


that I might as well lie down and let the snow cover me up; but just then, on a board, on which a lamp shone direct, and which the snow had not yet furred, I saw "To the Thames Tunnel. "

There, at any rate, the snow could not reach me. I hurried on to the Rotherhithe shaft, and invested all my property in the purchase of a night's shelter. "Bitter weather," said the old man who took my penny, blowing on his mittened fingers, as I passed through the turnstile. "I wish I was going home, like you."

Down, down, down the wearisome steps I wound. Three men who were coming up on the other side were very merry, knocking one another's hats off, jumping on one another's backs, and making the shaft echo with the songs they howled. But when I got to the bottom there was perfect silence, except the singing of the gas. The boarded-up right-hand arcade stretched along in mysterious gloom. The left-hand arcade soon ended in mysterious gloom, in spite of the gas jets that lighted its horseshoe-arched vista.

It was a queer bedroom, but I was most thankful to have reached it. Down there, at first, the air felt quite soft, after the cutting atmosphere from which I had descended. The comparative warmth made me feel sleepy, and I was besides dog-tired; but so long as I thought that there was any chance of anybody passing me, I did not like to lie down. Backwards and forwards between the Surrey and the Middlesex sides I paced, until I thought my feet would drop off at the ankles. When I saw any one coming, I hurried on as if I were as anxious to get out of the Tunnel as they were. Very few people did pass me—not more than three, I think: a thievish-looking young fellow, who scurried along like a scared rat; a drunken man, who did not take the slightest notice of me, but stopped to shake his fist at every gas-burner, and exclaim with sobs, smiling blandly all the while, "Well, really now, I shouldn't ha' thought it;" and a very stout old woman in a pilot jacket, and tugging along something heavy in a fish basket, who seemed to think that I was a thief, and threatened to knock me down if I offered to molest her.

I suppose it was about two in the morning when I arrived at the conclusion that at last I had the Tunnel to myself, and prepared to turn in.

"The next recess but two I come to I'll take," I said to myself. When I came to it, I was greatly astonished to find that I had *not* the Tunnel to myself—that I must have passed and repassed ever so many times a group there sleeping. Huddled together

under an empty stall lay an old woman, a little girl, and a smaller boy. They were pinched and ragged, but somehow they did not look like beggars. If they *had* been beggars, no doubt they would have been enjoying a far more comfortable night's lodging.

"Well," I said to myself, "I fancied that I was the only person in London that would have paid a penny to sleep in the Thames Tunnel, but these poor things have done the same. The old woman can't be fond of gin, or she would have spent the threepence on it, and left the children to shift for themselves as they could." I had felt quite alone in the world the minute before, but the sight of these three sleepers linked me on to my kind again. They slept so peacefully, too, that I grew ashamed of my gloomy forebodings. There was I, who, at any rate, must be able to do something or other for a living, grizzling, whilst that weak old woman and those two little ones were sleeping as soundly as if they had been lying on a swan's-down bed, beneath an eider-down quilt.

I curled myself up beside my co-mates in subfluvial exile, and once more tried to get to sleep. I chanced to lie down upon the little boy's foot, which he had drawn up under his tattered clothes. He kicked it out, and feeling the cold, began to toss and mutter; but when I had covered it up with the flap of my coat, he gave a sigh of satisfaction, and once more slept soundly. Tired as I was, it was some time, after all, before I could get to sleep. Now that I had got used to the temperature of the Tunnel, and, moreover, had stopped walking, I began to feel very cold again; and then, although, of course, it was *only* fancy, I could not *help* fancying that I heard the water popping over-head, and speculating as to the possibility of a heavy anchor plumping through our bedroom ceiling, and letting in the Thames upon us. Brick for your sheets, clay for your blankets, and a river for your counterpane—however tired you might be, you would think that a queer bed the first time you tried it.

At last, however, I fell as sound asleep as my curly-headed, barefooted, little unconscious comrade. I did not feel very grateful to him when he awoke me about seven by a kick in the cheek. He kicked me back from a delicious dream into a consciousness that I had passed the night in the Tunnel, and that I had not a penny in the world. I started up and stared at him; he started up and stared at me.

"Granny, here's a man," he shouted, shaking the old woman by the gown. She started up, the little girl started up, and all three of them stared at me.