ARTHUR MORRISON

A CHILD OF THE JAGO

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… Woe unto the foolish prophets, that
follow their own spirit, and have seen
nothing!…

Because, even because they have seduced
my people, saying, Peace; and there
was no peace; and one built up a
wall, and lo, others daubed it with
untempered mortar:

Say unto them which daub it with untempered
mortar, that it shall fall:
there shall be an overflowing shower;
and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall;
and a stormy wind shall rend it.

Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not
be said unto you, Where is the daubing
wherewith ye have daubed it?—

Ezekiel xiii. 3 … 10 12.

PREFACE

Inhaltsverzeichnis

I AM glad to take this, the first available opportunity, to acknowledge the kindness with which *A Child of the Jago* has been received: both by the reading public, from which I have received many gratifying assurances that what I have tried to say has not altogether failed of its effect: and by the reviewers, the most of whom have written in very indulgent terms.

I think indeed, that I am the more gratified by the fact that this reception has not been unanimous: because an outcry and an opposition, even from an unimportant minority, are proofs that I have succeeded in saying, however imperfectly, something that was worth being said. Under the conditions of life as we know it there is no truth worth telling that will not interfere with some hearer's comfort. Various objections have been made to *A Child of the Jago*, and many of them had already been made to *Tales of Mean Streets*. And it has been the way of the objectors as well as the way of many among the kindest of my critics, to call me a 'realist.' The word has been used sometimes, it would seem, in praise; sometimes in mere indifference as one uses a phrase of convenient description; sometimes by way of an irremediable reproach. It is natural, then, not merely that I should wish to examine certain among the objections made to my work, but that I should feel some interest in the definition and description of a realist. A matter never made clear to me.

Now it is a fact that I have never called myself a ‘realist,’ and I have never put forth any work as ‘realism.’ I decline the labels of the schoolmen and the sophisters: being a simple writer of tales, who takes whatever means lie to his hand to present life as he sees it; who insists on no process; and who refuses to be bound by any formula or prescription prepared by the cataloguers and the pigeon-holers of literature.

So it happens that when those who use the word ‘realist’ use it with no unanimity of intent and with a loose, inapprehensive application, it is not easy for me, who repudiate it altogether, to make a guess at its meaning. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the man who is called a ‘realist’ is one who, seeing things with his own eyes, discards the conventions of the schools, and presents his matter in individual terms of art. For awhile the schoolmen abuse him as a realist; and in twenty years’ time, if his work have life in it, he becomes a classic. Constable was called a realist; so was Corot. Who calls these painters realists now? The history of Japanese art affords a continuous illustration. From the day when Iwasa Matahei impudently arose and dared to take his subjects from the daily life of the people, to the day when Hiroshigé, casting away the last rag of propriety, adventurously drew a cast shadow, in flat defiance of all the canons of Tosa and Kano—in all this time, and through all the crowded history of the School of Ukioyé, no artist bringing something of his own to his art but was damned for a realist. Even the classic Harunobu did not escape. Look now at the work of these men, and the label seems grotesque enough. So it goes through the making of all art. A man with the courage of his own vision interprets what he sees in fresh terms, and gives to things a new reality and an immediate presence. The schoolmen peer

with dulled eyes from amid the heap of precedents and prescriptions about them, and, distracted by seeing a thing sanctioned neither by precedent nor by prescription, dub the man realist, and rail against him for that his work fits none of their pigeon-holes. And from without the schools many cry out and complain: for truth is strong meat, and the weakling stomach turns against it, except in minim doses smothered in treacle. Thus we hear the feeble plea that the function of imagination is the distortion of fact: the piteous demand that the artist should be shut up in a flower-garden, and forbidden to peep through the hedge into the world. And they who know nothing of beauty, who are innately incapable of comprehending it, mistake it for mere prettiness, and call aloud for comfits; and among them that cannot understand, such definitions of the aims of art are bandied, as mean, if they mean anything, that art finds its most perfect expression in pink lollipops and gilt boxes. But in the end the truth prevails, if it be well set forth; and the schoolmen, groaning in their infinite labour, wearily write another prescription, admit another precedent, and make another pigeon-hole.

