

ALONE IN LONDON: NINETEENTH-CENTURY STREET CHILDREN
IN NOVELS BY CHARLES DICKENS AND HESBA STRETTON

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Hesba Stretton (pseudonym of Sarah Smith) and Charles Dickens had a literary and business relationship while Stretton wrote for Dickens's periodicals, Household Words and All the Year Round. Although the actual extent of Dickens's influence upon Hesba Stretton's writing is difficult to ascertain fully, both authors write about children, street children of London in particular. Within her books, Hesba Stretton incorporates, and often extends, many of the thematic concepts which characterize Dickens's presentations of street children. Their thematic presentations of the children include viewing the street child as a reflection of deprivation, both emotional and physical, as a devotee to responsibility, a recipient of benevolence, an inheritor of spiritual blessings, and an instrument of salvation.

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PREFACE

Although the name Hesba Stretton is a household word to my family, few others have ever heard of the author or her writings. The occasional references to her literary works are meager, indeed, when compared to the innumerable critiques of Dickens's novels. Yet, each writer contributed significantly to the development of Victorian fiction. Justification of this study and reasons for its pursuit appear within the text itself and in the biographical sketch of Hesba Stretton. Any further comments would border on redundancy.

Gratitude is expressed to Dr. June Underwood for her initial enthusiasm for the topic and her scholarly criticism of the study. Appreciation is expressed, also, to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his guidance and many helpful suggestions. Finally, special thanks is extended to my parents and Dale Jackson for their encouragement, patience, and understanding.

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Chapter 1

THE STREET CHILD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

After years of being considered a subject devoid of literary importance, the child finally achieved prominence as a character in literature during the nineteenth century. Themes regarding the special world of childhood gained emphasis primarily through the works of the Romantic poets who referred to youth within their poetry. According to Peter Coveney, "Childhood as a major theme came with the generation of Blake and Wordsworth."¹ Coveney later suggests, "With Blake we have the first coordinated utterance of the Romantic Imaginative and spiritually sensitive child."² In addition to emphasizing the spiritual and imaginative aspects of youth, many of the poetic works which focused upon children also became social protests written on behalf of children whose innocence contrasted with society's corruptive forces. Poems such as "The Chimney Sweeper" and "The Lamb" from Songs of Innocence by Blake or "The Idiot Boy" and "Lucy Gray" or "Solitude" by Wordsworth distinctly expressed these as well as other concepts of childhood. As a result, the

¹Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood, The Individual and Society: a Study of the Theme in English Literature, p. 29.

²Ibid., p. 51.

poems helped to establish decisive guidelines for presenting children in literature during the foremost part of the nineteenth century. Children and aspects of youth remained almost exclusively a poetic device until Charles Dickens and, following his lead, minor novelists such as Hesba Stretton, began to focus upon children and their unique world. With the shift in literary mediums from poetry to novels, however, many of the basic factors involving youth remained. Peter Coveney notes:

In this central transference towards prose, the flow carried within itself the characteristics of the romantic sensibility--the self-awareness, the heightened sense of individual personality, the social protest, and, too, the increased awareness of the child, as a vehicle for social commentary, as a symbol of innocence and the life of the imagination, as an expression of nostalgia, insecurity, and, one can just detect it, introspective self-pity.³

By extending many of the themes which were emphasized by the Romantic poets, Dickens became " . . . the first English novelist in whose stories children and young people played central parts."⁴ In fact, of Dickens's fifteen novels, including Pickwick Papers, only four fail to give children a prominent position; his shorter fiction includes even more juvenile characters.⁵ The abundance of children

³Ibid., p. 92.

⁴Frank Donovan, Dickens and Youth, p. 3.

⁵Ibid.

and their positions of prominence within his literary works have evoked innumerable comments from critics. W. Walter Crotch, who believed Dickens had the vision of a child, has said, "'The Pied Piper himself was not followed by a larger, noisier, jollier, or a more motley crowd of youngsters than those which sprang teeming from the creative brain of Dickens.'"⁶ A more recent critic, Frank Donovan, comments,

Dickens' multifarious interests prompted him to write about many things, but through all his work there marches a cast of juvenile characters unique in the world of literature. No other author wrote so extensively about youth in all its aspects.⁷

Not only are Dickens's novels unique because of the number of child characters, but also because of the semblance of those creations to actual children. In all his diverse characterizations, Dickens strove to capture realistic features and to stress the individuality of his children. According to Marghanita Laski, the distinction between adults and children, which Dickens clearly delineates through his multitude of juvenile characters, was first handled successfully on the European continent by Rousseau. She comments,

It was, I suppose, Rousseau's Emile that inculcated the belief that children were different animals from adults and as such required different treatment, clothing, surroundings and even books.⁸

⁶Ibid., p. 2.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Marghanita Laski, Mrs. Ewing, Mrs. Molesworth, and Mrs. Hodgson-Burnett, p. 17.

As a nineteenth-century novelist, Dickens reiterated the concepts of differentiation between children and adults by attempting to make his portrayals of youth lifelike.

While reflecting his keen understanding of the individuality of children, Dickens's writings also provided an outlet for a voice which favored reform measures on the behalf of children, especially street children. Writing in the mid-century when children were not only frequently omitted from literature but also neglected within society, Dickens used his novels to direct attention to the trials of children in society. As George Gissing states,

England sadly needed awakening to her responsibilities in the matter of childhood, and who shall say how great an influence for good was exercised by Charles Dickens in his constant preoccupation with children, their sufferings, their education, their claims of every kind.⁹

Because of Dickens's ability to rouse public awareness in regard to neglected children, Philip Collins suggests that

Dickens in the literary world corresponds to Shaftesbury in the political: "the children's champion" is a title each could justify and each soon found a large and loving audience for his appeals.¹⁰

Unlike Dickens, most of the major novelists of the Victorian Era either chose to ignore children, even as incidental background subjects, or dealt with them in a superficial manner. According to Marjory Bald, "Jane Austen

⁹George Gissing, Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 94.

¹⁰Philip Collins, Dickens and Education, p. 179.

used them [children] as accessories; Charlotte Bronte understood them only when they were too old for their years; and Emily seems to have left them very much to one side"¹¹ In Bald's estimation, George Eliot also must be criticized because she merely sketched her child characters from the outside and ". . . often attempted nothing more than some quaintness or delicacy of manner."¹² Unlike Dickens, the majority of writers failed to realize that children differ significantly from adults. As a result, their portrayals often show no apparent distinction between the two levels of humanity.

Although many of the major novelists failed to portray adequately children within their works, numerous minor novelists, including Hesba Stretton, echoed the themes of youth which Dickens introduced in his writings. The minor novels which contained such themes wielded considerable importance among their contemporary audiences. As Amy Cruse has commented in regard to such books: "Their lives, though short, are active and potent."¹³ J. H. Ewing, herself a minor woman novelist of that period, justifies the position of the minor authors by writing that ". . . small writers

¹¹Marjory A. Bald, Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century, p. 282.

¹²Ibid., p. 197.

¹³Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Reading, p. 13.

are wanted as well as big ones, and there is no reason why donkey-carts shouldn't drive, even if there are coaches on the road."¹⁴ Her viewpoint, which she expressed in a letter to her mother in January of 1868, has recently gained favorable support among literary scholars of this century. For instance, Louis James suggests that ". . . it is probably wise to consider the minor literature of a period seriously if we are to understand satisfactorily the major writings which survive to our times."¹⁵ Moreover, John Goode states,

The study of Victorian fiction is at a point of development when, in order to give historical definition to the work of major authors, popular novels need to be brought forward from the background and made properly part of the context.¹⁶

In view of the preceding contentions, a study of street children in nineteenth-century literature needs to be analyzed, not only from Dickens's standpoint as a major novelist of the period, but also from Hesba Stretton's position as a minor novelist within the same era. Hesba Stretton was one of the more popular Victorian authors who reflected Dickens's concern for the plight of street children. Jessica's First Prayer, Little Meg's Children, and Alone in London serve as literary examples which indicate Hesba

¹⁴Laski, p. 4.

¹⁵John R. Reed, Victorian Conventions, p. xii.

¹⁶John Goode, "Minor Nineteenth-Century Fiction," Victorian Studies, 11 (June 1968), 535.

Stretton's specific interest in street children. Although her writings have not survived readily into the twentieth century, as have Dickens's, they were influential forces during the first few decades following their publication. Stretton's concentration upon street children in stories such as those listed above corresponds to Dickens's presentations. Beginning with Oliver Twist, his first novel with a child as the pivotal center, Dickens exposed the conditions of street children in particular. In addition to Oliver Twist, the role of the London street child receives prominence in works such as The Old Curiosity Shop and Bleak House.

Although Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens exchanged a literary and business relationship while Stretton wrote for Dickens's periodicals, Household Words and All the Year Round, the extent of Charles Dickens's influence upon Hesba Stretton and her writings is difficult fully to ascertain on the basis of the limited information currently accessible. However, the two Victorians do share a connective relationship which may be firmly established by a perusal of several of their major works. In numerous narratives which focus upon the lives of children, Hesba Stretton incorporates, and often extends, many of the thematic concepts which characterize Dickens's presentations of street children

within several of his novels.¹⁷ Their thematic presentations of such children include viewing the street child as a reflection of deprivation, both emotional and physical, a devotee to responsibility, a recipient of benevolence, an inheritor of spiritual blessings, and an instrument of salvation.

¹⁷Bleak House, The Old Curiosity Shop, and Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens, as well as Alone in London, Jessica's First Prayer, Little Meg's Children, Lost Gip, and A Thorny Path by Hesba Stretton, will serve as the main primary sources under examination. The works of both authors were selected on the basis of relevancy to the topic of street children. In addition, Hesba Stretton's works were selected on the basis of availability since the books are difficult to obtain for analysis.

Chapter 2

THE NEGLECTED CHILD AS A REFLECTION OF EMOTIONAL DEPRIVATION

The deprived child was a favorite theme of Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens. Their presentations of nineteenth-century street children consist of realist scenes of emotional deprivation. While street children serve as the central protagonists in many of the novels of Hesba Stretton, in Dickens's novels, street children may be frequently subordinated to the main plot and characters of a book. In spite of the diverse focus which street children receive from the two authors, both Stretton and Dickens dwell upon the factors which contribute to the emotional deprivation of such children. In presenting the subject, they particularly note the street child's lack of parental love and peer friendships.

When writing of street children, Dickens and Stretton create characters deprived of parental love and affection by either orphanhood or a quasi-orphaned state. Regarding Dickens's creation of children, Frank Donovan notes that "a very high percentage are orphans or half-orphans who are denied the stability of a loving home."¹⁸ The denial of a

¹⁸Donovan, p. 15.

loving home and the affection which accompanies such a life may cause the rejected child immense suffering. Viewing Dickens's characters in this vein, Philip Collins contends:

His more prominent child-characters, whether or not they die, are denied the stability of a loving home, and sometimes have no home at all; they are maltreated, bludgeoned by the sarcasm, bad-tempered, or expressive of the convictions of their parents and guardians. Sometimes they are subjected to physical force, whippings and solitary confinement. They are starved or under-nourished, rendered unsound of body or mind.¹⁹

Because the characters created by both Dickens and Stretton illustrate a definite lack of affection, their street children often become pathetic figures which demand sympathy from the reader. In John Reed's opinion, "children are appealing because of their innocence and spontaneity, but orphans are more effective because of the added pathos of their condition."²⁰ Although often pathetically presented, the inclusion of street children who lack an affectionate home life was a realistic portrayal of a situation which occurred frequently during the nineteenth century in England as a result of shorter life expectancies and, especially, because of the frequent deaths of mothers during childbirth.

Of the street children who serve as protagonists in the works of Dickens and Stretton, several represent the orphan state of existence. One of these, Tony, the main

¹⁹Collins, p. 173.

²⁰Reed, pp. 252-53.

character of Stretton's Alone in London, is an orphan crossing-sweeper whom old Oliver refers to as being ". . . one of the Lord's poor little ones as are scattered up and down in this great city, without father or mother. . . ."21 The homeless, parentless state of characters such as Tony is often illustrated by the child's lack of a surname. Tony explains his own name when introducing himself to the elderly Mr. Oliver. Tony says,

" . . . And my name's Antony' Tony, for short. I used to have another name; mother told it to me afore she died, but it's gone clean out o' my hear. Tony I am, anyhow, and you can call me by it, if you choose" (II).

A similar type of situation arises with the orphan Don of A Thorny Path who, when he died, ". . . had no name that they could put upon the headstone. . . ."22 Upon questioning, he recalls the acquisition of his first name.

"I never had what one 'ud call a proper name," he answered; "at least, not like other boys, you know; or, if I had, I lost it afore I can remember. But I call myself Don; and I won't answer to any other name. I'll tell you why. Folks kept callin' me anythin' they liked, till I didn't even know who I was. And there was a little dawg, a little black-and-tan terrier, as sharp as a needle, that used to run up to me and sniff round me and eat a bit out o' my hand, as if we'd known each other all our lives; and the lady as belonged to him called him Don. I heard her once call him away from me: 'Don, Don!'"

²¹Hesba Stretton, Alone in London, p. 70. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

²²Hesba Stretton, A Thorny Path, p. 173. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

she said; and that was the very last time I ever saw him. I never set eyes on that little black-and-tan dawg again. So I chose his name for my own, and it often makes me think of him comin' up so friendly and familiar. That's how I came to call myself Don." (II)

The lack of a family name is especially significant in the orphan crossing-sweeper Jo of Bleak House by Dickens. Trevor Blount summarizes Jo's orphanhood by saying, "'Moved On,' he is without home, security, even very much of an identity."²³ The preliminary questions asked in the court proceedings reveal his lack of a positive identity.

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for him. He don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. He can't spell it. No father, no mother, no friends.²⁴

Later, when Mr. Bucket and Mr. Snagsby attempt to locate Jo in the slum district of Tom-All-Alone's, Jo's name again reflects his orphan status.

There is inquiry made, at various houses, for a boy named Jo. As few people are known in Tom-All-Alone's by any Christian sign, there is much reference to Mr. Snagsby whether he means Carrots, or the Colonel, or Gallows, or young Chisel, or Terrier Tip, or Lanky, or the Brick.
(XXII)

After much controversy, "at least there is a lair found out where Tough, or the Tough Subject, lays him down at night;

²³Trevor Blount, "Poor Jo, Education and the Problem of Juvenile Delinquency in Dickens' Bleak House," Modern Philology, 62 (May 1965), 329.

²⁴Charles Dickens, Bleak House, p. 75. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

and it is thought that the Tough Subject may be Jo" (XXII). Blount comments that "it is not irrelevant that the boy has more than one name--Jo, Toughy, and the Tough Subject--and yet lacks a family name."²⁵ If Jo is to have any father at all, most critics contend the slum itself fulfills that role.

In addition to Hesba Stretton's two characters, Tony and Don, and Charles Dickens's character Jo, Oliver Twist, another of Dickens's creations, experiences a similar problem involving his name. Oliver's situation is more poignant than many of the street children because he was born in a workhouse to which his mother was taken immediately prior to his birth. Upon the death of his mother, Oliver becomes ". . . a parish child--the orphan of a workhouse--the humble, half-starved drudge--to be cuffed and buffeted through the world--despised by all, and pitied by none."²⁶ Evidence of Oliver's deprivation of familial love occurs when Mr. Bumble proudly explains the impersonal workhouse system of assigning names. He declares:

"We name our fondlings in alphabetical order. The last was a S,--Swubble, I named him. This was a T,--Twist, I named him. The next one as comes will be Unwin, and the next Vilkins. I have got names ready made to the end of the alphabet, and all the way through it again, when we come to Z." (II)

²⁵Blount, p. 329.

²⁶Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 2. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

Orphans who are girls also appear in the works by both authors. John Reed contends that

to be female and an orphan as well, was to be doubly disadvantaged in an age that valued family and empowered man. Hence, female orphans come to represent, not surprisingly, a vulnerable and isolated virtue.²⁷

One of Dickens's main protagonists is Little Nell of The Old Curiosity Shop. Carola, in Stretton's book by the same name, is another female orphan whose early street life affects her later life. When she assumes a teaching position in the country, "it was known by all about her that she was an orphan, and had no friends, having come direct from school to take her present post. . . ."28

Although only a few of Stretton's street children are full-fledged orphans, many have only one living parent and, in many instances, even the remaining parent dies in the course of the novel's events. Little Meg's Children, one of Stretton's three most popular works, follows this structure. The father, one of the rare father images presented, is away at sea and of little help to the family even when he is in port because of his heavy drinking. The mother, a steadfast, loving woman, gradually loses strength and dies, leaving Meg charged with the responsibility for the rest of the family.

²⁷Reed, p. 254.

²⁸Hesba Stretton, Carola, p. 110.

Quite similarly in Dickens's Bleak House, the young girl Charley Neckett and her brother and sister, Tom and Emma, become orphans after the death of their father. Their emotional loss is illustrated in the following excerpt spoken by Esther:

It was the first time since our entry that a tear had been shed among these children. The little orphan girl Charley had spoken of their father, and their mother, as if all that sorrow were subdued by the necessity of taking courage, and by her childish importance in being able to work, and by her bustling busy way. But now, when Tom cried; although she sat quite tranquil, looking quietly at us, and did not by any movement disturb a hair of the head of either of her little charges; I saw two silent tears fall down her face. (XV)

Stretton's work, In Prison and Out, also involves an only living parent, the mother, who eventually dies, leaving the two children as orphans. Although only a few of Dickens's characters still have one living parent by the end of the novel, in The Old Curiosity Shop, Nell's close friend Kit is fatherless but has a loving mother whom he strives to support. An even rarer situation occurs in Stretton's Alone in London which presents a child figure loved by both her parents. Although the girl is temporarily abandoned by the mother going to the aid of her husband, the couple later seek a reunion with their daughter.

According to Dickens, ". . . not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast

from a living parent's home."²⁹ Children within Stretton's works frequently conform to this pattern.³⁰ In Jessica's First Prayer, Jessica's mother is still living but for all supportive purposes may as well be dead. The mother, an unemployed actress who is often drunk, considers Jessica a regrettable burden:

Everything that could be pawned had disappeared long ago, and Jessica's mother often lamented that she could not thus dispose of her child. Yet Jessica was hardly a burden to her. It was a long time since she had taken any care to provide her with food or clothing, and the girl had to earn or beg for herself the meat which kept a scanty life within her.³¹

Quite similarly, in Lost Gip the two children have a mother still living but she, like Jessica's mother, is a drunkard. Little concerned for her children, the mother eventually loses Gip, a toddler, on one of her drunken sprees. The plot then centers upon the brother's attempt to locate his lost sister. In his search, he flees from his mother and retains a dreadful fear of her until the very end when she dies a despicable death. In A Thorny Path the children are fatherless and abandoned in a garden by their mother who foresees

²⁹Steven Marcus, Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey, p. 354.

³⁰Hesba Stretton's personal interest in cruelty to children is reflected by her concern and active participation in the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Further information on the subject is included within the biographical sketch in the Appendix.

