasped his niece by the arm and led her ,still protesting, into the house.

The policeman saw the bundle of papers scattered over the roadway, and near them, the partly-eaten bun. After a wrench at his garments he produced a penny.

"Here," he said to the boy. "Buy another bun and be off. It's a good job for you the young lady spoke the way she did.'

"She merely told the truth. The man was a liar."

Refusing the proffered penny, the boy turned on his heel. The policeman looked after him.

"That's a queer kid," he thought. "Talked like a regular young gent. I wonder why he is selling papers. Poor lad! He lost a bob's worth at least. and small thanks he got for it."

Passing out of the square by the first eastward street, Phil Anson, with his head erect and hands clinched in his pockets, strode onward at a rapid pace. The lightning was less frequent now, and the thunder was dying away in sullen rumblings. He was wet and hungry. Yet, although he had three half-pence the remaining balance of the only sales effected that evening, he passed many shops where he could have bought food.

In Piccardly, where the cessation of the storm created a rush of traffic, he was nearly run over, by reason of his own carelessness, and received a slash from a whip, accompanied by a loud oath -from an angrys cabman. He shivered, but never even looked around. Crossing Trafalgar Square, he plunged through the vortex of vehicles without troubling to avoid them in the slighest degree. One the hot breath of a pair of van horses touched his cheek while a speechless driver pulled them back onto their haunches. Again, the offwheel of an omnibus actually grazed his heel as he sped behind the statue of Charles the First.

At last he reached the comparative seclusion of the Embankment, and stood for a moment to gaze at the swirling, glinting river.

"Not here," he muttered, aloud. "I must be nearer to mother — dear old mother ! She is there, waiting for me."

He trudged steadily away, through Queen Victoria Street, Cornhill, Leadenhall Street, and so on to Johnson's Mews, in the Mile End Road. Pausing at a Marine store dealer's shop, kept by an army pensioner, an Irishman, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, he entrede. An elderly man was laboriously reading a paper on the preceding day's date.

"Good-evening, Mr. O'Brien," he said. "Can you oblige me with a pice of rope ? I want a strong piece, about three or four yards in length. I can only spare three halfpence."

"Faix, I dunno. They use nails on the crates mostly nowadays. If I have a bit it's at your service. I wouldn't be afther chargin' the likes o' you."

Philip's story was known in that humble locality, and the old soldier sympathized with the boy. "He has rale spunk an' no mistake," was his verdict when others said Philip was proud and overbearing. O'Brien moved rheumatically about the squalid shop. At last he found some portion of a clothesline.

"Will that do ?" he inquired.

Philip tested it with vigorous pulling against his knee.

"Excellently,' he said. "Let me pay for it."

"Arrah, go away wid ye. And be the powers, isn't the poor lad cowld an' famished. Luke here, now. In five minutes I'm going to have a cup o' tay——"

"I am awfully obliged to you ,but I could not touch a morsel. I am in a hurry."

"Are ye goin' a journey ? Have ye a job ?"

"I think so. It looks like a permanency. Good-bye'

"Good-by, an' luck to ye. Sure the looks mighty quare. 'Tis grief for his mother has turned his head entirely."

No words could more clearly express Philip's condition than this friendly summing up. S ince his mothers burial he had been half demented. His curt, disconnected answers had lost him two places as an errand boy, which he could easily have secured. His small stock of money, ridiculously depleted by the generosity with which he met the open hints of the undertakers' assistants, barely sufficed to keep him in food for a week. Then he sought employment, but with each stiff upper lip and haughty indifference to success that he unknowingly turned those against him who would have assisted him.

For two days he was chosen to act as van boy for a parcel delivery firm. He earned a few meals, but in a fit of aberration induced by the sight of a lady who was dressed in a costume similar to one he remembered his mother wearing at Dieppe, he allowed a ham to be stolen from the rear of the van. This procured his instant dismissal, with threats. Then he sold newspapers, only to find that every good site was jealously guarded by a gang of roughs who mercilessly bullied any newcomer. Personal strength and courage were unavailing against sheer numbers. His face was still swollen and his ribs sore as the result of being knocked down and kicked at Ludgate Circus; at Charring Cross next day he was hustled under the wheels of an omnibus and narrowly escaped death. So he was driven into the side streets and the quiet streets and the quiet squares, in which ,during a few days he managed to earn an average of eightpence daily, which he spent on food.

Each night he crept back to the poor tenement in Johnson's Mews, his bleak "home" amidst the solitude of

(Continued on page 4.)