I have been asked, in print, if I think that there is no phase of life which the artist may not touch. Most certainly I think this. More, I know it. It is the artist’s privilege to seek his material where he pleases, and it is no man’s privilege to say him nay. If the community have left horrible places and horrible lives before his eyes, then the fault is the community’s; and to picture these places and these lives becomes not merely his privilege, but his duty. It was my fate to encounter a place in Shoreditch, where children were born and reared in circumstances which gave them no reasonable chance of living decent lives: where they were born fore-damned to a criminal or semi-criminal career. It

was my experience to learn the ways of this place, to know its inhabitants, to talk with them, eat, drink, and work with them. For the existence of this place, and for the evils it engendered, the community was, and is, responsible; so that every member of the community was, and is, responsible in his degree. If I had been a rich man I might have attempted to discharge my peculiar responsibility in one way; if I had been a statesman I might have tried another. Being neither of these things, but a mere writer of fiction, I sought to do my duty by writing a tale wherein I hoped to bring the conditions of this place within the apprehension of others. There are those who say that I should have turned away my eyes and passed by on the other side: on the very respectable precedent of the priest and the Levite in the parable.

Now, when the tale was written and published it was found, as I have said, to cause discomfort to some persons. It is needless to say more of the schoolmen. Needless, too, to say much of the merely genteel: who were shocked to read of low creatures, as Kiddo Cook and Pigeony Poll, and to find my pages nowhere illuminated by a marquis. Of such are they who delight to read of two men in velvet and feathers perforating each other's stomachs with swords; while Josh Perrott and Billy Leary, punching each other's heads, present a scene too sickening and brutal to consider without disgust. And it was in defiance of the maunderings of such as these that Charles Lamb wrote much of his essay *On the Genius and Character of Hogarth*. But chiefly this book of mine disturbed those who had done nothing, and preferred to do nothing, by way of discharging their responsibility toward the Jago and the people in it. The consciousness of duty neglected is discomforting, and personal comfort is the god of their kind. They firmly believe

it to be the sole function of art to minister to their personal comfort—as upholstery does. They find it comfortable to shirk consideration of the fate of the Jago children, to shut their eyes to it, to say that all is well and the whole world virtuous and happy. And this mental attitude they nickname optimism, and vaunt it—exult in it as a quality. So that they cry out at the suggestion that it is no more than a selfish vice; and finding truth where they had looked for the materials of another debauch of self-delusion, they moan aloud: they protest, and they demand as their sacred right that the bitter cup be taken from before them. They have moaned and protested at *A Child of the Jago*, and, craven and bewildered, any protest seemed good enough to them. And herein they have not wanted for allies among them that sit in committee-rooms, and tinker. For your professed philanthropist, following his own spirit, and seeing nothing, honestly resents the demonstration that his tinkering profits little. There is a story current in the East End of London, of a distracted lady who, being assailed with a request for the loan of a saucepan, defended herself in these words:—‘Tell yer mother I can’t lend ‘er the saucepan, consekince o’ ‘avin’ lent it to Mrs Brown, besides which I’m a-usin’ of it meself, an’ moreover it’s gone to be mended, an’ what’s more I ain’t got one.’ In a like spirit of lavish objection it has been proclaimed in a breath that I transgress:—because (1) I should not have written of the Jago in all the nakedness of truth; (2) my description is not in the least like; (3) moreover, it is exaggerated; (4) though it may be true, it is quite unnecessary, because the Jago was already quite familiar, and everybody knew all about it; (5) the Jago houses have been pulled down; and (6) there never was any such place as the Jago at all.

To objections thus handsomely variegated it is not easy to reply with the tripping brevity wherewith they may be stated; and truly it is little reply that they call for, except, perhaps, in so far as they may be taken to impugn the sincerity of my work and the accuracy of my picture. A few of the objectors have caught up enough of their wits to strive after a war in my own country. They take hold of my technical method, and accuse me of lack of ‘sympathy’; they claim that if I write of the Jago I should do so ‘even weeping.’ Now, my technical method is my own, and is deliberately designed to achieve a certain result, as is the method of every man—painter, poet, sculptor, or novelist—who is not the slave and the plaything of his material. My tale is the tale of my characters, and I have learned better than to thrust myself and my emotions between them and my reader. The cant of the charge stares all too plainly from the face of it. It is not that these good people wish me to write ‘even weeping’: for how do they know whether I weep or not? No: their wish is, not that I shall weep, but that I shall weep obscenely in the public gaze. In other words, that I shall do their weeping for them, as a sort of emotional bedesman: that I shall make public parade of sympathy in their behalf, so that they may keep their own sympathy for themselves, and win comfort from the belief that they are eased of their just responsibility by vicarious snivelling.