³¹Hesba Stretton, Jessica's First Prayer, p. 21. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

no future for them together as a family. Although the children are later reunited with their mother, her initial rejection of them is a negation of motherhood. The loss of a father is a handicap, but the loss of a living mother's love is even more pathetic and can be emotionally crippling for a child who is denied that needed love.

According to John Reed, "literary orphans frequently embody a pervasive sense of yearning for fulfillment of a vague desire usually stipulated as human love."³² Besides the emotional state of orphanhood, most of the authors' street children lack the love provided by friends, especially peers. Collins says, "Dickens's child-heroes, indeed, have a craving for affection, but are not very good at making friends of their own age."³³ In fact, for the most part, the street children created by both Dickens and Stretton have few friends. The two authors thus illustrate the loneliness of urban life by depicting children surrounded by isolation and solitude. John Reed suggests, "The orphan's isolation and alienation represented the growing sense of exile many felt in the milieu of the materialistic society of nineteenth-century England."³⁴ Quite similarly, Peter Coveney believes,

³²Reed, p. 258.

³³Collins, p. 183.

³⁴Reed, p. 258.

"Loneliness for Dickens was the essential concomitant of the megalopolitan age."³⁵ Loneliness becomes a dominant characteristic of the street children who are not only deprived of parental love but also the affection of friends.

Many of Stretton's street children experience the loneliness illustrated by Meg in Little Meg's Children. Meg's isolation is emphasized when she sits in the dark of the evening, ". . . looking out over the great vast city, with its myriads of fellow-beings all about her, none of whom had any knowledge of her loneliness, or any sympathy with her difficulties."³⁶ Her situation reflects Walter Bagehot's contention that

London is like a newspaper. Everything is there, and everything is disconnected. There is every kind of person in some houses; but there is no more connection between the houses than between the neighbours in the lists of "births, marriages, and deaths."³⁷

Hesba Stretton stresses the fact that Meg

. . . had no friend to go to in all the great city. Once she might have gone to the teacher at the school where she had learned to read a little; but that had been in quite a different part of London, on the other side of the river, and they had moved from it before her father had started on his last voyage. (VIII)

³⁵Coveney, p. 122.

³⁶Hesba Stretton, Little Meg's Children, pp. 31-32. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

³⁷Walter Bagehot, "Charles Dickens," in The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot, ed. Mrs. Russell Barrington, III, 84-85.

Later, Meg's lack of friends is again emphasized with the comment that "there was no one in Angel Court whom she dare call to her help" (XI).

Dickens's Little Nell, the central character of The Old Curiosity Shop, also experiences the loneliness which Meg encounters. Peter Coveney believes the theme of isolation is especially insistent in The Old Curiosity Shop.³⁸ The lack of love and concern from friends is evident when the old man is ill with a fever and Mr. Quilp, who owns their property, is threatening to expel them. According to the narration,

. . . in all the hurry and crowding of such a time, the child was more alone than she had ever been before; alone in spirit, alone in her devotion to him who was wasting away upon his burning bed; alone in her unfeigned sorrow and her unpurchased sympathy.³⁹

As a means of alleviating some of their sorrow, many of the street children steal to windows and stare out across the rooftops of the neighboring buildings. Whether an attempt to communicate either with their fellowmen or with God, or merely a mental form of pastoral escape, the children use the action as recourse to the sorrow which they feel. Like Meg whose window watching was previously mentioned, Nell, in her loneliness, ". . . had stolen to her usual window, and

³⁸Coveney, p. 122.

³⁹Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop, p. 41. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

was sitting there very sorrowfully. . ." (XI).

The lack of friends and the resulting isolation, both physically and emotionally, is a noteworthy feature of Oliver Twist's orphan life, as well. He, too, is a window gazer. While confined to Fagin's rooms in London, Oliver frequently stared out a window.

There was a back-garret window with rusty bars outside, which had no shutter: and out of this, Oliver often gazed with a melancholy face for hours together; but nothing was to be descried from it but a confused and crowded mass of house-tops, blackened chimneys, and gable-ends. (XVIII)

Sherman Eoff believes, "Oliver Twist quite plainly brings to mind the pícaro in the role of a homeless and friendless child who finds himself at the mercy of an unsympathetic society."⁴⁰ Joseph Duffy comments upon Oliver's isolated state, saying:

As a composition of molecules occupying space Oliver must have some conviction of his reality, but otherwise, melancholy in appearance, his thoughts still, usually crouched "in the corner of the passage by the street-door, to be as near living people as he could," the boy is experiencing a lack of relationship to other beings so complete as to annihilate his personal identity. He is undergoing a psychic testing prepared by Fagin so that he will "prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place. . . ." ⁴¹

⁴⁰Sherman Eoff, "Oliver Twist and the Spanish Picaresque Novel," Studies in Philology, 54 (July, 1957), 440.

⁴¹Joseph M. Duffy, Jr., "Another Version of Pastoral: Oliver Twist," Journal of English Literary History, 35 (September 1968), 408.

It is Oliver's prayer

. . . that if any aid were to be raised up for a poor outcast boy who had never known the love of friends or kindred, it might come to him now, when, desolate and deserted, he stood alone in the midst of wickedness and guilt" (XX).

Despite the circumstances, occasionally a child will find a friend with whom he will establish a loyal relationship. Sandy's relationship with the lame boy in Lost Gip, Tony's friendship with old Oliver and Dolly in Alone in London, and Nell's companionship with Kit in The Old Curiosity Shop all serve as examples of such loyal friendships. However, in these friendships, a separation between the two friends increases their loneliness and longing for each other. The street child's loneliness, therefore, is augmented by the threat of losing his friends. The character Tony in Alone in London emphasizes the loneliness of the city for its street occupants, Tony in particular. His only friends are Dolly and old Oliver, whom he leaves temporarily when frightened by a visiting relative of theirs. The peace of returning to the security of friends becomes apparent upon Tony's return when

he fell asleep that night under the counter with the tranquil peacefulness of one who has been tossed about in a great storm and tempest, and has been brought safely to the desired haven (VII).

The fear of losing his two friends emerges near the end of the story. Tony realizes that

if the old man [old Oliver] went away to live with his daughter in the country, his home would be lost to him,

and he would have to go out into the great city again alone, with nobody to love. He could get his living now in a respectable manner, and there was no fear of his being driven to sleep in Covent Garden, or under the bridges. But he would be alone, and all the links which bound him to Dolly and old Oliver would be snapped asunder. (XX)

Oliver Twist also experiences the loneliness which comes as a result of separations and frequent moving. Unlike Tony in Alone in London, Oliver does not develop a specific friendship. An early indication of Oliver's loneliness appears when he is removed from Mrs. Mann's branch-workhouse and taken to the regular workhouse.

Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known; and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the child's heart for the first time (II).

The second move during his life also creates a sorrowful situation for him. While being escorted by Mr. Bumble to the home of his new employer, Mr. Sowerberry, Oliver ". . . wept until the tears sprung out from between his chin and bony fingers" (IV). When Mr. Bumble inquired as to the reason for such a scene, the child cried, "'So lonely, sir! So very lonely! Everybody hates me. Oh! sir, don't, don't pray be cross to me!' The child beat his hand upon his heart; and looked in his companion's face, with tears of real agony" (IV). Oliver's exclamation indicates the emotional deprivation which many of the street children experienced during their brief lives. A culminating remark upon Oliver's loneliness is presented in regard to his

solitary sleeping quarters amid the coffins:

He was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation. The boy had no friends to care for, or to care for him. The regret of no well-remembered face sank heavily into his heart. But his heart was heavy, notwithstanding; and he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed that that were his coffin, and that he could be lain in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep. (V)

Indicative of the physical separation of true friends is the separation of Kit and Nell when Nell and her grandfather leave town. Kit so earnestly wished Nell to return that

day after day as he bent his steps homeward, returning from some new effort to procure employment, Kit raised his eyes to the window of the little room he had so much commended to the child, and hoped to see some indication of her presence (XX).

Just as Nell and her grandfather ". . . were the fountain-head of all his Kit's meditations" so was Kit a dominant figure in Nell's thoughts. For instance, while working for Mrs. Jarley, Nell

. . . would go and sit at the open window, and feel a companionship in the bright stars. At these times she would recall the old house, and the window at which she used to sit alone; and then she would think of poor Kit and all his kindness, until the tears came into her eyes, and she would weep and smile together. (XXIX)

Prior to her death, Nell frequently refers to Kit and their previous friendship.

She would like to see poor Kit, she had often said of late. She wished there was somebody to take her love to Kit. And, even then, she never thought or spoke about him but with something of her old, clear, merry laugh" (LXXII).

The loyalty of the relationship which the two children remember, but because of distance cannot share, is honored too late. The permanency of their long-term separation becomes ironically apparent when Kit arrives to see Nell and Nell, quite timely, has just died.

Deprived of parental love and peer affection, the street children of Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens demand the reader's sympathy for their plight. Their lack of natural, loving relationships would obviously have serious consequences upon the emotional stability of these children as they matured. However, their limited opportunity even to reach maturity, their struggle for mere survival, becomes just as significant when the two authors couple emotional deprivation with the physical deficiencies caused by their environment. The physical environment which the children experience reflects the harsh reality of a city that frequently limits street children to a life characterized by the hunger, cold, and sickness of poverty.

Chapter 3

THE NEGLECTED CHILD AS A REFLECTION OF PHYSICAL DEPRIVATION

"Deprived of parental love and support, most of these children are," according to Philip Collins, "rudely cast out in the alien adult world to fend for themselves."⁴² Within the works by Stretton and Dickens, the city of London becomes the "alien adult world" upon whose streets the abandoned children struggle to exist amid the hostility, cruelty, and indifference of the adult world. Joseph Duffy has stated that

the inhospitableness of the earthly environment is dramatized by the plight of the child who feels the poignancy of his own condition, who like Arnold's "Gipsy Child by the Seashore" has a dream sadder than any exile's and a sorrow more forlorn than any angel's!⁴³

Duffy also believes "the question of how men are to live in a world which seems so little geared to their accommodation is of primary concern in all of Dickens's novels."⁴⁴ Hesba Stretton is also concerned with the survival of the poor in London. Margaret Cutt says, "She reflects very clearly the Victorian concern about the appalling problems of poverty

⁴²Collins, p. 183.

⁴³Duffy, p. 404.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 403.

and illiteracy."⁴⁵ In addition, Margaret Mortimer comments upon Stretton's books by saying, "Together they not only show the prevalent evangelical theology of the time, but they also present a detailed picture of the conditions of the poor in Victorian England."⁴⁶ Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens both analyze the city environment in terms of the street children who have suffered as a result of living there. According to Peter Coveney, "there is a sure echo of Wordsworth and Coleridge in the image of the child deprived of joy and wonder in his urban prison. . . ."⁴⁷ Of the urban problems which deprive street children of happiness and, at times, even life itself, the two authors consider the physical factors of hunger, cold, and illness which ensue as a result of a life of poverty in the slums.

An inevitable aspect of slum life was the constant threat of starvation for the young children of the streets. Alexander Welsh notes,

In the slums of the city . . . death is not the ironic and unexpected leveler of men in all classes and characters but the starvation that slowly and predictably overcomes those who do not have enough to eat.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Margaret Cutt, "In Their Own Time: Footnotes to Social History, Part II," The Horn Book Magazine, February 1974, p. 28.

⁴⁶Margaret Mortimer, "Preface," in Little Meg's Children, by Hesba Stretton, p. x.

⁴⁷Coveney, p. 102.

⁴⁸Alexander Welsh, "Satire and History: The City of Dickens," Victorian Studies, 11 (March 1968), 386.

Hesba Stretton's stress upon starvation, the deprivation of food, occurs in the early example of Jessica in Jessica's First Prayer, the book with which she met instant success.

Jessica is first introduced by her hungry gaze upon the food of an experienced vender in a coffee stall. Stretton writes that

. . . one morning in a partial lull of his business the owner suddenly became aware of a pair of very bright dark eyes being fastened upon him and the slices of bread and butter on his board, with a gaze as hungry as that of a mouse which has been driven by famine into a trap. (I)

According to a later description,

whoever the wretched child was, she did not speak; only at every steaming cupful which he poured out of his can, her dark eyes gleamed hungrily, and he could hear her smack her thin lips, as if in fancy she was tasting the warm and fragrant coffee (I).

The conversation between the two characters which ensues focuses upon Jessica's hunger. After scrutinizing the situation, Jessica comments:

". . . It's so nice to smell the coffee; and the police has left off worrying me while I've been here. He thinks I'm a customer taking my breakfast." And the child laughed a shrill little laugh of mockery at herself and the policeman.

"You've had no breakfast, I suppose," said the coffee-stall keeper, in the same low and confidential voice, and leaning over the stall till his face nearly touched the thin, sharp features of the child.

"No," she replied coolly, "and I shall want my dinner dreadful bad afore I get it, I know. You don't often feel dreadful hungry, do you sir? I'm not griped yet, you know; but afore I taste my dinner it'll be pretty bad, I tell you. Ah! very bad indeed!"

She turned away with a knowing nod, as much as to say she had one experience in life to which he was quite a stranger. . . . (I)

Jessica's description also indicates the long-term evidence of hunger as she possesses "a wan face and thin little frame" and is frequently referred to as a "famished child" (II).

To the starving street child,

the snug, dark corner of the coffee-stall, with its warm fire of charcoal and its fragrant smell of coffee had been a paradise to her. . . . All beyond the railway arch the streets stretched away, cold and dreary, with no friendly faces to meet hers, and no warm cups of coffee to refresh her . . ." (II)

Mr. Daniel's offer to provide her with a bun and coffee once a week, every Wednesday, brings a realization of her hopes and an expectation of days to come.

In the novel A Thorny Path, Hesba Stretton's emphasis upon starvation becomes most apparent and, within the book, she makes personal, authorial comments in regard to London's hungry children. One of the prominent characters, Don, in his strife to support little Dot, gradually is forced to starve himself in order to provide food for the girl. Upon hearing some women observe his approaching death, Don analyzes his condition:

He was never hungry now. He could go without food longer, much longer than he could two months ago, and feel no gnawing or craving for it. The very smell of bread in the bakers' shops seemed to satisfy him. Yet he could not altogether be sure that the women were wrong. He could feel all the bones in his wasted limbs; and his clothes, the man's suit he was so proud of, hung upon him like a skeleton. People died of starvation sometimes in London; but surely this ailment of his, if he was ailing, could not be starvation, it had come on so slowly. (XVI)

A later comment on starvation occurs after Don's death as Mrs. Clack is considering the cause of his demise. The following passage reflects Mrs. Clack's thinking on the subject:

It was clear from what little Dot said that he had not touched a morsel of food all the day, and it was only too probable that many hours had passed since he had taken anything to nourish life. She knew the sad secret of how many hours it is safe to go without food. It was no new thing to her to discover that the poor may slowly famish from the want of things necessary to life, until they grow unconscious of the certain death that is stealthily lying in wait for them; when their resolution breaks down, and they accept the dreaded shelter of the workhouse, too late. (VIII)

Stretton's own personal feelings about starvation emerge in the final chapter of the book under the title "A Shameful Verdict." In her didactic comments, she remarks:

It was necessary to have an inquest held on the death of the homeless and nameless boy; and the usual verdict of death through starvation was returned. This verdict is growing common enough to lose its power of giving a shock to the hundreds of thousands of hearths where comfort and ease abound. Last year seventy-seven persons died from this cause in London alone. (XIX)

Of the visitors who paid their respects to Mrs. Clack, several inquired about what could be done to prevent such deaths from starvation for they believed ". . . it to be an infamy to the greatest and richest city in the world, a Christian city, that one of its children should famish in its streets" (XIX). Hesba Stretton again interjects her personal feelings, based upon informed opinions and actual experiences, as she extends the previous remark. She contends:

To die of famine and the want of all things, whilst our river is thronged with heavily-laden ships coming in day after day, bringing stores of corn and food from the furthest ends of the earth! To be stinted in the absolute necessaries of life, whilst luxury and waste run riot on every hand, whilst hundreds of tons of food are thrown away! That was terrible. Christ had come amongst us, in the form of one of the least of His brethren; he had been hungry, and we had not fed him; naked, and we had clothed him not; a stranger, and we took him not in. (XIX)

The horrible effects of hunger are also apparent in Dickens's Bleak House with the character Jo, who ". . . lives --that is to say, Jo has not yet died--in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-All-Along's" (XVI). Jacob Korg believes Bleak House is one of Dickens's "most powerful protests" on the problem of poverty.⁴⁹ Slightly better than eating orange peels from the gutter, "Jo comes out of Tom-All-Along's, meeting the tardy morning which is always late in getting down there, and munches his dirty bit of bread as he comes along" (XVI). Later, after being given some meats from Mr. Snagsby's table,

Jo moves on, through the long vacation, down to Blackfriars Bridge, where he finds a baking stony corner, wherein to settle his repast. And there he sets, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral. . . ." (XIX).⁵⁰

⁴⁹Jacob Korg, ed., Twentieth-Century Interpretations of BLEAK HOUSE: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 5.

⁵⁰Stretton and Dickens both wrote about the conditions within the East End of London, the area surrounding the vicinity of St. Paul's Cathedral, with which they were acquainted as a result of their personal visits to view the slums there.

Much like Jessica, Jo also eats a breakfast from a stall on the street corner. Allan Woodcourt is responsible for providing the breakfast for Jo:

What is a dainty repast to Jo is then set before him, and he begins to gulp the coffee, and to gnaw the bread and butter; looking anxiously about him in all directions as he eats and drinks, like a scared animal.

But he is so sick and miserable, that even hunger has abandoned him. "I thought I was amost a starvin, sir," says Jo, soon putting down his food; "but I don't know nothink--not even that. I don't care for eating wittles nor yet for drinking on 'em." And Jo stands shivering, and looking at the breakfast wonderingly. (XLVII)

Because he is so accustomed to hunger, Jo is unable to eat, and not until he drinks some wine provided by Woodcourt and has rested several minutes is he able to attempt eating again. Then, ". . . by little and little, he eats the slice of bread he had so hopelessly laid down" (XLVII). In response to questioning concerning himself, Jo answers, "'I never was in no other trouble at all, sir--'sept not knowin' nothink and starvation'" (XLVII).

Oliver Twist, written in 1838 as a criticism of the Poor Law Amendment of 1834, also presents a child deprived of bodily nourishment. Alex Zwerdling notes that "Oliver's deprivation is primarily physical, external."⁵¹ One of the main contributing factors to his physical deficiency is the starvation which he experiences while he resides in the

⁵¹Alex Zwerdling, "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated," PMLA, 88 (May 1973), 429.

workhouse. Although Oliver's hunger begins while he lives in the workhouse, his starved condition is similar to that of the street children on their own in London. Dickens's satiric comments on the workhouse system of planned starvation prevail in the second chapter of Oliver Twist.

Oliver Twist's ninth birthday found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference. But nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast. It had had plenty of room to expand, thanks to the spare diet of the establishment. . . . (II)

Reference is later made to Oliver's hunger when he leaves the branch-workhouse of Mrs. Mann to return with Mr. Bumble to the regular parish workhouse. Dickens then notes that

it was no very difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry; and Oliver cried very naturally indeed (II).