But the protest, that my picture of the Jago is untrue, is another thing. For the most part it has found very vague expression, but there are instances of rash excursion into definiteness. Certain passages have been denoted as exaggerations—as impossibilities. Now, I must confess that, foreseeing such adventurous indiscretions, I had, for my own diversion, set *A Child of the Jago* with traps. For certain years I have lived in the East End of London, and have been,

not an occasional visitor, but a familiar and equal friend in the house of the East-Ender in all his degrees; for, though the steps between be smaller, there are more social degrees in the East End than ever in the West. In this experience I have seen and I have heard things that persons sitting in committee-rooms would call diabolical fable; nevertheless, I have seen them, and heard them. But it was none of my design to write of extreme instances: typical facts were all I wanted; these, I knew, would be met—or shirked—with incredulity; so that, whenever I saw reason to anticipate a charge of exaggeration—as for instance, in the matter of faction fighting—I made my typical incident the cold transcript of a simple fact, an ordinary, easy-going fact, a fact notorious in the neighbourhood, and capable of any amount of reasonable proof. If I touched my fact at all, it was to subdue it; that and no more. The traps worked well. Not one definite charge of exaggeration has been flung but it has been aimed at one of the normal facts I had provided as a target: not one. Sometimes the effect has had a humour of its own; as when a critic in a literary journal, beginning by selecting two of my norms as instances of ‘palpable exaggeration,’ went on to assure me that there was no need to describe such life as the life in the Jago, because it was already perfectly familiar to everybody.

Luckily I need not vindicate my accuracy. That has been done for me publicly by independent and altogether indisputable authority. In particular, the devoted vicar of the parish, which I have called the Jago, has testified quite unreservedly to the truth of my presentation. Others also, with special knowledge, have done the same; and though I refer to them, and am grateful for their support, it is with no prejudice to the validity of my own authority. For not only

have I lived in the East End of London (which one may do, and yet never see it) but observation is my trade.

I have remarked in more than one place the expression of a foolish fancy that because the houses of the Old Jago have been pulled down, the Jago difficulty has been cleared out of the way. That is far from being the case. The Jago, as mere bricks and mortar, is gone. But the Jago in flesh and blood still lives, and is crowding into neighbourhoods already densely over-populated.

In conclusion: the plan and the intention of my story made it requisite that, in telling it, I should largely adhere to fact; and I did so. If I write other tales different in scope and design, I shall adhere to fact or neglect it as may seem good to me: regardless of anybody’s classification as a realist, or as anything else. For though I have made a suggestion, right or wrong, as to what a realist may be, whether I am one or not is no concern of mine; but the concern (if it be anybody’s) of the tabulators and the watersifters.

A. M.

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CHAPTER I

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IT was past the mid of a summer night in the Old Jago. The narrow street was all the blacker for the lurid sky; for there was a fire in a farther part of Shoreditch, and the welkin was an infernal coppery glare. Below, the hot, heavy air lay, a rank oppression, on the contorted forms of those who made for sleep on the pavement: and in it, and through it all, there rose from the foul earth and the grimed walls a close, mingled stink—the odour of the Jago.

From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on one end of Old Jago Street, to where the other end lost itself in the black beyond Jago Row; from where Jago Row began south at Meakin Street, to where it ended north at Honey Lane—there the Jago, for one hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and festered; and half-way along Old Jago Street a narrow archway gave upon Jago Court, the blackest hole in all that pit.

A square of two hundred and fifty yards or less—that was all there was of the Jago. But in that square the human population swarmed in thousands. Old Jago Street, New Jago Street, Half Jago Street lay parallel, east and west: Jago Row at one end and Edge Lane at the other lay parallel also, stretching north and south: foul ways all. What was too vile for Kate Street, Seven Dials, and Ratcliff Highway in its worst day, what was too useless, incapable and corrupt—all that teemed in the Old Jago.

Old Jago Street lay black and close under the quivering red sky; and slinking forms, as of great rats, followed one another quickly between the posts in the gut by the High Street, and scattered over the Jago. For the crowd about the fire was now small, the police was there in force, and every safe pocket had been tried. Soon the incursion ceased, and the sky, flickering and brightening no longer, settled to a sullen flush. On the pavement some writhed wearily, longing for sleep; others, despairing of it, sat and lolled, and a few talked. They were not there for lack of shelter, but because in this weather repose was less unlikely in the street than within doors: and the lodgings of the few who nevertheless abode at home were marked here and there by the lights visible from the windows. For in this place none ever slept without a light, because of three kinds of vermin that light in some sort keeps at bay: vermin which added to existence here a terror not to be guessed by the unafflicted: who object to being told of it. For on them that lay writhen and gasping on the pavement; on them that sat among them; on them that rolled and blasphemed in the lighted rooms; on every moving creature in this, the Old Jago, day and night, sleeping and walking, the third plague of Egypt, and more, lay unceasing.

The stifling air took a further oppression from the red sky. By the dark entrance to Jago Court a man rose, flinging out an oath, and sat with his head bowed in his hands.

‘Ah—h—h—h,’ he said. ‘I wish I was dead: an’ kep’ a cawfy shop.’ He looked aside from his hands at his neighbours; but Kiddo Cook’s ideal of heaven was no new thing, and the sole answer was a snort from a dozing man a yard away.

Kiddo Cook felt in his pocket and produced a pipe and a screw of paper. ‘This is a bleed’n’ unsocial sort o’ evenin’

party, this is,’ he said, ‘An’ ‘ere’s the on’y real toff in the mob with ardly ‘arf a pipeful left, an’ no lights. D’ y’ ‘ear, me lord’—leaning toward the dozing neighbour—‘got a match?’

‘Go t’ ‘ell!’

‘O wot ‘orrid langwidge! It’s shocking, blimy. Arter that y’ ought to find me a match. Come on.’

‘Go t’ ‘ell!’

A lank, elderly man, who sat with his back to the wall, pushed up a battered tall hat from his eyes, and, producing a box of matches, exclaimed ‘Hell? And how far’s that? You’re in it!’ He flung abroad a bony hand, and glanced upward. Over his forehead a greasy black curl dangled and shook as he shuddered back against the wall. ‘My God, there can be no hell after this!’

‘Ah,’ Kiddo Cook remarked, as he lit his pipe in the hollow of his hands, ‘that’s a comfort, Mr Beveridge, any’ow.’ He returned the matches, and the old man, tilting his hat forward, was silent.

A woman, gripping a shawl about her shoulders, came furtively along from the posts, with a man walking in her tracks—a little unsteadily. He was not of the Jago, but a decent young workman, by his dress. The sight took Kiddo Cook’s idle eye, and when the couple had passed, he said meditatively: ‘There’s Billy Leary in luck ag’in: ‘is missis do pick ‘em up, s’elp me. I’d carry the cosh meself if I’d got a woman like ‘er.’

Cosh-carrying was near to being the major industry of the Jago. The cosh was a foot length of iron rod, with a knob at one end, and a hook (or a ring) at the other. The craftsman, carrying it in his coat sleeve, waited about dark staircase corners till his wife (married or not) brought in a well drunken stranger: when, with a sudden blow behind the head, the stranger was happily coshed, and whatever was

found on him as he lay insensible was the profit on the transaction. In the hands of capable practitioners this industry yielded a comfortable subsistence for no great exertion. Most, of course, depended on the woman: whose duty it was to keep the other artist going in subjects. There were legends of surprising ingatherings achieved by wives of especial diligence: one of a woman who had brought to the cosh some six-and-twenty on a night of public rejoicing. This was, however, a story years old, and may have been no more than an exemplary fiction, designed, like a Sunday School book, to convey a counsel of perfection to the dutiful matrons of the Old Jago.

The man and woman vanished in a doorway near the Jago Row end, where, for some reason, dossers were fewer than about the portal of Jago Court. There conversation flagged, and a broken snore was heard. It was a quiet night, as quietness was counted in the Jago; for it was too hot for most to fight in that stifling air—too hot to do more than turn on the stones and swear. Still the last hoarse yelps of a combat of women came intermittently from Half Jago Street in the further confines.

In a little while something large and dark was pushed forth from the door-opening near Jago Row which Billy Leary’s spouse had entered. The thing rolled over, and lay tumbled on the pavement, for a time unnoted. It might have been yet another would-be sleeper, but for its stillness. Just such a thing it seemed, belike, to two that lifted their heads and peered from a few yards off, till they rose on hands and knees and crept to where it lay: Jago rats both. A man it was; with a thick smear across his face, and about his head the source of the dark trickle that sought the gutter deviously over the broken flags. The drab stuff of his pockets peeped out here and there in a crumpled bunch,

and his waistcoat gaped where the watch-guard had been. Clearly, here was an uncommonly remunerative cosh—a cosh so good that the boots had been neglected, and remained on the man's feet. These the kneeling two unlaced deftly, and, rising, prize in hand, vanished in the deeper shadow of Jago Row.