The workhouse system on feeding becomes clear when

. . . they established the rules, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it (II).

In Dickens's narrative, the boys' hunger within the workhouse led to Oliver's simple, yet disastrous, request for more food. Oliver horrified the staff by his request.

Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table, and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: "Please, sir, I want some more" (II).

Even at the home of the Sowerberry's, Oliver's starvation continues. His famished state is indicated by Mrs.

Sowerberry's reference to him as a "'little bag o' bones'" (IV). His relishment of the dog's food also illustrates that point:

Oliver, whose eyes had glistened at the mention of meat, and who was trembling with eagerness to devour it, replied in the negative; and a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before him.

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. (IV)

While with the Sowerberrys, Oliver always ". . . ate the stale pieces which had been specifically reserved for him" (V). Although he was not given a lot of food nor the choicest pieces, Oliver did receive some nourishment. However, his situation reflects the gradual process of starvation to which many street children fell victim.

Closely associated with hunger is cold, resulting from inadequate clothing and housing during the wintry London days. The majority of Stretton's street children resemble Jessica of Jessica's First Prayer. Jessica's description reveals her inappropriate dress for the weather conditions.

A thin and meagre face belonged to the eyes, and was half hidden by a mass of matted hair hanging over the forehead and down the neck, the only covering which the head or neck had. A tattered frock, scarcely fastened together with broken strings was slipping down over the shivering shoulders of the little girl. (I)

The child was barefoot as she stood with her two feet on the damp pavement and ". . . lifted up first one and then the other, and laid them one over another to gain a momentary feeling of warmth" (I). Further mention of her neglected condition is made when she holds the coffee she is given between her "benumbed hands" and Mr. Daniel is unable to determine "whether her arms were black and blue from the cold, or from ill-usage . . ." (I, II). References to the rags which she wears for clothing are common throughout the book. For instance, when Jessica was desperately ill and Mr. Daniel located her in her home, the loft of a stable, "she was stretched upon a scanty litter of straw under the slanting roof where the tiles had not fallen off, with her poor rags for her only covering . . ." (IX). Stretton also emphasizes Jessica's ragged clothing in regard to her attendance at church. When Jessica visited with the minister for the first time and saw his two daughters in their fine clothing, the contrast between their clothing and hers became obvious. Jessica gazed

at the handsome clothing of the minister's daughters, while she drew her rags closer about her, and shivered a little as if she felt the sting of the east wind, which was blowing keenly through the streets (V).

Regarding the clothing of the poor, Gillian Avery says, "Hesba Stretton would have us believe that she was indifferent to how cold the poor were in the streets, so long as their

appearance did not offend the wealthy in church."⁵² Avery's comment indicates an inadequate knowledge of the text of Stretton's book and of the author's character as well. Whereas other authors often patronized the poor, Margaret Mortimer believes that Hesba Stretton ". . . not only observed the poor and wrote about them but she tried constructively to help them."⁵³ In Jessica's First Prayer, she explicitly opposes the belief that personal appearance should make a difference in the act of worship or in the sight of God. She reinforces her own position by quoting a passage of scripture within Jessica's First Prayer. Winny, one of the minister's daughters, says:

. . . "this was papa's text a little while ago:--'For if there comes unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?'" (IV)

By depicting Jessica in a ragged condition, Stretton was able to stress the double deprivation caused by inadequate clothing--exposure to the cold and denial of a place to worship. Hesba Stretton, thus, reveals the effects which a lack of adequate clothing imposes upon an innocent child, a child of God.

⁵²Gillian Avery with the assistance of Angela Bull, Nineteenth-Century Children, Heroes and Heroines in English Children's Stories 1780-1900, p. 96.

⁵³Mortimer, p. xii.

Another Stretton novel which exemplifies the lack of appropriate clothing for children is Alone in London.

Mention is made of barefoot children when, early in the first chapter, Stretton notes,

All day long the sun had shone down steadily upon the streets of London, with a fierce glare and glowing heat, until the barefooted children had felt the dusty pavement burn under their tread almost as painfully as the icy pavement had frozen their feet in the winter.

More specifically, Stretton focuses attention upon the street child Tony and his bedraggled condition. Tony was

. . . a ragged boy, barefoot and bareheaded, with no clothing but a torn pair of trousers, very jagged about the ankles, and a jacket through which his thin shoulders displayed themselves (II).

After scrimping and starving himself in order to obtain a small sum of money, Tony purchases a pair of boots, a unique experience for him and also one which proved disastrous:

He fixed upon a pair at last, urged and coaxed to them by the dealer. They were a good deal too large, and his feet slipped about in them uncomfortably; but the man assured him that was how everybody, even gentlefolks, bought them, to leave room for growing. There was an awkward, uneven patch under one of the soles, and the other heel was worn down at the side; but at least they covered his feet well. He shambled away in them slowly and toilsomely, hardly knowing how to lift one foot after another, yet full of pride in his new possessions. (XIII)

In Tony's attempt to run home after buying his too-large boots, he fell upon an orange peel and broke his leg. Just barely able to move, Tony became concerned about survival because

it was freezing fast, now the sun was gone down, and his hands scraped up the frosty mud as he dragged himself

along. If he stayed out all night, he must die of cold and pain before morning (XIII).

As a result of his intermittent lodgings, Tony was well aware of the effect of the cold. Earlier, when questioned about where he slept, Tony replied, "Anywhere as I can get out o' the wind. It's cold now, nights--wery cold, master. But I must get along a bit farder on. Lodgings is wery dear" (VII). Because of his broken leg and his stay at the hospital, Tony received better clothing from Mr. Ross, a would-be benefactor, and the nurse patched his old clothing and made a cap for him to wear when at work on the crossing. As a result of these improvements, Tony ". . . felt as rich as if a large fortune had been left to him" and, "once he became an errand-boy, he never again ran about bare-headed or barefooted" (XV).

The characters in Dickens's Bleak House also lack protection from the cold by their inappropriate apparel and shelter. The young children of the Neckett family, Tom and Emma of five years and eighteen months respectively, experience the cold:

There was no fire, though the weather was cold; both children were wrapped in some poor shawls and tippets, as a substitute. Their clothing was not so warm, however, that their noses looked red and pinched, and their small figures shrunken, as the boy walked up and down, nursing and hushing the child with its head on his shoulder. (XV)

The more prominent street child of the novel, Jo, is frequently exposed to the cold through his rags. When first presented to the Coroner, Jo is described as being ". . . very

muddy, very hoarse, very ragged" (XI). Like Tony, Jo wears no shoes. Jo's deficiency becomes apparent when he conducts a tour upon Lady Dedlock's request. According to that passage, Jo ". . . gives his ragged head a rub, takes his broom under his arm, and leads the way; passing deftly, with his bare feet, over the hard stones, and through the mud and mire" (XVI). A further depiction of Jo's miserable state of deprivation occurs when Allan Woodcourt visits Tom-All-Along's and sees Jo,

. . . [a] ragged figure coming very cautiously along, crouching close to the soiled walls--which the wretchedest figure might as well avoid--and furtively thrusting a hand before it. It is the figure of a youth, whose face is hollow, and whose eyes have an emaciated glare. He is so intent on getting along unseen, that even the apparition of a stranger in whole garments does not tempt him to look back. He shades his face with his ragged elbow as he passes on the other side of the way, and goes shrinking and creeping on, with his anxious hand before him, and his shapeless clothes hanging in shreds. Clothes made for what purpose, or of what material, it would be impossible to say. They look, in colour and in substance, like a bundle of rank leaves of swampy growth, that rotted long ago. (XLVI)

Accustomed to shivering in doorways and even then being frequently ousted, Jo continually was moving in search of new lodgings. When accosted by Mr. Snagsby and Mr. Bucket, "Jo stands amazed in the disc of light, like a ragged figure in a magic lantern, trembling to think that he has offended against the law in not having moved on far enough" (XXII). The impermanency of his shelter is also stressed in the following comment by Jo.

"I have been moved on, and moved on, more nor ever I was afore, since the t'other one giv' me the sov'ring. Mrs. Snagsby, she's always a watching, and a driving of me-- what have I done to her?--and they're all a watching and a driving me. Every one of 'em's doing of it, from the time when I don't get up, to the time when I don't go to bed. And I'm a going somewheres. That's where I'm a going." (XXXI)

Many street children contracted illnesses as a result of the conditions which deprived them of food, warmth, and shelter. Although it became essential for society to respond with health policies, the legislation for sanitation reform and medical aid on behalf of the poor was restricted by the fear that such laws would merely convert "the slum-dwellers into vermin parasites."⁵⁴ Indeed, as O'Neill states, "Behind this [Workhouse] program there lay the conviction that most, if not all, poverty stemmed from lack of moral fiber-- laziness, drunkenness, or simple thriftlessness."⁵⁵ The New Poor Law of 1834 with its much criticized workhouse system served as the initial law for helping the poor in London, but not until 1867, after extensive reform movements and increased public interest, was a policy established which actually benefited the sick poor. O'Neill relates:

The Metropolitan Poor Law Amendment Act of 1867 marked a new departure in the Poor Law's treatment of the sick. In place of an ambiguous and inadequate policy, there was

⁵⁴Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todger's," Sewanee Review, 58 (Summer 1950), 427.

⁵⁵James E. O'Neill, "Finding a Policy for the Sick Poor," Victorian Studies, 7 (March 1964), 266.

now a clear and practical one: the sick poor must be given special treatment, and, where feasible, must receive it in a Poor Law hospital.⁵⁶

The passage of corrective legislation and its enforcement interest both Dickens and Stretton. As a result, they expressed their feelings through their fictional creation of the unhealthy in society. Many of their works stress the prevalency of disease, the limited facilities for treating the diseased, and the unifying social factor of death.

Stretton particularly emphasizes illness and its encompassing problems through the character of young Dolly in Alone in London. As was common for many of the young street children living in slum housing,

. . . the full, strong, healthy light of the sun, could not find its way into it [the house], and day after day Dolly became more like one of those plants growing in shady places, which live and shoot up, but only put out pale and sickly leaves, and feeble buds (XVI).

Dolly, who ". . . never complained of feeling any pain . . .," continued to decline steadily (XVI). Exemplifying the fate of many street children, Stretton writes the following account of the situation.

But when the summer was ended, and after the damp warm fogs of November were over, and a keen, black frost set in sharply before Christmas--a frost which had none of the beauty of white rime and clear blue skies, but which hung over the city like a pall, and penetrated to every fireside with an icy breath; when only the strong and the healthy, who were well clothed and well fed, could meet it bravely, while the delicate, and sickly, and poverty-stricken, shrank before it, and

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 283.

were chilled through and through, then Dolly drooped and failed altogether. (XVI)

At Tony's suggestion, Oliver takes Dolly to the Children's Hospital. Their reception there indicates the limited availability of medical treatment for children:

"I think there's some mistake here, ma'am," said Oliver, his eye wandering absently about the large entrance-hall; "this is the Hospital for Sick children, I think, and I've brought my little grandchild here, who is very ill indeed, yet the man at the door says there's no room for her. I think it must be a mistake."

"No," said the lady; "I am sorry to say it is no mistake. We are quite full; there is not room for even one more. Indeed, we have been obliged to send cases away before to-day. Who is your recommendation from?" (XVIII)

The restricted amount of space is again referred to when old Oliver is told by the nurse that there is room for only seventy-five beds.

"Only seventy-five!" repeated the old man, very sorrowfully. "Only seventy-five, and there are hundreds and hundreds of little children ill in London! They are ill in houses like mine, where the sun never shines." (XVIII)

The hope of taking Dolly to another hospital ends when Oliver learns that there are only two or three other hospitals, all of which are far away and even smaller than this particular one. Mention is made of the fact that probably ". . . there are not more than a hundred and fifty cots in all London for sick children" (XVIII). Through Oliver's prayer upon leaving the hospital, Hesba Stretton stresses society's lack of concern for the sick children:

"Dear Lord," he said, "there's only room for seventy-five of Thy little lambs that are pining and wasting

away in every dark street and alley like mine. Whatever can Thy people be thinking about? They've got their own dear little children, who are ill sometimes, spite of all their care; and they can send for the doctor, and do all that's possible, never looking at the money it costs; but when they are well again they never think of the poor ones who are sick and dying, with nobody to help them or care for them as I care for this little one." (XVIII)

Dolly's death illustrates the fate of many ill street children who were unable to receive medical aid in time. Old Oliver's final prayer refers to society's neglect of the child. He prays, "'Dear Lord! there was no room for my little love, but thou has found room for her'" (XX).

Dickens's character Jo in Bleak House particularly illustrates society's negligence in the area of illness.

Dorothy Van Ghent suggests that

. . . the physical plague that arises out of the slum district of Tom-All-Alone's, in Bleak House, and that creeps to the houses of the great, is itself a moral plague, the conditions for it having been created by moral acquiescence.⁵⁷

Certainly, its origin in the London graveyard where Nemo was buried and its transmission to others identify the unnamed disease as a social one which infects all levels. "From the neglected slum where society's outcasts are buried, the disease is passed by the orphan, Jo, to the orphan, Charley, to the orphan, Esther."⁵⁸ Although Esther is severely disfigured, both she and Charley recover from their siege with

⁵⁷Van Ghent, p. 427.

⁵⁸James H. Broderick and John E. Grant, "The Identity of Esther Summerson," Modern Philology, 55 (May 1958), 254.

the same illness which leads to Jo's death. The two older girls have proper care while they are ill; however, Jo, as a social victim and outcast, is left to fend for himself.

The fever, usually considered smallpox, though not specifically named, characterizes Jo's illness. When Esther and Charley Neckett went to Jenny's to inquire about Jo, they found the

. . . wretched boy, supported by the chimney-piece, was cowering on the floor. He held under his arm, like a little bundle, a fragment of a fur cap; and as he tried to warm himself, he shook until the crazy door and window shook (XXXI).

Jo even comments upon his fever to Esther.

"I'm a being froze," returned the boy hoarsely . . . , "and then burnt up, and then froze, and then burnt up, ever so many times in a hour. And my head's all sleepy, and all a going mad-like--and I'm so dry--and my bones isn't half so much bones as pain" (XXXI).

Despite his condition, Jo has to survive amid the harsh environmental elements. On his way to lie among the warm bricks at the kiln, Jo ". . . carried his wretched fragment of fur cap like a bundle, though he went bare-headed through the rain which now fell fast" (XXXI).

Even when individual members of society attempt to help Jo, their attempts are thwarted and, in effect, virtually worthless because of society's continued apathy and the inefficiency of the bureaucracy which operates the programs.

Liz, a friend of Jo's, attempted to find help for him, but

at first it was too early for the boy to be received into the proper refuge, and at last it was too late. One official sent her to another, and the other sent her

back again to the first, and so backward and forward; until it appeared as if both must have been appointed for their skill in evading their duties, instead of performing them. (XXXI)

Commenting upon Liz's attempt to help Jo, Mr. Jarndyce elaborates upon the child's inability to obtain proper care.

As Esther narrates:

"Now, is it not a horrible reflection," said my Guardian, to whom I had hastily explained the unavailing efforts of the two women, "is it not a horrible reflection," stealing up and down and rumpling his hair, "that if the wretched creature were a convicted prisoner, his hospital would be wide open to him, and he would be as well taken care of as any sick boy in the Kingdom?" (XXXI)

Even Allan Woodcourt, himself a physician, realizes the limited extent of hospital services and the inaccessibility of them to street children. Allan Woodcourt explains:

"I am unwilling to place him [Jo] in a hospital, even if I could procure him immediate admission, because I foresee that he would not stay there many hours, if he could be so much as got there. The same objection applies to a workhouse; supposing I had the patience to be evaded and shirked, and handed about from post to pillar in trying to get him into one--which is a system that I don't take kindly to." (XLVII)

Although Jo was placed in the hospital by Mr. Bucket, the stay was brief, and he was discharged before his disease was cured.

Jo's oath of "Wishermaidie" eventually becomes reality as society's negligence reaches a culminating point. Realizing his weakened condition, Jo contends, "'But I'm a moving on now. I'm a moving on to the berrying ground--that's the move as I'm up to'" (XLVI). Not particularly concerned about where he dies, Jo cites what he has learned

from experience.

"They dies everywheres," said the boy. "They dies in their lodgings . . . and they dies down in Tom-All-Alone's in heaps. They dies more than they lives, according to what I see" (XXXI).

The combined result of society's indifference and Jo's illness occurs at the final scene of Jo's life when blame is laid upon society as a whole for its basic lack of charity. In fact, "it could not be clearer that the process of saying the Lord's Prayer over a boy shown dying because of man's neglect is as useless to him in his last extremity as Snagsby's half-crowns."⁵⁹ In the exchange between Allan Woodcourt and Jo, the street child, the prayer is never completed; however, Dickens's indictment of society does reach a tony of finality:

"Jo, can you say what I say?"

"I'll say anythink as you say, sir, for I knows it's good."

"OUR FATHER."

"Our Father!--yes, that's wery good, sir."

"WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

"Art in Heaven--is the light a comin, sir?"

"It is close at hand. HALLOWED BE THY NAME!"

"Hallowed be--thy--"

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dear men and women, born with Heavenly compassion, in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day. (XLVII)

⁵⁹K. J. Fielding and A. W. Brice, "Bleak House and the Graveyard," in Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation, ed., Robert B. Partlow, Jr., p. 135.

What May L. Becker terms a "lyric cry"⁶⁰ on behalf of London street children was a passionate demand, from both Dickens and Stretton, upon the citizens of England. Without an established welfare system, the only wide-scale hope for such children lay in influencing charities and the lawmakers of social policies. As Trevor Blount states, "Too many of the Snagsbys of London were unaware of these wretched Tom's in their midst."⁶¹ In order to stir national apathy and redirect misplaced philanthropy, Stretton and Dickens continually created images which emphasized the child as a victim of society's omissions. The similarity of their children is understandable, according to Margaret Cutt, because Hesba Stretton ". . . was a social reformer to her fingertips, on the model of Charles Dickens, from whom she had learned much of her craft."⁶² Dickens's description of Jo's position within Bleak House is representative of the beliefs which he and Hesba Stretton held in regard to society and street children. Dickens writes:

He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tochahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby's lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by

⁶⁰May L. Becker, "Preface," in The Old Curiosity Shop, by Charles Dickens, p. [iv].

⁶¹Trevor Blount, "Dickens's Slum Satire in Bleak House," Modern Language Review, 60 (July 1965), 342.

⁶²Cutt, p. 28.

distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets. . . . Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. (XLVII)

Amy Cruse aptly summarizes the situation by observing, "Here was something to touch the conscience, and make the sight of one's own happy and well-cared for children a reproach instead of a pleasure."⁶³

The cold, wet, shelterless midnight streets of London; the foul and frowsy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn; the haunts of hunger and disease, the shabby rags that scarcely hold together; where are the attractions of these things?⁶⁴

It is this question which Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens illustrate in their novels by presenting orphan or half-orphan street children who lack parental love as well as peers' affection. Outcast from a loving home environment, the children struggle to survive the hunger, cold, and illnesses which accompany the poor living on London's streets. As a result, both Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens initially create socially neglected children who serve as reflections of deprivation. Although the street children may illustrate other themes, they all face the harsh reality of these circumstances.