A small boy, whom they met full tilt at the corner, staggered out to the gutter and flung a veteran curse after them. He was a slight child, by whose size you might have judged his age at five. But his face was of serious and troubled age. One who knew the children of the Jago, and could tell, might have held him eight, or from that to nine.

He replaced his hands in his trousers pockets, and trudged up the street. As he brushed by the coshed man he glanced again toward Jago Row, and, jerking his thumb that way, 'Done 'im for 'is boots,' he piped. But nobody marked him till he reached Jago Court, when old Beveridge, pushing back his hat once more, called sweetly and silkily, 'Dicky Perrott!' and beckoned with his finger.

The boy approached, and as he did so the man's skeleton hand suddenly shot out and gripped him by the collar. 'It—never—does—to—see—too—much!' Beveridge said, in a series of shouts, close to the boy's ear. 'Now go home,' he added, in a more ordinary tone, with a push to make his meaning plain: and straightway relapsed against the wall.

The boy scowled and backed off the pavement. His ragged jacket was coarsely made from one much larger, and he hitched the collar over his shoulder as he shrank toward a doorway some few yards on. Front doors were used merely as firewood in the Old Jago, and most had been burnt there many years ago. If perchance one could have been found still on its hinges, it stood ever open and probably would not

shut. Thus at night the Jago doorways were a row of black holes, foul and forbidding.

Dicky Perrott entered his hole with caution, for anywhere, in the passage and on the stairs, somebody might be lying drunk, against whom it would be unsafe to stumble. He found nobody, however, and climbed and reckoned his way up the first stair-flight with the necessary regard for the treads that one might step through and the rails that had gone from the side. Then he pushed open the door of the first-floor back and was at home.

A little heap of guttering grease, not long ago a candle end, stood and spread on the mantel-piece, and gave irregular light from its drooping wick. A thin-railed iron bedstead, bent and staggering, stood against a wall, and on its murky coverings a half-dressed woman sat and neglected a baby that lay by her, grieving and wheezing. The woman had a long dolorous face, empty of expression and weak of mouth.

‘Where ‘a’ you bin, Dicky?’ she asked, rather complaining than asking. ‘It’s sich low hours for a boy.’

Dicky glanced about the room. ‘Got anythink to eat?’ he asked.

‘I dunno,’ she answered listlessly. ‘P’raps there’s a bit o’ bread in the cupboard. I don’t want nothin’, it’s so ‘ot. An’ father ain’t bin ‘ome since tea-time.’

The boy rummaged and found a crust. Gnawing at this, he crossed to where the baby lay. ”Ullo, Looey,’ he said, bending and patting the muddy cheek. ”Ullo!’

The baby turned feebly on its back, and set up a thin wail. Its eyes were large and bright, its tiny face was piteously flea-bitten and strangely old. ‘Wy, she’s ‘ungry, mother,’ said Dicky Perrott, and took the little thing up.

He sat on a small box, and rocked the baby on his knees, feeding it with morsels of chewed bread. The mother, dolefully inert, looked on and said: ‘She’s that backward I’m quite wore out; more ‘n ten months old, an’ don’t even crawl yut. It’s a never-endin’ trouble, is children.’

She sighed, and presently stretched herself on the bed. The boy rose, and carrying his little sister with care, for she was dozing, essayed to look through the grimy window. The dull flush still spread overhead, but Jago Court lay darkling below, with scarce a sign of the ruinous back yards that edged it on this and the opposite sides, and nothing but blackness between.

The boy returned to his box, and sat. Then he said: ‘I don’t s’pose father’s ‘avin’ a sleep outside, eh?’

The woman sat up with some show of energy. ‘Wot?’ she said sharply. ‘Sleep out in the street like them low Ranns an’ Learys? I should ‘ope not. It’s bad enough livin’ ‘ere at all, an’ me being used to different things once, an’ all. You ain’t seen ‘im outside, ‘ave ye?’

‘No, I ain’t seen ‘im: I jist looked in the court.’ Then, after a pause: ‘I ‘ope ‘e’s done a click,’ the boy said.