⁶³Cruse, p. 136.

⁶⁴Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. xi.

Chapter 4

THE SACRIFICING CHILD AS A DEVOTEE TO RESPONSIBILITY

Despite the depravity of their surrounding environment, the street children of Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens frequently display a center of innocence and goodness. The contrast between inherent goodness and environmental depravity reflects the earlier concepts of the Romantic poets. Peter Coveney notes, "The tension between innocence and experience sounded initially by Blake, became the main motif of early and mid-Victorian literature of the child."⁶⁵

Trevor Blount refers to Dickens's street children by saying,

There are, however, fewer occupants in Dickens's fiction than would have been likely in actuality, but Dickens cleverly uses the presence of the child to strike a sharp contrast between the unexplored potentiality of infant innocence and the vile surroundings that signalize man's depravity and callousness.⁶⁶

Although Dickens is considered an heir to the Romantic poets and the author responsible for the introduction of the romantic child into the Victorian novel, both he and Stretton extend the Romantic concept of original innocence. For Dickens in particular, Paul Squires believes, ". . . The environment, potent as it is, and as he admits it to be,

⁶⁵Coveney, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁶Blount, "Dickens's Slum Satire in Bleak House," p. 348.

must play second fiddle to 'original nature.'⁶⁷ Without proper guidance and direction, orphans and semi-orphans may go bad; on the other hand, those same children may become virtuous as a result of their isolated condition. It is the latter concept which Stretton and Dickens couple with the theme of original innocence to create sacrificing children devoted to the responsibilities of life.

"But whether evil is expressed through individuals, or through the institutions of a corrupt society," according to Peter Coveney, "goodness is always characterized through individuals remarkable for their generous flow of human feeling."⁶⁸ In the novels by Stretton and Dickens, females particularly reflect goodness as they usually demonstrate the sacrifice theme more than males. Many of Hesba Stretton's heroines are young girls who function in the role of responsible mother figures, but only a few of Charles Dickens's creations function this way. Therefore, this chapter concerns only Dickens's female characters, such as Charley Neckett of Dickens's Bleak House and Little Nell of The Old Curiosity Shop, who correspond to the juvenile stage of Stretton's creations.

⁶⁷Paul Squires, "Charles Dickens as Criminologist," Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology, 24 (July 1938), 185.

⁶⁸Coveney, p. 113.

In her introduction to Nicholas Nickleby, Dame Sybil Thorndike wrote:

Though many of his readers feel Dickens wallows in his Little Nells, his Madeline Brays, and other prototypes in each book, one recognizes that he must have a perfect being to worship (it is nearly always a young girl)--a being who has no vice, no small sins, but is self-sacrificing, helping all who are near her to a realization of what goodness means--the touching even of the hem of a garment bringing healing.⁶⁹

In particular, Margaret Dalziel notes that the girls ". . . are capable of assuming and carrying out great responsibilities."⁷⁰ The supreme goodness of the girls sharply contrasts with the forces of evil in their environment. As a result of their exceptional goodness, the girls surpass the bounds of reality. Their purity often becomes too much for modern readers. In fact, Joseph Fradin believes, "Freud has made it impossible for us to believe in uncomplicated human goodness, as science has made it difficult to ground individual goodness in a purposeful Good."⁷¹ However, Frank Donovan suggests viewing such creations as symbols rather than as actual personages. He contends, "They are symbolic rather than real; symbolic of purity, virtue, innocence, self-sacrifice, and all of the highest ideals of angelic womanhood."⁷²

⁶⁹Donovan, p. 21.

⁷⁰Margaret Dalziel, Popular Fiction a Hundred Years Ago: An Unexplored Tract of Literary History, p. 123.

⁷¹Joseph I. Fradin, "Will and Society in Bleak House," PMLA, 81 (March 1966), 97.

⁷²Donovan, p. 87.

The most famous image of the innocent, yet sacrificing, child is Little Nell of Dickens's The Old Curiosity Shop. As Amy Cruse states, Nell ". . . was the embodiment of their ideal of what a child should be."⁷³ At the age of fourteen, Nell assumes the burden of caring and providing for her grandfather. In the beginning of the novel, she faithfully tends her grandfather during his fever and delirium.

Day after day, and night after night, found her still by the pillow of the unconscious sufferer, still anticipating his every want, still listening to those repetitions of her name and those anxieties and care for her, which were ever uppermost among his feverish wanderings (XI).

Accompanying her grandfather and providing for their existence become Nell's sole concerns. In order to provide, Nell relies upon her own initiative and talents. She sews for the Punch show of Mr. Codlin and Short and, when necessary, she gathers flowers from the fields and arranges them into little nose-gays which she sells to the ladies in the carriages. Besides being successful in those two ventures, Nell later receives employment from Mrs. Jarley, the owner of a wax-works show:

And so well did Nell profit by her instructions, and so apt was she to remember them, that, by the time they [she and Mrs. Jarley] had been shut up together for a couple of hours, she was in full possession of the history of the whole establishment, and perfectly competent to the enlightenment of visitors. (XXVIII)

The forces of innocence and evil confront one another when Nell's grandfather's greed leads to gambling and robbery.

⁷³Cruse, p. 164.

Nell, whom Steven Marcus views as "purely incarnate,"⁷⁴ remains the image of goodness and sacrifice, thus ensuring the triumph of innocence over evil.⁷⁵ She perceptively analyzes her grandfather's vice and then assumes the responsibility which she is capable of handling.

"God bless him!" said the child, stooping softly to kiss his placid cheek. "I see too well now that they would indeed part us if they found us out, and shut him up from the light of the sun and sky. He has only me to help him. God bless us both!" (XXI)

To prevent her grandfather from robbing Mrs. Jarley, Nell suggests that they flee the area. Because she realized

. . . that her grandfather's preservation must depend solely on her firmness, unaided by one word of advice or any helping hand, [she] urged him onward, and looked back no more. (XLIII)

Dickens indicates Nell's view of her task when he writes:

. . . The child herself was sensible of a new feeling within her, which elevated her nature, and inspired her with an energy and confidence she had never known. There was no divided responsibility now; the whole burden of their two lives had fallen upon her, and henceforth she must think and act for both. "I have saved him," she thought. "In all dangers and distresses, I will remember that." (XLIII)

Nell experiences many of the physical hardships which were characteristic of the street children. All of the pain

⁷⁴Marcus, p. 151.

⁷⁵Harry Levin notes that "there is no development of character in such little pilgrims as Oliver and Nell; they are virtually impermeable to outside influences." Harry Levin, "The Uncles of Dickens," in The Works of Victorian Fiction, ed., Jerome H. Buckley, p. 33.

and suffering which she endures in her attempt to help her grandfather are borne without complaint. An instance of her suffering occurs in their attempt to seek asylum in a remote, primitive place in the country:

The child walked with more difficulty than she had led her companion to expect, for the pains that racked her joints were of no common severity, and every exertion increased them. But they wrung from her no complaint, or look of suffering; and, though the two travellers proceeded very slowly, they did proceed. (XLV)

The reader learns more about Nell's devotion from the old schoolmaster who observes Nell and also from the grandfather at Nell's death. The schoolmaster asks himself

". . . has this child heroically persevered under all doubts and dangers, struggled with poverty and suffering, upheld and sustained by strong affection and the consciousness of rectitude alone? And yet the world is full of such heroism. Have I yet to learn that the hardest and best-borne trials are those which are never chronicled in any earthly record, and are suffered every day? And should I be surprized to hear the story of this child?" (CLVI)

At the death of Nell, the grandfather reveals his final recognition of her strife and sacrifice for him. While speaking to Kit, he rummages through an old chest which contains many mementos of Nell's. The grandfather says,

"See here--these shoes--how worn they are!--She kept them to remind her of our last journey. You see where the little feet went bare upon the ground. They told me afterwards that the stones had cut and bruised them. She never told me that. No, no, God bless her! And, I have remembered since, she walked behind me, sir, that I might not see how lame she was--but yet she had my hand in hers, and seemed to lead me still." (LXXI)

If parents or guardians die or fail to assume the duties which are rightfully theirs, then the eldest living

child often has to shoulder those responsibilities. Stretton's book Little Meg's Children develops by this situation. The story involves a little girl of ten, the oldest child, who for several months after the death of their mother provides for herself and her siblings. Left in poverty, Meg assumes sole responsibility for the care of her family until the return of the father from sea. In doing so, she becomes exemplary of the saintly maiden figure in literature.

Referred to as a "little woman," a "poor little woman" with a "careworn face," Meg struggles to support and provide for the other two children in the family. References made to Meg's being a woman despite her actual age occur, even prior to the death of her mother:

The only nurse she [the dying mother] had, and the only person to whom she would entrust her errands, was her eldest child, a small, spare, stunted girl of London growth, whose age could not be more than ten years, though she wore the shrewd anxious air of a woman upon her face, with deep lines wrinkling her forehead, and puckering about her keen eyes. Her small bony hands were hard with work; and when she trod to and fro about the crowded room, from the bedside to the creaking door, which let the cold draughts blow in upon the ailing mother, her step was slow and silent, less like that of a child than of a woman, who was already weary with much labour. The room itself was not large enough to cause a great deal of work; but little Meg had had many nights of watching lately and her eyes were heavy for want of sleep, with the dark circles underneath them growing darker every day. (I)

In reviewing the responsibilities which had been delegated to her by her dying mother, Meg says,

"I'm to take care of the children, and the money as belongs to one of father's mates; and I must wear the

little bag round my neck, and tell folks I expect father home today or tomorrow, and never let nobody come into our room" (I).

She particularly wanted her father to return so she could give him the key to the box of money and she, in turn, "could feel like a child once more" (IV). While she waited for her father's return, which was delayed because of his illness, "Little Meg's heart was full of a woman's heaviest care and anxiety . . ." (VII).

Gillian Avery notes that "it was emphasized by all writers for early Victorian girlhood that domestic duties must never be neglected."⁷⁶ With Meg, those duties became automatic and ingrained. The children and their needs always became her prime concern and little thought was given to herself and her own misery. Always mindful of her responsibility to the children, Meg attempts to pawn some of her clothing in order to obtain money for essentials. Unaccustomed to bargaining, her attempt becomes a desperate plea for help.

"Oh! if you please," cried little Meg, in an agony of distress. "You must give me more than tenpence. I've got two little children, and no food, nor coals, nor candles. I couldn't buy scarcely anythink with only tenpence" (VIII).

Another incident involves the children's wintry excursion during the middle of December when they lack shoes and proper

⁷⁶Avery, p. 76.

clothing. Again, Meg's concern is for the children, especially her younger brother Robin, rather than for herself.

Stretton writes:

Robin's feet were red and blue with cold, like her own; but Meg could not see her own, and did not feel the cold as much for them as for Robin's. His face had lost a little of its roundness and freshness, and his black eyes some of their brightness since his birthday; and poor Meg's heart bled at the sight of him as he trudged along the city pavement of the streets at her side. (IX)

Later, when given food at Mrs. Blossom's shop, Meg again expresses her motherly concern and devotion to her children:

Meg sat in her large arm-chair, grasping a big knife and fork in her small hands, but she could not swallow a morsel at first, for watching Robin and the baby, who was sucking in greedily spoonfuls of potatoes soaked in the gravy. Mrs. Blossom urged her to fall to, and she tried to obey; but her pale face quivered all over, and letting fall her knife and fork, she hid it in her trembling hands.

"If you please, ma'am, I'm only so glad," said little Meg, as soon as she could command her voice. "Robbie and Baby was so hungry, and I hadn't got anythink to give 'em."

"I suppose you ain't hungry yourself, neither," observed Mrs. Blossom, a tear rolling down a little channel between her round cheeks and her nose.

"Oh, but ain't I?" said Meg, recovering herself still more. (IX)

A culminating instance of her motherly nature and complete adaptation to her role occurs when she lies ill, battered and bruised from being trampled by horses, at Dr. Christie's home.

"I want Robbie," she cried, "I must get up and go to him directly. It's my Robbie that's ill, and baby's dead. I'm not ill, but Robbie's ill, if he isn't dead, like baby, afore now. Please do let me get up" (XI).

The poignancy of her request is emphasized by her appealing remark: "'They're my children, please. If your children were ill, you'd go to 'em, wouldn't you? Let me get up this minute'" (XI).

Similar to little Meg, the thirteen-year-old Charley (Charlotte Neckett of Dickens's Bleak House) assumes additional responsibilities upon the deaths of her mother and, later, of her father. Those responsibilities include working as a washerwoman and caring for her brother and sister. As with Meg, the description of Charley is of a grown woman, looking far older than her thirteen years. As Esther notes in her narration,

. . . there came into the room a very little girl, childish in figure but shrewd and older-looking in the face--pretty-faced too--wearing a womanly sort of bonnet much too large for her, and drying her arms on a womanly sort of apron. Her fingers were white and wrinkled with washing, and the soap-suds were yet smoking which she wiped off her arms. But for this, she might have been a child; playing at washing, and imitating a poor working woman with a quick observation of the truth. (XV)

In a further comment concerning the discrepancy between Charley's actual age and her appearance, Esther says,

"It was a thing to look at. The three children close together, and two of them relying solely on the third, and the third so young and yet with an air of age and steadiness that sat so strangely on the childish figure" (XV).

James Broderick and John Grant say, "Like Esther herself, Charley Neckett is an orphan, competent, uncomplaining, and

womanly before her time. . . ."77

Charley competently handles her innumerable responsibilities and the various situations which she encounters. Charley herself speaks of the responsibilities which she had to undertake when her mother died:

"Mother died just after Emma was born," said the child, glancing at the face upon her bosom. "Then father said I was to be as good a mother to her as I could. And so I tried. And so I worked at home, and did cleaning and nursing and washing for a long time before I began to go out." (XV)

Mrs. Blinder, from whom the Neckett children rent, speaks of Charley's competence to Mr. Jarndyce. Mrs. Blinder claims,

"She's as handy as it's possible to be. Bless you, sir, the way she tended them two children, after the mother died, was the talk of the yard! And it was a wonder to see her with him the father after he was took ill, it really was!" (XV)

Similar to Meg who worked as a charwoman for Mrs. Blossom and earned threepence a day plus a half-quartern loaf of bread, Charley frequently earned sixpences and shillings by appearing ". . . in a rough apron and a large bonnet, with her hands covered with soap and water, and a scrubbing brush in one of them . . ." (XXI). Her attitude towards her work indicates her perpetual goodness despite adverse conditions.

Mrs. Blinder comments:

"Some people won't employ her, because she was a follerer's child; some people that do employ her, cast it at her; some make a merit of having her to work for them, with that and all her drawbacks upon her; and perhaps pay her less and put upon her more. But she's patienter

than others would be, and is clever too, and always willing, up to the full mark of her strength and over! (XV)

Accordingly, George Gissing believes, "She is healthy in mind and body; her little figure makes one of the points of contrast which emphasize the sordid evil all about her."⁷⁸

Charley's ever continuing sense of duty emerges even when she is ill with the fever and at her worst. During that time, ". . . her mind rambled again to the care of her father's sick bed, and the little children . . ." (XXXI).

Charley's devotion to obligation and to those who need her extends beyond the realm of her immediate family as she also aids Jo and Esther. Believing Charley was ". . . sent into the world, surely to minister to the weak and sick . . ." (XXXV), Esther says,

My little Charley, with her premature experience of illness and trouble, had pulled off her bonnet and shawl, and now went quietly up to him [Jo] with a chair, and sat him down in it, like an old sick nurse. Except that no such attendant could have shown him Charley's youthful face, which seemed to engage his confidence. (XXXI)

Later, Esther again comments on Charley's adeptness to handling illness. She notes, "Charley directed the operations, and went to and fro between the loft-room and the house with such little stimulants and comforts as we thought it safe to give him" (XXXI).

⁷⁸Gissing, p. 146.

Unlike Dickens, Hesba Stretton allows some of her more prominent male street children to assume responsibilities for others. Although brief glimpses of Jo's innate goodness in Bleak House or Kit's concern for his mother and family in The Old Curiosity Shop are shown by Dickens, Stretton presents detailed situations which exhibit the sacrificing spirit of a male. One of these youthful characters is Stretton's Sandy of Lost Gip. Within the novel, Sandy becomes responsible for his baby sister Gip because their mother is invariably drunk and fails to fulfill her maternal role. His brotherly devotion is emphasized from the beginning of the book. Usually the mother

. . . took no notice of Gipsy, and left the boy to tend her as well as he could. It was a good thing for the baby. Sandy carried her out of the foul air into the broader and opener streets, often lingering wistfully at a baker's window till he got a wholesome crust for her to nibble at. His jacket continued to be almost the only clothing she had, and as the winter came on her shivered with cold, till his benumbed arms could scarcely hold her.⁷⁹

The loss of Gip by the drunken mother becomes a constant worry of Sandy's. His feelings for his sister are indicated by his plan for providing for her in the future if she is ever found. He vows to take Gip to a distant part of London and hide from their mother:

⁷⁹Hesba Stretton, Lost Gip, pp. 12-13. All subsequent references to this source will be noted by the use of parenthesis and chapter denotation within the text.

Gip would soon be old enough now to run by his side, and when she was tired he would carry her; and they would live together in any hole or corner. He knew several, where, if he put Gip next to the wall, and lay outside himself, perhaps she would not feel the rain and cold so very much. (III)

Sandy forgets his own misery in his concern for his sister and the wretchedness which she may be enduring. As Stretton writes,

But his dread for Gip made him almost unconscious of his own wretchedness and weariness and hunger. She had no shoes, had little Gip, or a bonnet, or a jacket; nothing but a worn-out cotton frock which he had picked up very cheaply in Rag Fair; so cheap and worn that his mother had not found it worth while to sell it again. To think of Gip out in this rain and wind was agony to him; and he could very well bear the smaller misery of being wet and chilled to the bone himself. (IV)

Sandy even believes it would be better for Gip to be dead than for her to wander alone in an environment which had nothing to offer but cold, hunger, and physical abuse. In fact, "it seemed as if he could not live without little Gip. Why! to lose her in this way would be a hundred times worse than to see her lying dead in her small coffin . . ." (IV). A further and final expression of his concern for lost Gip presents the extent of the sacrifices which Sandy is willing to make in order to see Gip once more:

What good would it be to him if he lived well, and had a comfortable bed to sleep on, and wore fine clothes, if his little Gip were starved, and cold, and almost naked? He would give up all, even Mrs. Shafto and his friend Johnny, and go back and down to the former degradation and misery, if he could only save Gip by doing so. (XIII)

Sandy's role is very similar to that of Nell, Meg, and Charley in that all of them provide for members of their own

family. Stretton, however, also has another technique which she occasionally employs. In this variation, the boys often adopt their responsibilities rather than merely inherit them within the family. Therefore, the boys' performance becomes even more exemplary of innate innocence and goodness within a hostile environment and in the face of adversity. When it is a difficult job merely to provide for oneself and to survive, the boys' interest and care for someone else becomes an even more admirable feat. Exemplary of this latter variation is the character Tony.⁸⁰ Tony's concern for Dolly's maintenance occurs early in Alone in London. When speaking to old Oliver about Dolly, who has been left on her grandfather's doorstep, Tony says, "'You just give her to me, and I'll take care of her. It 'ud be easy enough to find victuals for such a pretty little thing as her. You give her up to me, I say'" (II). Old Oliver also becomes a prime concern of Tony's since he never had anyone to love before and he felt ". . . as if he could have suffered himself to be put to death for either of these two . . ." (VII). Stretton stresses Tony's role by writing,

The person who took upon himself the heaviest weight of anxiety and responsibility about Dolly was Tony, who began to make it his daily custom to pass by the house at the hour when old Oliver ought to be going for his morning papers; and if he found no symptom of life about

⁸⁰The character Don in A Thorny Path is another Stretton creation which conforms to this particular technique.

the place, he did not leave off kicking and butting at the shopdoor until the owner appeared. It was very much the same thing at night, when the time for shutting up came; though it generally happened now that the boy was paying his friends an evening visit, and was therefore at hand to put up the shutters for Oliver. Tony could not keep away from the place. (VII)

Tony's sensitivity to the needs of others affects his own daily actions, as indicated in the following example.

Tony always woke early in the morning, and if it rained he would run for the papers, before turning out to 'find for himself' in the streets. He generally took care to be out of the way at mealtimes; for it was as much as the old man could do to provide for himself and Dolly. Sometimes Tony saw him at the till, counting over his pence with rather a troubled face. Once, after receiving a silver four penny-piece, an extraordinary and undreamed-of event, Tony dropped it, almost with a feeling of guilt, through the slit in the counter which communicated with the till. (VIII)

Tony's job as a crossing-sweeper, an occupation of a large part of the London poor,⁸¹ enables him to provide occasionally for himself and to contribute to Oliver and Dolly. When he does make money, his thoughts immediately go to Dolly to whom he would gladly give the money to ". . . buy her a beautiful doll, dressed like a real lady" (IX). Tony's dedication and seriousness are shown by the adult role which he has had to assume since he was small. His early responsibilities and duties left him with little free time for the carefree, childish recreation which most children enjoy. At the hospital, while he was recuperating from his

⁸¹Blount, "Poor Jo, Education, and the Problem of Juvenile Delinquency in Dickens' Bleak House," p. 338.

broken leg, the other children were playing but " . . . Tony was sitting quietly and gravely on one side, looking on from a distance. He had never learned to play" (XV).

The loyalty and dedication which Tony has for Oliver and Dolly leads him to sacrifice temporarily his own chances of success in order to help Oliver and Dolly. Offered a position as a gardener by Mr. Ross, Tony replies:

"It 'ud be first-rate for me," he said at last, "and I'd try my best to help in the garden; but I couldn't never leave Mr. Oliver and the little girl. She'd fret ever so; and he's gone so forgetful he'd lost his own head, if he could anyhow. Why! of a morning they sell him any papers as they've too many of. Sometimes it's all the 'Star,' and sometimes it's all the 'Standard': and them as buys one won't have the other. I don't know why, I'm sure. But you see when I go for 'em I say twenty-five this, and thirteen that, and I count 'em over pretty sharp, I can tell you; though I couldn't read at all afore I came here, but I could tell which was which easy enough. Then he'd never think to open his shop some mornings; and other mornings he'd open at four or five o'clock, just when he woke of hisself. No. I must stay and take care of 'em a bit; but thank you, sir, all the same." (XV)

Later, Tony even gives up his position as an errand-boy because the old master is becoming more and more forgetful and Tony must mind the shop for him. Tony's responsibilities, although self-adopted, require sacrifice and devotion which deny him personal gain.

Largely as a result of environmental factors that create undesirable situations, many of the street children of Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens assume adult responsibilities which require a maturity far beyond that expressed

merely by their years. In many instances, these children, especially the girls, already know more about life and its hardships than do their elders. Their willing acceptance of responsibility and hard work and their exhibitions of self-sacrifice illustrate an innocence and goodness which has remained untainted by the evils of the environment in which they struggle to exist. Much of their devotion to others may be attributed to the fulfillment of human love which they are lacking as a result of being deprived of parental love and peer friendships. Their admirable, idealistic qualities enable them to be worthy of receiving benevolence and exemplary of a pattern of life which is desirable for others, whether for other characters in the books or for humans as members of society.

Chapter 5

THE DESERVING CHILD AS A RECIPIENT OF BENEVOLENCE

An inheritance awaits the street children who have survived harsh living conditions while retaining their innocence and goodness. In the writings of Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens, benevolence represents the inheritance which the deserving children receive from patrons who recognize their worthiness. Since the parents of the children provide little, if any, support, a parental substitute performs the benign activities. Usually the benefactor is an elderly stranger acting as a patron or guardian who intercedes on behalf of the child. Regarding Dickens's benefactors, Philip Collins says,

His young men and women sometimes enjoy a confidential relationship with an elder, but it is generally an avuncular rather than parental figure, an unmarried or childless benefactor. . . .⁸²

Harry Levin contends, "Society for Dickens resembles Plato's republic in one respect, if in no others: it is presided over by a class of guardians."⁸³

The benevolence which the self-appointed guardians extend to the street children is closely connected with a

⁸²Collins, p. 29.

⁸³Levin, p. 4.

belief in working for one's rewards. Self-pity was not encouraged by either Dickens or Stretton. In regard to Hesba Stretton's handling of the situation of the poor, Mortimer contends, "She strongly encouraged 'self-help' but deplored deep social evils most earnestly, especially the plight of orphaned children, such as Tony in Alone in London, and Little Meg in Little Meg's Children."⁸⁴ In recommending "self-help" for the poor, Stretton vehemently denounced mere monetary contributions to beggars, a theme of her book The Lord's Pursebearers. She writes,

"Nothing is worse for children begging in the streets, neglect itself is far better, than the easy method of gratifying our emotional pity and pacifying our conscience, by simply taking money from our purse and dropping it into their little outstretched hands."⁸⁵

She continues by saying,

To give indiscriminate or inefficient help is an injury, not a benefaction. "Blessed is the man who considereth the poor"; not the man or woman who carelessly flings a penny or a sixpence to every beggar in the lanes and streets. A Christian must take the trouble to know how his gift is used. To help a beggar to remain in his beggarhood is a blunder very near a crime."⁸⁶

Stretton and Dickens advocate encouragement for the poor to raise themselves through the opportunity to work and a recognition of their merits. According to Gillian Avery,

⁸⁴Mortimer, pp. x-xi.

⁸⁵Hesba Stretton, "Preface," in The Lord's Pursebearers, p. iii.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. vi.

the "English tradition [of literature] did not permit the Horatio Alger theme of dramatic rise from waifhood to fortune."⁸⁷ Therefore, rather than creating instant fortunes for the street children, Stretton and Dickens incorporate into their novels work policies by which street children are able to advance to positions of service. Frank Donovan notes that many of Dickens's children are servants. "These he could easily draw from life because in Victorian England, many, perhaps, most, servants were teenagers, and little slaveys as young as twelve were not unusual."⁸⁸ Occasionally the children would manage to raise themselves to a higher state through marriage or adoption but most were content merely to find positions by which they could support themselves and any other family members for whom they might be responsible.

The early works of Charles Dickens and Hesba Stretton illustrate benevolence through adoption. The two most famous examples occur in Dickens's Oliver Twist and Stretton's Jessica's First Prayer. At the end of both novels, the protagonists, Oliver and Jessica respectively, are adopted by their benefactors. Steven Marcus contends, "Oliver's inheritance is an earthly one, a translation of that spiritual and celestial reward into temporal benefits, into the idiom of a

⁸⁷Avery, p. 96.

⁸⁸Donovan, p. 65.

quasi-secularized bourgeois society."⁸⁹ Mr. Brownlow presents the earthly benevolence as a reward for the innocent goodness of Oliver. Joseph Duffy believes,

Brownlow is not a Nobodaddy in the novel, an ineffectual patriarch exercising bogus influence over those with whom he is involved. Instead, he is a man of organized experience who reacts in a vigorous personal manner to any affront to human order he encounters. . . .⁹⁰

Feeling sorry for Oliver, who has been charged with theft in the early part of the book, Mr. Brownlow takes him home with him. "'Poor boy, poor boy!' said Mr. Brownlow, bending over him. 'Call a coach, somebody, pray. Directly!'" (XI). Mr. Brownlow's generous nature later reveals itself when Oliver recovers from his illness:

Oliver looked very worn and shadowy from sickness, and made an ineffectual attempt to stand up, out of respect for his benefactor, which terminated in his sinking back into the chair again; and the fact is, if the truth must be told, that Mr. Brownlow's heart, being large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition, forced a supply of tears into his eyes, by some hydraulic process which we are not sufficiently philosophical to be in condition to explain. (XII)

Oliver himself requests to be given a servant's position in order to stay with Mr. Brownlow. He pleads, "'Don't turn me out of doors to wander in the streets again. Let me stay here, and be a servant. Don't send me back to the wretched place I came from. Have mercy upon a poor boy, sir!'" (XIV).

⁸⁹Marcus, p. 84.

⁹⁰Duffy, p. 419.

Whenever in trouble, Oliver immediately hopes that his benefactor will not think badly of him. Referring to the accusation of stealing books, Oliver says:

"They belong to the old gentleman, to the good, kind, old gentleman who took me into his house, and had me nursed, when I was near dying of the fever. Oh, pray send them back; send him back the books and money. Keep me here all my life long; but pray, pray send them back. He'll think I stole them. Oh, do have mercy upon me, and send them back!" (XVI)

Oliver frequently refers to the goodness of his benefactor, commenting, "'They were so good to me; so very, very good to me'" (XXXII). Rose Maylie relates to Mr. Brownlow the full extent of Oliver's feelings when she states that ". . . his only sorrow, for some months past, had been the not being able to meet with his former benefactor and friend" (XLI). As a final act of benevolence within the novel, Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver as his son.

Adoption is also the final step in the series of encounters between Daniel Standring, the coffee-stall keeper in Jessica's First Prayer, and Jessica. The story illustrates benevolence as the older bachelor adopts Jessica at the end of the narrative. Just as Oliver offered to be a servant for Mr. Brownlow, Jessica offers to help Daniel as payment for his treating her to a bun and coffee in his stall. Jessica says, "' . . . I'm off, sir, but if you've an errand I could go on, I'd do it all right, I would. Let me carry some of your things'" (I). In enumerating Daniel's kindnesses to her, Jessica says, "' . . . I thought how kind

you'd been, and how good the coffee and buns are, and how you let me warm myself at your fire . . .'" (II). Jessica is particularly grateful to Mr. Daniel. Her first utterance of prayer, to which the title of the book refers, includes a remembrance of Daniel's kindness to her:

Jessica gazed round the room with large wide-open eyes, as if she were seeking to see God; but then she shut her eyelids tightly, and bending her head upon her hands, as she had seen the minister do, she said, "O God! I want to know about You. And please pay Mr. Dan'el for all the warm coffee he's give me." (V)

She later reassures Daniel that he will be paid for his generosity to her:

"Mr. Dan'el," she said, "has God paid you for my sups of coffee yet?"

"Paid me?" he repeated; "God? No."

"Well, He will," she answered, nodding her head sagely; "Don't you be afraid of your money, Mr. Dan'el; I've asked Him a many times, and the minister says He's sure to do it."

"Jess," said Daniel sternly, "have you been and told the minister about my coffeestall?"

"No," she answered, with a beaming smile, "but I've told God lots and lots of times since Sunday, and He's sure to pay in a day or two." (VII)

Daniel Standring, a hypocritical Christian who begrudges spending any of his accumulated money, feels guilty for not having given Jessica more than merely the dregs of the coffee and the stale buns from his stand on Wednesdays. Out of guilt, Daniel gives her a penny which she uses to buy food at his stand as other people do. His commitment to her,

however, deepens when he finds her ill in her home, a stable loft. "He took off his Sunday coat and laid it over the tiny shivering frame, which was shaking with cold even in the summer evening . . ." (IX) and "he had entrusted a friendly woman out of the court to buy food and fuel, and all night long he had watched beside Jessica, who was light-headed and delirious . . ." (X). After taking her home with him, and continuing to provide for her, Daniel counts his hoarded money. He then prays, "'Lord, it's all Thine; and I'd give every penny of it rather than lose the child, if it be Thy blessed will to spare her life'" (X). Jessica also responds with a prayer: "' . . . I asked You to let me come home to heaven, but if Mr. Dan'el wants me, please to let me stay a little longer, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen'" (X). Jessica and Daniel are granted their prayers as Jessica not only survives her ordeal but eventually lives with Daniel as his adopted daughter. She learns to serve the daily customers in the coffee-stall, and she sweeps and dusts the chapel where Daniel works.

Neither Oliver nor Jessica have to work for their rewards and improved status; they merely are recipients. However, that situation alters in succeeding books by both authors. John Reed notes a change in the doctrine of Dickens, by saying,

If a comfortable inheritance was the just due of innocence in Oliver Twist, by the time Dickens wrote Bleak House (1852-53), his attitude had changed; man's

inheritance now was more the suffering and sweat of the brow promised to Adam than the golden streets of heaven offered by a mere benign doctrine.⁹¹

The concept of working for one's advancements becomes more pronounced in later works by Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens.

Stretton's Alone in London is one of the books which portrays the deserving child as a working child. Tony, the street child, is typical of many of the befriended children who encounter wealthy patrons, or what John Reed terms "Good Samaritans."⁹² Although old Oliver befriends the street child Tony, Tony's benefactor is actually the well-to-do Mr. Ross. Explaining how he earned his first silver four-penny piece, Tony describes his initial encounter with Mr. Ross. He explains, "'A tall, thin gentleman, with a dark face and very sharp eyes gave it to me for holding his horse, near Temple Bar. He says, "Mind you spend that well, my lad." I'd know him again anywhere'"(VIII). The first piece of money which Tony received for his work for Mr. Ross enabled him to purchase the broom needed for a regular job as a crossing-sweeper. Mr. Ross invests a second fourpence when he encounters Tony working as a crossing-sweeper.

"Hello, my lad'" he said, "you're the boy I gave fourpence to a week ago for holding my horse. I told you to lay it out well. What did you do with it?"

⁹¹Reed, p. 276.

⁹²Ibid., p. 93.

"Me and Dolly bought this broom," he answered, "and I've kept this crossing ever since."

"Well done!" said the gentleman. (XI)

Mr. Ross refers to Tony as his "fourpenny-bit" when he encounters him a third time just after Tony has broken his leg. Mr. Ross immediately assumes responsibility for Tony and, in doing so, takes him to the Children's Hospital. His conversation with the doctor shows his support of Tony:

"I know you do not take in accidents," he said; "but what could I do with the little fellow? He told me he had no home, and that was all he could say. You have two or three cots empty; and I'll double my subscription if it's necessary, rather than take him away. Come, doctor, you'll admit my patient?" (XIV)

Mr. Ross goes beyond the required duty as a benefactor as he even takes an interest in Dolly and old Oliver with whom Tony has been staying. In speaking to Tony, Mr. Ross says, "'If you will tell me where they live, I will go at once and let them know all about your accident; and they shall come to see you to-morrow, if you are well enough to see them'" (XIV). Mr. Ross's concern for Tony's future is discussed prior to Tony's dismissal from the hospital. In keeping with Stretton's beliefs, the emphasis of the scene is not upon a reward but upon Tony's ability and willingness to work:

"Antony," said Mr. Ross--he was the only person who ever called him Antony, and it seemed to make more a man of him--"what are you thinking to do when you leave here tomorrow?"

"I s'pose I must go back to my crossing," answered Tony, looking very grave.

"No, I think I can do better for you than that," said his friend. "I have a sister living out in the country, about fifty miles from London; and she wants a boy to help the gardener, and run on errands for the house. She has promised to provide you with a home, and clothing, and to send you to school for two years, till you are about twelve, for we think you must be about ten years old now; and after that you shall have settled wages." (XV)

Because Tony is needed to manage Oliver's shop, he does not accept the position which Mr. Ross offers. However, later he accepts a better job than the crossing:

Tony's crossing had failed him altogether, for in dry weather nobody wanted it; but in this extremity Mr. Ross came to his aid, and procured him a place as errand-boy, where he was wanted from eight o'clock in the morning till seven at night; so that he could still open old Oliver's shop, and fetch him his right papers before he went out, and put the shutters up when he came back. To become an errand-boy was a good step forwards, and Tony was more than content. (XVI)

After Dolly's death, "Mr. Ross made a point of going in to visit them [Oliver and Tony] every week, and of seeing how the business prospered in the boy's hands; and he put as much as he could in his way" (XX). Mr. Ross continues his benevolent attitude until near the end of the book when Tony, with the help of Dolly's father, receives the job of gardener and general errand boy for the colonel and his wife. In addition, Tony is provided lodging with old Oliver who also moves to the property in the country. Although Tony's last employment is not a direct result of Mr. Ross's intervention, it is indicative of the type of position which Mr. Ross wanted him to have. The emphasis throughout is upon Tony's willingness to work, and the rewards or profits from his positions are

based upon his work output.

Quite similar to Tony's situation in Alone in London, a patron befriends the street child Kit, Christopher Nubbles in Dickens's The Old Curiosity Shop. Like Tony, Kit begins his relationship with his benefactors by holding their horse:

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Kit. "I'm sorry you stopped, sir. I only meant did you want your horse minded?"

"I'm going to get down in the next street," returned the old gentleman. "If you like to come on after us, you may have the job."

Kit thanked him and joyfully obeyed. (XIV)

Not having a sixpence, Mr. Garland gives Kit a shilling for holding his horse. He comments, "'I'm coming here again next Monday at the same time, and mind you're here, my lad, to work it out.' 'Thank you, sir,' said Kit. 'I'll be sure to be here'" (XIV). Just as Kit had promised, he returns the next week at the appointed time much to the amazement of the Garlands:

"Why bless me," cried the old gentleman, "the lad is here! My dear, do you see?"

"I said I'd be here, sir," said Kit, patting Whisker's neck. "I hope you've had a pleasant ride, sir. He's a very nice little pony."

"My dear!" said the old gentleman. "This is an uncommon lad, a good lad, I'm sure."

"I'm sure he is," rejoined the old lady. "A very good lad, and I'm sure he is a good son." (XX)

After extensive interrogations, Kit ". . . was formally hired at an annual income of Six Pounds, over and above his

board and lodging, by Mr. and Mrs. Garland, of Abel Cottage, Finchley" (XXI). In elaborating on his expectations of Kit, Mr. Garland

. . . told him, besides, what great things he meant to do to make him comfortable and happy, if he found he deserved it. All these kindnesses Kit acknowledged with various expressions of gratitude . . . (XXII).