His mother winced. ‘I dunno wot you mean, Dicky,’ she said, but falteringly. ‘You—you’re gittin’ that low an’ an’—’

‘Wy, copped somethink, o’ course. Nicked somethink. You know.’

‘If you say sich things as that I’ll tell ‘im wot you say, an’ ‘e’ll pay you. We ain’t that sort o’ people, Dicky, you ought to know. I was alwis kep’ respectable an’ straight all my life, I’m sure, an’—’

‘I know. You said so before, to father—I ‘eard: w’en ‘e brought ‘ome that there yuller prop—the necktie pin. Wy, where did ‘e git that? ‘E ain’t ‘ad a job for munse and munse: where’s the yannups come from wot’s bin for to pay

the rent, an’ git the toke, an’ milk for Looey? Think I dunno? I ain’t a kid. I know.’

‘Dicky, Dicky! you mustn’t say sich things!’ was all the mother could find to say, with tears in her slack eyes. ‘It’s wicked an’—an’ low. An’ you must alwis be respectable an’ straight, Dicky, an’ you’ll—you’ll git on then.’

‘Straight people’s fools, *I* reckon. Kiddo Cook says that, an’ ‘e’s as wide as Broad Street. W’en I grow up I’m goin’ to git toffs’ clo’es an’ be in the ‘igh mob. They does big clicks.’

‘They git put in a dark prison for years an’ years, Dicky—an’—an’ if you’re sich a wicked low boy, father ‘ll give you the strap—‘ard,’ the mother returned, with what earnestness she might. ‘Gimme the baby, an’ you go to bed, go on; ‘fore father comes.’

Dicky handed over the baby, whose wizen face was now relaxed in sleep, and slowly disencumbered himself of the ungainly jacket, staring at the wall in a brown study. ‘It’s the mugs wot git took,’ he said, absently. ‘An’ quoddin’ ain’t so bad.’ Then, after a pause, he turned and added suddenly: ‘S’pose father’ll be smugged some day, eh, mother?’

His mother made no reply, but bent languidly over the baby, with an indefinite pretence of settling it in a place on the bed. Soon Dicky himself, in the short and ragged shirt he had worn under the jacket, burrowed head first among the dingy coverings at the foot, and protruding his head at the further side, took his accustomed place crosswise at the extreme end.

The filthy ceiling lit and darkened by fits as the candle-wick fell and guttered to its end. He heard his mother rise and find another fragment of candle to light by its expiring flame, but he lay still wakeful. After a time he asked: ‘Mother, why don’t you come to bed?’

‘Waitin’ for father. Go to sleep.’

He was silent for a little. But brain and eyes were wide awake, and soon he spoke again. ‘Them noo ‘uns in the front room,’ he said. ‘Ain’t the man give ‘is wife a ‘idin’ yut?’

‘No.’

‘Nor yut the boy—‘umpty-backed ‘un?’

‘No.’

‘Seems they’re mighty pertickler. Fancy theirselves too good for their neighbours; I ‘eard Pigeony Poll say that; on’y Poll said—’

‘You mustn’t never listen to Pigeony Poll, Dicky. Ain’t you ‘eard me say so? Go to sleep. ‘Ere comes father.’ There was, indeed, a step on the stairs, but it passed the landing, and went on to the top floor. Dicky lay awake, but silent, gazing upward and back through the dirty window just over his head. It was very hot, and he fidgeted uncomfortably, fearing to turn or toss lest the baby should wake and cry. There came a change in the hue of the sky, and he watched the patch within his view, until the red seemed to gather in spots, and fade a spot at a time. Then at last there was a tread on the stairs, that stayed at the door; and father had come home. Dicky lay still, and listened.

‘Lor, Josh, where ye bin?’ Dicky heard his mother say. ‘I’m almost wore out a-waitin’.’

‘Awright, awright’—this in a hoarse grunt, little above a whisper. ‘Got any water up ‘ere? Wash this ‘ere stick.’

There was a pause, wherein Dicky knew his mother looked about her in vacant doubt as to whether or not water was in the room. Then a quick, undertoned scream, and the stick rattled heavily on the floor. ‘It’s sticky!’ his mother said. ‘O my Gawd, Josh, look at that—an’ bits o’ ‘air, too!’ The great shadow of an open hand shot up across the ceiling and fell again. ‘O Josh! O my Gawd! You ain’t, ‘ave ye? Not—not—not that?’