The following passage which marks Kit's success answers the question of whether Kit deserves Mr. Garland's benevolence:

Besides becoming in a short time a perfect marvel in all stable matters, Kit soon made himself a very tolerable gardener, a handy fellow within doors, and an indispensable attendant on Mr. Abel, who every day gave him some new proof of his confidence and approbation. (XXXVIII)

Although Kit, at times, is cockier than many of the other street children who receive benefits, he is nonetheless grateful for his position with the Garlands. He explains his loyalty to Mr. Garland, saying,

" . . . I know that I should be a fool, and worse than a fool, sir, to leave the kindest master and mistress that ever was or ever could be, who took me out of the streets a very poor and hungry lad indeed--poorer and hungrier, perhaps, than ever you think for, sir--to go to him? Mr. Witherden? or anybody?" (XL)

Fearful of not living up to the expectations of the Garlands, Kit is particularly concerned when he is unjustly accused of stealing a bank note from Sampson Brass and, as a result, put in jail. He believes the Garlands will think he is a "monster of ingratitude" (LXI). When the facts are known about the incident, Kit not only retains the respect of the Garlands but he also wins the respect of others, which, in turn, leads to a job of additional prosperity for him.

He had no idea, at first, of ever quitting Mr. Garland's service; but, after serious remonstrance and advice from that gentleman, began to contemplate the possibility of such a change being brought about in time. A good post was procured for him, with a rapidity which took his breath away, by some of the gentlemen who had believed him guilty of the offence laid to his charge, and who had acted upon that belief. (LXXVIII)

Girls, as well as boys, were often considered worthy of receiving some form of benevolence. In Dickens's novel, Bleak House, one which stresses the practicality of personal charity rather than the misplaced efforts of organized philanthropy, Charley Neckett and her brother and sister receive kindly aid from Mr. Jarndyce. James Broderick believes that "compared with Bucket and Allan Woodcourt, Jarndyce seems to function primarily as a character from romance, the wise, the good, the rich old man who provides and promotes happiness."⁹³ Because of his aid to Charley and her family, Jarndyce is, as Kathleen Tillotson terms Dickens's benefactors, "a benevolent fairy godmother of Father Christmas."⁹⁴ Charley's gratitude to Mr. Jarndyce for employing her as Esther's maid becomes apparent when she reveals the news to Esther herself. "'And I'm so happy and so thankful, miss,' cried Charley with a heaving heart, 'and I'll try to be such a good maid!'" (XXVIII). Charley enumerates the benefits of Jarndyce's benevolence:

⁹³Broderick and Grant, p. 258.

⁹⁴Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p. 196.

"And O, miss," says Charley, clasping her hands, with the tears starting down her dimpled cheeks, "Tom's at school, if you please, and learning so good! And little Emma, she's with Mrs. Blinder, miss, a being took such care of! And Tom, he would have been left with Mrs. Blinder--and me, I should have been here--all a deal sooner, miss; only Mr. Jarndyce thought that Tom and Emma and me had better get a little used to parting first, we was so small." (XXIII)

When Esther insists that Charley never forget who did everything for her, Charley replies, "'No, miss, I never will. Nor Tom won't. Nor yet Emma'" (XXIII). Charley serves as the constant companion of Esther, especially after their bout of illness. In Esther's final summarization of Charley's life, she writes, "It is difficult to believe that Charley (roundeyed still, and not at all grammatical) is married to a miller in our neighbourhood; yet so it is . . ." (LXVIII). Besides elaborating on Charley's marriage, Esther also accounts for the other members of the family who, having grown up, now have jobs of their own:

I hope the miller will not spoil Charley; but he is very fond of her, and Charley is rather vain of such a match--for he is well to do, and was in great request. So far as my small maid is concerned, I might suppose Time to have stood for seven years as still as the mill did half an hour ago since little Emma, Charley's sister, is exactly what Charley used to be. As to Tom, Charley's brother, I am really afraid to say what he did at school in ciphering, but I think it was Decimals. He is apprenticed to the miller. . . . (LXVII)

Although Charley, by her marriage to the miller, has moved up a step from the poverty she originally knew, she has earned that position by years of hard work. In turn, her sister and brother are following her example of benefiting through work

and effort.

In the novels of Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens most of the benefactors are men. Patricia Thomson notes that "Dickens went further than most writers of the period in condemning organized philanthropy for women, whatever their age."⁹⁵ Thomson also comments,

Both Dickens, now, and Trollope later, for instance, felt that usefulness could go too far. The former's own practical benevolence and the very fact of his stewardship of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts' charity strengthened his belief that good works by women should be carried out by remote control and never, above all, by direct participation in committee work of any kind.⁹⁶

Although women frequently had the time to devote to charitable activities, most of them had little money as the Victorian man was the wage earner and the family provider. These reasons may have contributed to the scarcity of benefactresses in the writings of Charles Dickens. Within his novels, benevolence which is extended to street children remains almost exclusively the dominion of men, those who would have had money within their control. His one exception occurs when the benefactress is also a relative of the child she is helping, such as Rose Maylie in Oliver Twist. Hesba Stretton, possibly because she was self-supporting and active in programs such as the Society for the Prevention of

⁹⁵Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837-1873, p. 25.

⁹⁶Ibid.

Cruelty to Children, tends to include women who serve major roles as benefactresses. However, often her women characters work in conjunction with a male who lends monetary support.

One example of a benefactress who forms a team with a male character in order to provide for street children is that of Mrs. Blossom in Little Meg's Children. She works closely with Mr. George, her boarder, in contributing to the welfare of Meg and her little family of siblings. Mr. George begins the benevolence, but actually Mrs. Blossom is the one in charge of details and the enactment of them. The relationship of the children to their benefactors begins through Mr. George:

"I guess you would eat a morsel of tripe," he said, ladling it out in overflowing spoonfuls upon the plates. "Mrs. Blossom, some potatoes, if you please, and some bread; and do you feed the baby, whilst the little woman gets her dinner. Now I'm off. Mrs. Blossom, you settle about 'em coming here again." (IX)

Before the children left her shop on that same day, Mrs. Blossom ". . . bound up Robin's foot in some rags, and gave Meg a loaf to carry home with her, bidding her be sure to come again the next day" (IX). She suggests, "'Well, you come here again tomorrow, and I'll ask Mr. George what's to be done. That was Mr. George as was here, and he's my lodger. He took you in, and may be he'll agree to do something'" (IX). Mrs. Blossom later informs Meg that she is to serve as a maid, or a type of charwoman, and work mornings and go away nights:

"I'm not a rich woman," resumed Mrs. Blossom, "and Mr. George has his old father to keep, as lives down in my own village, and I know him well; so we can't give great wages. I'd give you a half-quartern loaf a day and Mr. George threepence for the present, while it's winter." (X)

Mrs. Blossom continues by saying,

"You mustn't get any breakfast, you know, because that's in our bargain: and I'd never grudge you a meal's meat for the children either bless 'em! They shall come and have a good tea with us sometimes, they shall; specially on Sundays, when Mr. George is at home; and if you'd only got your clothes out o' pawn, we'd all go to church together. But we'll see, we'll see." (X)

Because Mr. George invariably is gone or has responsibilities which call him away from his duties to Meg and the children, Mrs. Blossom assumes more responsibility for the children as she gives of her possessions, money, and the immeasurable gifts of time and love. An indication of this generosity occurs during the Christmas celebration:

Christmas day was a great treat to Meg; for though Mr. George went down into the country to see his old father, Mrs. Blossom invited her and the children to come to dinner, and to stay with her till it was the little ones' bed-time. When they sat round the fire in the afternoon, she told them wonderful stories about the country--of its fields, and gardens, and lanes. (X)

Although Mr. George is very kind to the children and buys Meg a pair of new shoes with his first week's wages, Mrs. Blossom is the one called when Meg thinks Robbie is ill, and it is Mrs. Blossom who goes with the coffin to the grave when they bury the baby who dies. Little Meg's Children provides one example of a woman incorporated into the benevolence scheme.

Charles Dickens and Hesba Stretton provide for the deserving children of their novels. The provision, which denounces mere monetary handouts, is a practical benevolence given in recognition of the children's abilities to work. Margaret Cutt contends that "Hesba Stretton . . . sought to elevate and to impel to action."⁹⁷ Both authors supported the elevating of children through work opportunities in areas appropriate to their role in society. For those children who are not able to survive the harsh physical environment and who, as a result, are denied earthly benevolence, a reward comes at death when they receive a spiritual inheritance.

⁹⁷Cutt, p. 28.

Chapter 6

THE DYING CHILD AS AN INHERITOR OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Earthly and spiritual inheritance are closely associated in Victorian literature. Both types of inheritance reward the virtuous street children and ensure the happy ending which many Victorians demanded of their novels. Those endings include the financial and physical aid which contribute to happiness on earth and the spiritual blessings which are a part of eternal life. Although death is the only way to obtain heaven, Amy Cruse notes that "the Victorians were willing to accept death, if it came in a heroic, beautiful fashion, as a suitable and happy ending. . . ."98 In fact, spiritual gratification often surpassed mundane benevolence as a popular ending for the novels about street children. John Reed contends,

And this is the best function of the convention of inheritance in Victorian literature--to show that all that this earth offers by way of wealth, position, and comfort is of little meaning compared to the great inheritance promised by the Christian faith.99

By coupling religious meditation with reformist appeals, Stretton and Dickens avoid death scenes which are purely sentimental. Nonetheless, the pathos of such scenes

98Cruse, p. 414.

99Reed, p. 278.

is the aspect which has traveled least well from the nineteenth century to the present. The sentiment which surrounds the dying child frequently appears mawkish and exaggerated to twentieth-century readers who adhere to the modern taboo of "'No flowers. No letters.'"¹⁰⁰ Ludicrous as they may seem, such scenes were not only commonplace in much Victorian literature but also fully responded to by both men and women, a reaction which Edgar Johnson suggests may be closer to the norm than the contemporary view.¹⁰¹ According to Janet Dunbar, "mourning the dead is an instinct as old as man, but in no era had it become such an ironbound convention as in the Victorian age."¹⁰² The focus upon death was more than merely a literary contrivance as a high juvenile mortality rate actually existed in England during the nineteenth century. The deathbed convention, therefore, was a Victorian reality as it combined social truths with fictional techniques. The sentiment which accompanies the dying children of Stretton and Dickens is a by-product of a thematic structure which emphasizes death as a reward for deprived, but deserving, children of London.

¹⁰⁰Tillotson, p. 49.

¹⁰¹Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, I, 323.

¹⁰²Janet Dunbar, The Early Victorian Woman: Some Aspects of Her Life (1837-57), p. 60.

In viewing death as a reward, a conferring of blessings, Stretton and Dickens allow the innocent child to escape the miseries of earth, rejoin his deceased loved ones, and enjoy the peace of eternal life. Escaping the miseries of earth includes leaving the corruptive forces of society, exemplified by adulthood, and the suffering of a poverty-stricken existence. The street children could alleviate both types of misery through death. Little Nell, Dickens's most famous child-heroine, illustrates this two-fold purpose of death. In her attempt to avoid contact with society's corruptions, Nell withdraws to rural solitudes. Any further withdrawal can only be accomplished with her death and the prospect of a heavenly home free from the sins of adults. In contrasting Nell's purity to society's evils, Trevor Blount contends that

. . . the death of Little Nell and the account of her funeral constitute mainly a sacrament of innocence--testimony to her qualitative superiority to the world of sullied experience through which her journey takes her--and a means of reaffirming the expiatory power of unstained goodness.¹⁰³

Similarly, John Reed believes, "Nell . . . is the untainted soul exiled in the material world but working its way back to its eternal inheritance."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³Blount, "Poor Jo, Education and the Problem of Juvenile Delinquency in Dickens' Bleak House," p. 325.

¹⁰⁴Reed, p. 251.

The physical suffering which Nell endures on her journey resembles that of many children who never leave the London area. For instance, the workhouse orphan Dick in Oliver Twist experiences the gradual bodily deterioration which characterizes the suffering of street children.

The child was pale and thin; his cheeks were sunken; and his eyes large and bright. The scanty parish dress, the livery of his misery hung loosely on his feeble body; and his young limbs had wasted away, like those of an old man. (XVII)

Dick's death, one of the first in a subsequent line of child deaths, represents a release from suffering. Both Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens place the blame for the weakened state of characters such as Dick upon a negligent society. Dick's death, therefore, functions as an indictment of the adult world.¹⁰⁵

In noting that the children frequently do not develop, Peter Coveney declares:

It is a remarkable phenomenon, surely, when a society takes the child (with all its potential significance as a symbol of fertility and growth) and creates of it a literary image, not only of frailty, but of life extinguished, of life that is better extinguished, of life, so to say rejected, negated at its very root.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵The chapter entitled "The Neglected Child as a Reflection of Physical Deprivation" contains more examples of society's negligence. Included in that section are descriptions of Don of Stretton's A Thorny Path, Dolly of Stretton's Alone in London, and, particularly, Jo of Dickens's Bleak House.

¹⁰⁶Coveney, p. 193.

The literary images created by Dickens and Stretton reflect this negative view of life. However, the two authors suggest reforms to remedy the dismal situation of street children.

In Oliver Twist Dickens writes:

We need to be careful how we deal with those about us, when every death carries to some small circle of survivors, thoughts of so much omitted, and so little done--of so many things forgotten, and so many more which might have been repaired! There is no remorse so deep as that which is unavailing; if we would be spared its tortures, let us remember this, in time. (XXXIV)

Until society assumes its proper role in regard to street children, their only hope for happiness is death, which rectifies their sufferings on earth. That concept is fully presented in the closing passages of Nell's life in The Old Curiosity Shop:

A change had been gradually stealing over her in the time of her loneliness and sorrow. With failing strength and heightening resolution, there had sprung up a purified and altered mind; there had grown in her bosom blessed thoughts and hopes, which are the portion of few but the weak and drooping. (LII)

The culminating remark on the glories of death occurs after Nell's death:

Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose. (LXXI)

Besides alleviating suffering, death reunites a dying child with his previously departed loved ones. The orphan has a close affinity with heaven since often one of his parents or a sibling is there already. Deprived of love, the child is more willing to accept death if he can visualize a

reunion with his family and a fulfillment of his need for affection. As a result, the child approaches death in a heroic manner and even anticipates its coming. An early example of this situation occurs in Oliver Twist with the character Dick. Philip Collins notes that "Oliver dies by proxy, in the person of his workhouse friend, 'poor little Dick.' This child has indeed no function in the novel except to die, and he knows it from the start."¹⁰⁷ Dick willingly accepts his rapidly approaching death because his sister is already in Heaven. He explains his reasoning when he makes the will in which he leaves his love to Oliver.

"And I should like to tell him [Oliver]," said the child, pressing his small hands together, and speaking with great fervour, "that I was glad to die when I was very young; for, perhaps, if I had lived to be a man, and had grown old; my little sister who is in Heaven, might forget me, or be unlike me; and it would be much happier if we were both children there together." (XVII)

A slightly different variation occurs in Stretton's Alone in London. Dolly, who is dying, willingly accepts her fate because her grandfather will soon join her in death as will, eventually, Tony. She anticipates their coming with eagerness and plans to watch for them.

"Will ganpa come rere?" whispered the failing and faltering voice of Dolly.

"Very soon," he answered; a radiant smile coming to his face, which made her smile as her eyes caught the glory of it. "Very, very soon, my little love. You'll be there to meet me when I come."

¹⁰⁷Collins, p. 175.

"Dolly 'll watch for ganpa," she murmured, with long pauses between the words, which seemed to drop one by one upon Tony's ear; "and Dolly 'll watch at the door for Tony to come home; and she'll fret ever so if he never comes." (XIX)

Her vow to be waiting has a profound effect upon Tony. He believes that Heaven ". . . must be very near, since she had gone to it so quickly; and it was no longer empty, for Dolly was there; and she had said she would watch at the door till he came home" (XIX). Tony is, of course, anxious for a reunion with Dolly, but that privilege is conditional upon his good behavior. The idea which Stretton presents with the character Tony, and one which Dickens supports as well, is contrary to the Georgian use of death as a threat, frightening "erring" children into reformation. Instead, the two authors stress death as a reward for good behavior and dedication to others.

Dickens's The Old Curiosity Shop and Stretton's Lost Gip incorporate a different type of reunion. In both works, the dying child is to act as an agent for a child still on earth. The dying child will, thus, relay the messages between the two worlds. In The Old Curiosity Shop a young boy, a favorite of Nell and a close friend of hers, does not want her to die. However, he is willing to accept her death since it will enable her to converse with his brother Willy in Heaven. The conversation by proxy would take the place of an actual brotherly reunion:

"They say that Willy is in Heaven now, and that it's always summer there. . . . But if you do go, Nell," said the boy, caressing her, and pressing his face to hers, "be fond of him for my sake. Tell him how I love him still, and how much I loved you, and when I think that you two are together, and are happy, I'll try to bear it, and never give you pain for doing wrong--indeed I never will!" (LV)

A similar incident occurs in Lost Gip. Johnny, who realizes that he is about to die, suggests he may speak directly to Jesus about Sandy's lost sister Gip. That prospect appeals to Sandy who desperately wants to locate his sister even though he fears Johnny's death. Johnny comments:

"We can never, never see His face here; but I shall see it by-and-by, and perhaps tell Him [Jesus] about Gip myself."

"You'll have to die to do that," said Sandy, very gravely. To think that John would tell the Lord Jesus Christ about little Gip was a great comfort to him; but he could not bear to think he must lose him himself. (XI)

Most significantly, the dying child enjoys the peace and happiness which accompany eternal life. The writings of Dickens and Stretton differ substantially in emphasis which they place upon religion. Charles Dickens refers to religion in a general manner by having his characters speak in vague terms about Heaven and angels. His children often lack any detailed knowledge of religion which would enable them to speak more precisely. In fact, John Wilson believes that "nowhere in Dickens do his protagonists achieve even a transcendent knowledge of God, let alone a mystical union. . . ."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸John R. Wilson, "Dickens and Christian Mystery," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 73 (Autumn 1974), 540.

Hesba Stretton uses a more direct approach as her characters actually refer to God and Jesus in their conversations. Unlike Dickens's characters, many of Stretton's are in the initial stages of becoming Christians.

In Dickens's Oliver Twist Dick associates Heaven and angels with his coming death. In doing so he illustrates Gillian Avery's comment that ". . . the child may die talking of heaven and angels, he does not seem to have heard of sin."¹⁰⁹ Dick comments, "'I know the doctor must be right, Oliver, because I dream so much of Heaven, and Angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake'" (VII). Heaven and angels become representative of the happiness of eternal life in The Old Curiosity Shop, as well. Although the book has often been strictly "The Death of Nell,"¹¹⁰ the scholar's death precedes and influences Nell's. The scholar has a brief part, so brief he is not even given a name, but Nell frequently dreams of him prior to her own death. Dickens indicates the influence which his death has upon Nell: "Her dreams were of the little scholar: not confined and covered up, but mingling with angels, and smiling happily" (XXXVI). Later, in their home by the cemetery, Nell dreams

¹⁰⁹Avery, p. 174.

¹¹⁰James R. Kincaid, "Laughter and Pathos: The Old Curiosity Shop," in Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation, ed., Robert B. Partlow, Jr., p. 66.

. . . of the little scholar; of the roof opening, and a column of bright faces, rising far away into the sky, as she had seen in some old scriptural picture once, and looking down on her, asleen. It was a sweet and happy dream. The quiet spot, outside, seemed to remain the same, save that there was music in the air, and a sound of angels' wings. (LII)

In their conversations of the children, they refer to Nell herself becoming an angel. In response to the idea, Nell's favorite child cries, "'She is not one yet!'" (LV).

"You must not be one, dear Nell," cried the boy. "We can't see them. They never come to play with us, or talk to us. Be what you are. You are better so."

"I do not understand you," said the child. "Tell me what you mean."

"Why, they say," replied the boy, looking up into her face, "that you will be an Angel before the birds sing again. But you won't be will you? Don't leave us, Nell, though the sky is bright. Do not leave us!" (LV)

The schoolmaster's comment after Nell's death indicates that she has inherited the peace of eternal life. He says,

"Think what earth is, compared with the world to which her young spirit has winged its early flight; and say, if one deliberate wish expressed in solemn tears above this bed could call her back to life, which of us would utter it?" (LXXI)

Dolly in Alone in London exemplifies Stretton's technique of incorporating specifics of religion into the deathbed scenes. Unlike Jo (in Dickens's Bleak House), who cannot benefit from a prayer which is begun too late, Dolly gains from a last minute religious discussion with her grandfather. The scene emphasizes her acceptance of death and the happy state which she believes Heaven to be. The following conversation occurs when old Oliver and Tony surround the

little girl:

"Don't ky, ganpa," she said softly' "don't ky more than a minute. Nor Tony. Are I going to die, ganpa?"

"Yes, my little love," cried old Oliver, moaning as he said it.

"Where are I going to?" asked Dolly very faintly.

"You're going to see my Lord and Master," he said; "His as loves little children so, and carries them in His arms, and never lets them be sorrowful or ill or die again."

"Does He live in a bootiful place?" she asked again.

"It's more beautiful place than I can tell," answered the old Oliver. "The Lord Jesus gives them light brighter than the sun, and the streets are all of gold, and there are many little children there, who always see the face of their Father."

"Dolly's going rere," said the little child solemnly. (XIX)

John Shafto of Stretton's Lost Gip has a more adult approach to death and religion than the lispig infant Dolly. In response to Sandy's objection to his being placed in a coffin, John, a Christian, explains the benefits of his death:

"That's not much," replied John Shafto, "that's only my body; but I shall go to the other children. Mother says all this world is like one large room to God; and He is among us, like a mother is with her children when she sits at work in the same room with them, seeing all they do, and hearing all they say, but perhaps not seeming to take much notice of them. And to die is only like going into the next room, where we shall see Him and hear His voice, and be no longer like little children at play, but be more like His grown-up sons and daughters; and He will talk to us more, and teach us harder things than whilst we are so little. I shall be glad to be called into the next room for everything, save leaving mother."
(IX)

Stretton indicates that one must believe in God in order to gain the peace of life eternal. John's friend Sandy notices that John is different from the other people he has seen die and go to pauper graves. In none of their deaths had he seen the "pleasant smile that always shone in John Shafto's eyes . . ." (XIV). John's belief in God enables him to look forward to death and causes his happiness to shine in his eyes "with a steady beam of gladness" (XVIII) even at death. In his final speech, John refers to the Lord's calling him. He whispers,

"I'm very glad she's [Sandy's sister Gip] found but I cannot stay. Lost and found! Dead and alive again! Rejoice with Me! He is saying that." "Who says that?" asked Sandy. But there was no answer. (XVIII)

After anticipating the joys of Heaven, Johnny finally inherits those blessings.

Because so many of Dickens's novels contain dying children, Philip Collins says, ". . . Dickens was certainly reflecting, as well as stimulating, a vogue for deathbed lachrymosity."¹¹¹ Though sentimental and not as artistically handled as his later creations, Little Nell was acceptable to readers because she was an original. By the time Hesba Stretton wrote, numerous authors had imitated the deathbed convention, and the result was an over-worked and often poorly presented theme. As one of the better writers

¹¹¹Collins, p. 178.

for the Religious Tract Society, Stretton included a number of dying children. Lance Salway believes Stretton was more successful because she

. . . avoided the morbidity and the intense sentimentality which characterized the work of her contemporaries, and the pathetic descriptions of degradation and poverty and the fervent Christian exhortations were, to her, of less importance than the exposure of cruelty, injustice, and neglect."¹¹²

Her creations resemble Dickens's as they both reward the dying child by alleviating his earthly miseries, reuniting him with loved ones, and providing the joy of eternal life. The dying child who receives the blessings of spiritual inheritance, thus, becomes an exemplary for other street children who may observe and learn from his death.

¹¹²Lance Salway, "Pathetic Simplicity, An Introduction to Hesba Stretton and Her Books for Children," Signal: Approaches to Children's Books, 1 (January 1970), 27.

Chapter 7

THE MINISTERING CHILD AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION

Most critics agree that a preoccupation with religion characterized the Victorian age. Accounting for the Victorian obsession, R. M. Schieder says:

A number of circumstances combined to make religion their central preoccupation: the importance of the church in politics and society, the accumulated efforts of the Evangelical Revival, the changing aspects of the Oxford Movement, sectarian differences, and party divisions within the different sects.¹¹³

As a result of this religious interest, innumerable examples of evangelical and tract literature appeared during the second half of the nineteenth century. In those writings, "a little child shall lead them" became a prevalent theme. Since the adult world was frequently hostile, cruel, and indifferent toward children, the children often had to minister to society instead of being aided by it.

Although both authors use the ministering child at the secular level, as presented in the chapter entitled "The Sacrificing Child as a Devotee to Responsibility," only Hesba Stretton uses the ministering child on the religious level. Within many of her works, the child, as an instrument of

¹¹³R. M. Schieder, "Loss and Gain" The Theme of Conversion in Late Victorian Fiction," Victorian Studies, 9-10 (September 1965), 30.

salvation, appeals to the spiritual needs of adults. Even though Dickens creates sinful characters such as the gambling grandfather in The Old Curiosity Shop or the criminal Fagin in Oliver Twist, his street children are incapable of converting them. Dickens's children are either ignorant of God and prayer, as with Jo in Bleak House, who needs others to minister to him, or they are passive in their religion as with Oliver Twist. While Dickens's novels have religious implications, they do not give the significance to religion that Hesba Stretton gives in her writings. Religion is more prominent in Stretton's works because she was writing in the second half of the century when religion was stressed more, and also because she wrote primarily for the Religious Tract Society which stipulated a religious format. In addition, her strong religious background would have contributed to her inclusion of religion.¹¹⁴ Because Hesba Stretton so frequently incorporates the ministering child as an instrument of salvation into her narratives, the theme needs to be studied as one of the major points of difference between the two authors' presentations of street children.

In commenting upon the evangelical children included in writings, Charlotte Yonge, also a nineteenth-century writer, says:

¹¹⁴The biographical sketch within the Appendix provides additional information on Stretton's religious background.

Little children amaze their elders, and sometimes perfect strangers, by sudden inquiries whether they are Christians, or as to their personal love for God; they judge their superiors, and utter sentiments which are too apt to pass for practice; while the mixture of sentimentality with religion, the direful judgements brought on the unconverted, and the prominence given to feeling and conscious piety are all undesirable.¹¹⁵

The overall effect of such literary writings was frequently one of extreme sentimentality and unrealistic melodrama. However, as Margaret Mortimer says, "'Compared with other contemporary writers of evangelical fiction, Sarah Smith wrote well with a minimum of melodrama."¹¹⁶ By altering the evangelical traditions and incorporating her other themes with them, Stretton was able to present a more restrained, more acceptable, treatment of religion within her books. Mortimer comments, "She is remembered not only for her fine practical work for impoverished children but also for her elevation of evangelical fiction from mere didacticism to memorable stories."¹¹⁷ Her works do more than merely propagate Christian virtues; they also examine the hypocrisy of Christian attitudes. The latter concept is particularly important to her presentation of the ministering child.

¹¹⁵Charlotte M. Yonge, "Children's Literature of the Last Century: II, Didactic Fiction," Macmillan's Magazine, 20 (August 1869), 309.

¹¹⁶Mortimer, p. xi.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. xii.

The ministering child as an instrument of salvation appears recurringly in Jessica's First Prayer, Lost Gip, Little Meg's Children, Pilgrim Street, Fern's Hollow, The Children of Cloverley, A Thorny Path, and other works. In using the ministering child, particularly in the first three books listed above, Hesba Stretton retains the innocence so frequently stressed by both herself and Dickens. The child, just learning of Christianity, has already been practicing Christian principles. Within the plot, the street child will encounter a sinner, usually a stranger who has turned away from the direction of God. Although young and inexperienced, these children have an instinctive ability to survey situations, judge character, and question motives. After Stretton's child questions and advises, the grown-up will eventually return to the ways of the Divine. The sinner's repentance corresponds to Stretton's belief in God as the loving, forgiving Father of the New Testament.

Jessica's First Prayer, ". . . a book which is perhaps the most famous example of evangelical writing for children in the late Victorian period . . .,"¹¹⁸ presents the theme "a little child shall lead them." In the book, Jessica, who has never heard of God or prayer prior to meeting Mr. Daniel and attending chapel services, eventually causes the hypocritical, miser Daniel Standring to ask

¹¹⁸Salway, p. 20.

forgiveness. Daniel, a righteous pew-opener, does not want Jessica to come to the chapel as he is afraid she will tell the others that he has a second job as a coffee-stall attendant:

"Jess," continued Daniel, more gently, "you're a sharp little girl, I see; and now, mind, I'm going to trust you. You're never to say a word about me or my coffee-stall, because the folks at our chapel are very grand, and might think it low and mean of me to keep a coffee-stall. Very likely they'd say I mustn't be a chapel-keeper any longer, and I should loose a deal of money." (VII)

Continuing the conversation, Jessica questions Mr. Daniel about his motives for obtaining so much money. Her questions prick his conscience:

"Don't you see what money I get every morning?" he said, shaking his canvas bag. "I get a good deal of money that way in a year."

"What do you want such a deal of money for?" she inquired; "do you give it to God?"

Daniel did not answer, but the questions went to his heart like a sword-thrust. What did he want so much money for? He thought of his one bare, solitary room . . . with very few comforts in it, but containing a desk, strongly and securely fastened, in which was his savings-bank and his receipts for money put out at interest and a bag of coins for which he had been toiling and slaving both on Sundays and week-days. (VII)

Jessica insists that she wants God to pay Daniel for his kindness to her and that insistence merely irritates Daniel's conscience further. She, innocently but persistently, continues to question Daniel about whether God will pay him in return:

"Ay, He'll pay me," muttered Daniel; "there'll be a day of reckoning by-and-by."

"Does God have reckoning days?" asked Jessica. "I used to like reckoning days when I was a fairy."

"Ay, ay," he answered; "but there's few folks like God's reckoning days."

"But you'll be glad, won't you?" she said.

Daniel bade her get on with her breakfast, and then he turned over in his mind the thoughts which her questions had awakened. Conscience told him he would not be glad to meet God's reckoning day. (VII)

Although Daniel misses Jessica when she does not come to church, he does not inquire about the reason for her absence as that might lead to the exposure of his second job. When he finally does search for the ill Jessica, his conversion opportunely occurs. Again, it is Jessica's questioning which leads him to confess his sins:

"What did He [God] say to you, Mr. Dan'el?" said Jessica.

"He told me I was a great sinner," replied Daniel. "He told me I loved a little bit of dirty money better than a poor, friendless, help less child, whom He had sent to me to see if I would do her a little good for His sake. He looked at me, or the minister did, through and through, and He said, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' And I could answer Him nothing, Jess. He was come to a reckoning with me, and I could not say a word to Him." (IX)

Because Daniel feels he is unable to pray for his own sins, Jessica, with her new-found faith, prays on his behalf. Later, when Daniel explains his hypocrisy to the minister, he credits Jessica and her questions with his salvation:

"Well," resumed Daniel, "the questions this poor little creature has asked me have gone quicker and deeper down to my conscience than all your sermons, if I may

make so free as to say it. She's come often and often of a morning, and looked into my face with those dear eyes of her's, and said, 'Don't you love Jesus Christ, Mr. Dan'el?' 'Doesn't it make you very glad that God is your Father, Mr. Dan'el?' 'Are we getting nearer Heaven every day, Mr. Dan'el?' And one day says she, 'Are you going to give all your money to God, Mr. Dan'el?' Ah! that question made me think indeed. . . ." (X)

In Lost Gip the same theme becomes apparent in the relationship between the youth Sandy and Mr. Shafto, the father of Sandy's new friend. Although Mr. Shafto's wife and son are both practicing Christians, he only professes to be one. He refuses to accept Sandy as an appropriate friend for his son, Johnny; that refusal leads Sandy to question Mr. Shafto's motives as a Christian and the grandson of an upstanding minister. Sandy specifically questions whether Mr. Shafto believes in God's presence. Sandy comments:

" . . . if I b'lieved ot it, it 'ud make a difference to me, it would. I couldn't go on doing as I'm used to do. I don't see how folks can b'lieve in it; they goes on doin' jest the same as if it weren't true. Does God know as you don't like me to have a bite of bread, and sleepin' on your floor?" (X)

Not until Sandy's queries does Mr. Shafto probe his conscience and reassess his Christian values. Eventually he realizes that he has jeopardized his chances for salvation. Stretton explains:

If Jesus Christ, the Savior, who had laid down his life for him, knew how he had spent his own life, wasting it, and casting away all the golden opportunities of being good and doing good, why, then he was as much lost as poor little Gip or Sandy's drunken mother. (X)

Chapter XI in the book, entitled "An Awakened Conscience," presents Mr. Shafto's mental debates concerning the questions

which Sandy has asked him. In seeing himself as he has really been, he realizes that Sandy ". . . had a love in him deeper than all his ignorance and wretchedness, which proved him to be a truer child of the Heavenly Father than he was with all his learning" (XI). In Shafto's confession to Sandy he says:

"He's [God's] been seeking me many and many a long year, and I've been keeping back from Him; I did not want Him to find me out in my selfishness and idleness. But He has found me to-day, and shown me what I am, and I believe He sent you to help me to find myself out. It is not much that we can do for you, at any rate, till I can get some work; but what we have we will give to you; and please God, Sandy, we'll help you to find both Christ and little Gip." (XI)

Stretton does not have Mr. Shafto change overnight although he does become conscious of his erring ways and gradually attempts to become a true Christian. In the last chapter, after the family has emigrated to Canada,¹¹⁹ the father buys a verse, which hangs over the mantel in their new home. The verse sums up Mr. Shafto's conversion, which was initiated by Sandy and his questions: "'The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost'" (XIX).

A third and final example which also incorporates the theme of the ministering child is Little Meg's Children. Margaret Mortimer says, "Authentic details, piercingly observed and accurately described, make this an unforgettable

¹¹⁹Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens both advocated emigration as a solution to many of the problems within English society.

story."¹²⁰ Although extremely popular, the book ". . . was once condemned because it represented Little Meg's father lying to his wife."¹²¹ More recently, the work was criticized for the scene in which the three children remain a day and a night alone with the corpse of their mother before her burial.¹²² In spite of these two objections, the book has been widely acclaimed for children's reading. Surprisingly enough, few readers have criticized the character Kitty, the young woman in the book. "Kitty, in fact, is that all too familiar figure in the London of 1860's: the young prostitute."¹²³ Set against a background of drunkenness and violence, numerous clues emerge to contribute to the revelation of Kitty's character. Kitty, who is nicknamed "Puss" and "Madcap," has just been released after spending six weeks in a House of Correction; she bemoans her sinful state while crying over the memories of her mother; she spends nights out; the baby for whom she cares is drugged by a male companion of

¹²⁰Mortimer, p. x.

¹²¹Cutt, p. 30.

¹²²Margaret Cutt contends that critics ". . . failed to consider the context of the times in which burial within forty-eight hours was the very minimum of delay and perfectly acceptable to the city of London health authorities (pp. 28-29). In addition, the scene enables Meg immediately to assume her mother's duties and fulfill the vacated role in spite of the drastic circumstances.

¹²³Ibid., p. 30.

hers and, when bringing the baby home, she herself is drunk; finally, when Meg wants to know if her father has come in on a ship, Kitty says, "'I'll find him, if he's anywhere in London. I know their ways, and where they go to, when they come ashore, Little Meg'" (VII). Margaret Cutt, who believes Hesba Stretton handles the situation with tact and sympathy, says, "It took a great deal of courage to introduce Kitty at all, let alone give her a place in a children's book."¹²⁴

Meg, as the ministering child who leads the sinner, guides Kitty in her spiritual development. In discussing Kitty's wickedness with her, Meg mentions God. Kitty begins the conversation by crying:

"I do want to be good, and I can't. You don't know how wicked I am; but once I was a good little girl like you. And now I can never, never, never be good again."

"Yes, you can," answered little Meg, "if you ask God."

"You don't know anything about it," she said, pushing away Meg's hand.

"I don't know much," replied Meg, meekly; "but Jesus says in the Bible, that if our fathers 'll give us good things, God 'll much more give good things to anybody as asks for 'em." (VI)

The subject of forgiveness becomes a frequently discussed topic between Meg and Kitty. Kitty contends she is too wicked to receive forgiveness from either God or her own mother; Meg believes the solution may be found through prayer.

¹²⁴Ibid.

Kitty's depression over her wicked ways reaches its lowest point when she discovers the death of the baby whom she was tending and realizes her own faultiness. As a result, she contemplates drowning herself in the river, a standard Victorian method of suicide. The contemplated death never becomes reality because Kitty meets her mother, Mrs. Blossom, once again. Left alone with Meg after the initial reunion with her mother, Kitty seeks spiritual peace and forgiveness through the aid of Meg:

"Oh, Meg! Meg!" cried Kitty, almost crawling to the corner where she lay, and falling down beside her on the floor, with her poor, pale face still hidden from sight, "ask God for me to be made good again."

Little Meg . . . laid her hand upon Kitty's bended head.

"You must ask him for yourself," she said, after thinking for a minute or two: "I don't know as it 'ud do for me to ask God, if you didn't as well."

"What shall I say, Meg?" asked Kitty.

"If I was you," said Meg, "and had grow'd up wicked, and run away from mother, I'd say, 'Pray God make me a good girl again, and let me be a comfort to mother till she dies; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'" (XII)

Kitty eventually prays for forgiveness. Although she does not use the same wording as that in Meg's example, Kitty does build upon Meg's ideas. "'Oh, God,' she cried, 'do have mercy upon me, and make me good again, if it's possible. Help me to be a good girl to mother. God forgive me, for Jesus Christ's sake'" (XII). It is a result of Meg's loving, spiritual nature, which she conveys to Kitty, that Kitty is

finally able to pray the prayer seeking forgiveness.

Writing in an age when children were expected to say their prayers and read their Bibles daily, Hesba Stretton incorporated into her books the theme of the ministering child as an instrument of salvation, a theme which is virtually non-existent in Dickens's novels. Besides that particular concept, the recurring themes in the novels of Hesba Stretton and Charles Dickens present the Victorian street child as a reflection of deprivation, both emotional and physical, a devotee to responsibility, a recipient of benevolence, and an inheritor of spiritual blessings. Because Stretton and Dickens were able to present society's ills candidly as well as suggest the needed social and philanthropic reforms, the street child received more prominence and recognition in Victorian society. In writing of street children, therefore, the two authors were essentially writing of life itself. Their children reflect beliefs and actions of society. The thematic patterns which occur in the works of Stretton and Dickens indicate a relationship aside from their early business one as the similarity of their themes links the two writers in a literary bond. Although Hesba Stretton may have modeled her writings on those of Dickens's, her thematic differences and extensions reveal the social concerns and religious views which directed her writings and contributed to her individuality as a writer.

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APPENDIX

HESBA STRETTON: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A literary study of the Victorian Era customarily includes writings by authors of such caliber as Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, George Eliot, or the Brontes. However, the writings of these major novelists represent only a portion of the numerous publications of the nineteenth century. Many of the more promising minor authors have been virtually forgotten and, thus, omitted from interpretative studies. Besides meriting examination for their own qualities, the works of minor novelists may provide additional insights into the predominant Victorian novels which have been so frequently assessed and critiqued. Of the minor novelists, I have selected Hesba Stretton, a successful woman writer of the period, for further examination. Such a selection represents an academic interest in regard to her contributions to the literary field and a personal interest as she is a distant relative of mine.

As a great-niece of Hesba Stretton (the pseudonym of Sarah Smith), I have been interested in the author and her writings since I was a child and my grandmother first read some of her works to me.¹²⁵ Although I was not always fond of the literature, I eagerly listened to the stories which

¹²⁵The genealogical chart in the Appendix lists my precise relationship to Hesba Stretton.

the family related about Hesba Stretton. Their information was not only entertaining but also extremely accurate since my great-grandmother Alice Smith, a niece of Hesba Stretton, lived with her father's sisters in England. During the three years while she attended finishing school there, she stayed with the aunts, including her Aunt Sarah (Hesba Stretton). Following Alice Smith's return to Canada, she corresponded with her aunts as well as with a good English friend of theirs. In the mid-twenties the friend returned the letters to the family, and they are now in the possession of my mother, Alice Walker. The letters, written over a span of years from 1886 to the mid-1920's, contain references to the Smith/Stretton family and comments about some of the relatives who wrote articles concerning Hesba Stretton. In addition to the letters, Alice Smith owned autographed copies of most of Hesba Stretton's books. Since Stretton's literary works are difficult to locate here in the States and even more difficult to obtain for examination, I am especially grateful to Alice Smith Griffes's three children--Grace Spencer, Eleanor Frazier, and James S. Griffes and their descendants--for their generosity in lending the Stretton books which formed the basis for my thesis.

In my attempt to validate further the information which our family had concerning Hesba Stretton, I found that many reference works, if they mentioned her at all, often contained erroneous and misleading statements. Within this

account, therefore, I hope to dispel many of the mistaken ideas pertaining to Hesba Stretton. In verifying my material, I found the Shrewsbury Public Library, Shrewsbury, England, and, in particular, their Local Studies Librarian, Anthony M. Carr, to be especially helpful in providing information. A special recognition must be extended to T. C. Hancox of Wellington, England, who so generously shared the knowledge and materials which he gained from years of personal research and scholarship on the subject of Hesba Stretton. As far as I can determine, the following biographical sketch represents the most comprehensive compilation on Hesba Stretton to date. Within it, many incidental references and facts have been included in order to aid researchers who might wish to pursue the topic further. In presenting this brief sketch of Hesba Stretton's life, my intention is not to create a heroine, but merely to provide an informed account of a Victorian woman, an individual and a novelist, who contributed her talents to both humanity and literature during her lifetime.

Although the author's fame was acclaimed under the pseudonym of Hesba Stretton, she was christened Sarah Smith on July 27, 1832. As the third daughter of Benjamin and Anne Bakewell Smith, Sarah spent her early years at New Street, Wellington, Shropshire. Most of the brief biographical sketches of her life attribute the Christian aspects of her writing to the religiously oriented environment of her early home life. Because her mother died when Sarah was only ten,

Sarah was influenced more by the religious convictions of her father, a Methodist minister of Wesleyan beliefs, than by the evangelical beliefs of her mother, who belonged to the Church of England. Although Sarah and her sister Elizabeth both attended the Congregational Church later in life, they continued to regard Wesley as their spiritual father.¹²⁶ Sarah's home environment also stimulated her interest in literature as she would often read books in the shop of her father, a bookprinter and seller. Sarah (also spelled "Sara" by her family and herself) attended a large day school for girls, conducted by Mrs. Cranage at Old Hall, Watling Street, Wellington.

After concluding one's education, there were few job opportunities for single, intelligent women such as Sarah. As Harriet Schupf has commented, "Traditionally, the options open to the middle-class spinster without monetary resources were commonly limited to governessing or authorship. . . ."¹²⁷ These alternatives may be viewed in the lives of women writers such as the Brontes, who served as governesses as well as authors. Quite similarly, Sarah was involved in teaching. Upon the advice of Mrs. Wilding from whom they had studied,

¹²⁶T. C. Hancox, Letter to writer, 22 July 1976, p. 6. All references to Hancox are unpublished, personal letters which are in the writer's possession.

¹²⁷Harriet Schupf, "Single Women and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Mary Carpenter," Victorian Studies, 17 (March 1974), 301.

Sarah and her sisters conducted a school at Caradoc Lodge at All Stretton.¹²⁸ They taught seven years, until 1863, when Sarah and her elder sister Elizabeth left Shropshire and moved to a house in Rose Grove, Manchester, where log entries suggest the continuance of the same type of occupation. The two sisters remained in Manchester (the scene of her book, Pilgrim Street) for several years before settling in Bayswater, London, in 1870. Although Sarah frequently lived in London, she continued to change locations often throughout the rest of her life.

Travel on the European continent became a very important aspect of Sarah's life and a contributing factor to her writings. T. G. Hancox, a scholar on Hesba Stretton, says, "If Hesba and Elizabeth had a failing weakness it was toward foreign travel, something they enjoyed whenever the opportunity arose."¹²⁹ Of the European countries, Italy remained Hesba Stretton's favorite. In spite of her love for travel and the residence in Canada and later in the United States of her only brother, Benjamin, Jr., there is no indication that Sarah ever visited either country. Her travels on the continent, however, enlarged her range of experiences so that foreign scenes often served as settings in her works.

¹²⁸T. C. Hancox, Letter to writer, 20 July 1976, p. 7.

¹²⁹Ibid.

Stretton's book Max Krömer, a Story of the Siege of Strasbourg (1871) is one example in which the foreign setting is a dominant factor. In her preface to that book, Hesba Stretton writes:

Last September [1870] in returning from Switzerland, I passed through the upper valley of the Rhine, of which Strasbourg is the crown and capital, at the very time when the city was enduring its fiercest ordeal of fire. "Weep not for me," said our Lord to the daughters of Jerusalem, warning them of the approaching siege: "but weep for yourselves, and for your children." At every stage I saw how children were involved in the keen sufferings of the war. . . . Thus vividly impressed with the great and sad share which falls the lot of children, in all the misery produced by the crimes and mistakes of men, I wrote the story of Max Krömer, softening down, rather than heightening, the horrors of the siege of Strasbourg.¹³⁰

Her travels also widened her range of friendships. Among her close friends were foreigners such as J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, the French Protestant historian, and Franz Delitzsch, the German theologian who translated many of her stories into German. The Russian Stepnick, with whom she collaborated in writing the book, The Highway of Sorrow at the Close of the Nineteenth Century or, as later titled, A Story of Modern Russia: the Highway of Sorrow, was also a friend.

During the year of 1858, when Sarah was submitting numerous manuscripts in hopes of publication, she adopted the pseudonym of Hesba Stretton. In regard to the name

¹³⁰Hesba Stretton, Max Krömer, a Story of the Siege of Strasbourg, pp. [5]-6.

change, Margaret Mortimer aptly believes that Hesba Stretton ". . . thought Sarah Smith was insufficiently imposing for a writer."¹³¹ Although Hesba Stretton used her new name in all her business affairs from that time forth, she remained simply Miss Sara Smith to her intimates.¹³² In coining the name of Hesba, she selected the first initial of the Christian names of her brother and sisters who were then living. Those initials, together with her own, formed the name of Hesba (Hannah, Elizabeth, Sarah, Benjamin, and Anne). The order of the initials also parallels the sequence of their births.¹³³ The latter half of her pseudonym, Stretton, has often been erroneously attributed to Church Stretton, where Hesba retained a cottage for several years and where she wrote several of her early books. The name of Stretton refers more specifically to All Stretton, a Shropshire village located near Church Stretton. In commenting on the Smith family's attraction to All Stretton, Hesba Webb, a niece of Hesba Stretton, writes, "The early summer took them for many years to All Stretton, a Shropshire village, loved by them for its

¹³¹Mortimer, p. viii.

¹³²"I.--Memoir, Specially Written for 'The Sunday at Home,'" The Sunday at Home, October 1911, p. 121.

¹³³The genealogical chart in the Appendix verifies this information.

many associations and for its beautiful hills."¹³⁴ Sarah's sister Anne, as a result of their Uncle James's bequest, owned property at All Stretton.

Although Sarah Smith began writing stories in her teens, her literary career under the pseudonym of Hesba Stretton did not successfully commence until the publication of her short story "The Lucky Leg" in Household Words on March 19, 1859. Diary entries for 1858 and 1859 indicate that Hesba Stretton experienced little initial success with her early writings as publishers invariably returned her submitted manuscripts. Even the manuscript for "The Lucky Leg," with which she first met success, was rejected by Chambers in October of 1858.¹³⁵ Upon its return, Elizabeth sent the unaltered manuscript to Charles Dickens, editor of Household Words, on February 21, 1859. The entry in William Henry Wills's HOUSEHOLD WORDS Office Book, which records the transaction, verifies her authorship of the story.¹³⁶

Hesba Stretton's association with Charles Dickens and William Henry Wills, editor and sub-editor respectively of the weekly periodicals Household Words and, later, All the

¹³⁴Hesba Dora Webb, "II.--A Personal Note by Mrs. Hesba D. Webb, a Niece of Hesba Stretton," The Sunday at Home, October 1911, p. 125.

¹³⁵Elizabeth Smith Stretton, Log Book, 1858-59. The log book is located in the Shrewsbury Public Library, Shrewsbury, England.

¹³⁶Anne Lohrli, comp., Household Words, p. 191.

Year Round, began with the publication of her fictional narrative "The Lucky Leg." The plot involves a widower's proposal to a woman with a wooden leg, a physical feature which she shares in common with each of his two previous wives. According to the "Memoir" printed in The Sunday at Home, the idea for the story originated when Hesba's

elder sister, Elizabeth, told an amusing story which someone had related to her father in her hearing. Hesba listened in silence, and afterwards worked up the incident into a story with no idea of publishing it, but rather for the amusement of her sister and herself.¹³⁷

An incident similar to Hesba's story was related as a factual event by Augustus J. C. Hare in The Story of My Life (V, 33-38).¹³⁸

After reading her story, Charles Dickens evidently recognized Stretton's potential for he not only accepted her story but also indicated, by letter, that he would welcome any further contributions which she might have.¹³⁹ In response to Dickens's recommendation and continued encouragement, Hesba Stretton contributed numerous writings, largely

¹³⁷"Memoir," p. 122.

¹³⁸Lohrli, p. 436.

¹³⁹In Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, II, 713, Edgar Johnson notes that many writers began their literary careers as a result of encouragement from Dickens. Quite similarly, in The Dickens Circle: A Narrative of the Novelist's Friendships, page 341, James Ley says, "His [Dickens's] outstanding quality was his--shall we call it knack?--of discovering talent."

fictional in nature, to the periodicals.¹⁴⁰ Margaret Mortimer states, "She became a regular contributor for he [Dickens] regarded her as a writer of wit and promise and a born storyteller."¹⁴¹ Dickens, with his thorough, precise editorship, also aided Hesba Stretton by offering suggestions for the improvement of some of her writings. Anne Lohrli says,

Dickens's letters to Wills occasionally mention Miss Smith's A.Y.R. contributions and suggest what she should do to improve certain papers that she intended to collect and publish in book form.¹⁴²

"Her books may have been designed to provoke tears and sympathy," notes Lance Salway, "but it is easy to see in them the qualities that Dickens admired in her work: the vivid characterization and the touches of humour."¹⁴² Even though the policy of anonymity which Dickens maintained for items published in either of the two periodicals restricted her own personal renown, Hesba Stretton certainly benefited from Dickens's supportive position.

Dickens considered the quality of Hesba Stretton's tales worthy of placement among his Christmas numbers of All

¹⁴⁰Because the periodicals overlapped publication dates by five weeks (Household Words terminated on May 28, 1859, while its successor All the Year Round commenced on April 30, 1859), only one of Hesba Stretton's contributions appeared in Household Words, the rest appearing in All the Year Round. A list of her periodical publications is included in the Appendix.

¹⁴¹Mortimer, p. viii.

¹⁴²Lohrli, p. 436.

the Year Round. Authors considered it an exceptional honor to have Dickens select their writings for inclusion within his annual Christmas numbers, special editions which published only the best stories submitted in regard to the chosen theme for each particular year. The Christmas numbers often contained several stories by Dickens himself. As a regular contributor to the numbers until 1866, Hesba Stretton had chapters appearing in "The Haunted House," "Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy," "Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions," and "Mugby Junction." In commenting upon his method of selection for stories to comprise each Christmas issue, Dickens wrote, "But I read every paper as soon as it comes here, and keep myself well primed about them all, to make selection easier by and bye."¹⁴⁴ He also states that ". . . the xmas No. can only be made up, on a careful comparison of the relative merits and possibilities of the best things we have."¹⁴⁵ The honor of having a story published among Dickens's Christmas selections was reward enough for many writers. In a log entry for November 29 and 30, 1863, Hesba indicates receiving a cheque (£ 15) and a copy of "Mrs. Lirriper's

¹⁴³Salway, p. 24.

¹⁴⁴Charles Dickens, "Correspondence to Wills on 4 November 1862," Charles Dickens as Editor: Being Letters Written by Him to Henry Wills His Sub-Editor, ed., R. C. Lehmann, p. 314.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 314-15.

Legacy" which contained her story, "Another Past Lodger Relates Certain Passages to Her Husband."¹⁴⁶ She records her amazement at receiving payment for the story as she thought she would only have the glory of its publication in the Christmas number. Dickens himself believed that particular Christmas number to be "nothing but a good'un."¹⁴⁷

Of her Christmas tales, critics consider the "Traveling Post Office," printed in "Mugby Junction" in 1866, to be her most notable tale. Hesba Stretton had first-hand knowledge of postal affairs since her father served for many years as postmaster of Wellington. Besides applying her background knowledge to this particular Christmas story, she also had written such articles as "A Post-Office in the Provinces" or "A Provincial Post-Office" and stories such as "The Postmaster's Daughter" and "Lost in the Post Office" which all appeared in All the Year Round. The tale Two Secrets, published in book form, also relies upon knowledge of postal operations.

According to Hesba Webb,

after writing short articles and stories for magazines, she [Hesba Stretton] soon found her true bent, and year by year stories of the poor and novels of more or less

¹⁴⁶Hesba Stretton, Diary, 29/30 November 1863. Hesba Stretton's diaries are located in the Shrewsbury Public Library, Shrewsbury, England.

¹⁴⁷Dickens, "Correspondence to Wills on 4 November 1862," p. 339.

serious intention came from her pen.¹⁴⁸

As a result of these works, Hesba Stretton became known as a novelist and writer of children's stories, intended for both juveniles and adults. She achieved national fame and recognition with Jessica's First Prayer, which first appeared serially in The Sunday at Home in 1866. The work, immediately popular, sold over one and a half million copies when published in book form by the Religious Tract Society in 1867. (The Sunday at Home records the number of sales at a generous two million copies.¹⁴⁹) Samuel Green, a historian of the Religious Tract Society, said the book "'stirred innumerable hearts, old and young.'¹⁵⁰

Comments from readers and critics of Jessica's First Prayer indicate the phenomenal impact which the book made upon Victorian society. The Earl of Shaftesbury, the active Tory philanthropist and benefactor of the poor, highly commended the book in a personal letter which was printed in The Record and later forwarded to Hesba Stretton by the Religious Tract Society. Lord Shaftesbury's appraisal reads:

This beautiful tale exhibits a singular minute and accurate knowledge of that call (the destitute children of the metropolis) its wants and its capabilities. As a literary effort, it will hardly find a rival for nature, simplicity, pathos and depth of Christian

¹⁴⁸H. Webb, p. 124.

¹⁴⁹"Memoir," p. 122.

¹⁵⁰Mortimer, p. ix.

feeling. The writer is doubtless a woman--no man on earth could have composed a page of it.¹⁵¹

Contemporary opinion, regardless of the reader's age or status, generally concurred with Lord Shaftesbury's favorable assessment of Jessica's First Prayer. Edith Nesbit, also an author of that period, comments, "'I've just been reading 'Jessica's first prayer' to my maid (who is a treasure), and I felt my eyes smart and my throat go lumpy towards the finish. Pathetic simplicity is a grand gift in writing.'"¹⁵² Hesba Stretton records one reader's comment in a log entry for May 18, 1867: "My dentist came, and upon leaving hoped I should have a place near to Lord Byron in the next world; a marvellous compliment!" In response to her book, Hesba Stretton received letters from Queen Victoria, Disraeli, and Gladstone.¹⁵³ In addition, letters arrived from all areas of England as the book ". . . quickly became one of the standard books for children in Dissenting and Evangelical households."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹Seed Time and Harvest, December 1911, p. 12.

¹⁵²From a letter to Ada Breakell, quoted by Doris Langley Moore in E. Nesbit: A Biography, p. 107.

¹⁵³Cruse, p. 80.

¹⁵⁴Alice Annie Griffes, Letter to Della Dale, 7 February 1924. The unpublished letter is now in the possession of Alice Walker.

Miss Lilian Faithful says she read it with other books of "a morbid and sentimental kind" that abounded during her childhood. "We loved the sentiment," she says, "but disliked the children."¹⁵⁵

According to the "Memoir," the mill hands of Yorkshire and Lancashire especially enjoyed the book as they ". . . were enraptured with the story, and used it as a 'service of sing' in chapels and schools."¹⁵⁶ In fact, Mary Thwaite notes the enduring appeal of the book as the story was still being requested by children in a poor industrial area in the early 1930's.¹⁵⁷ Besides mill hands and industrial workers, the book also had a "marvellous" effect upon sailors. Mr. Frank T. Bullen, a nautical sentimentalist, says:

"Every word went right home to our hearts all soft as they were, and I am sure if Miss Hesba Stretton had seen four rough young sailors choking red-eyed over the story she had woven round Jessica's First Prayer, she would also have been compelled to allow her eyes to overflow with sympathetic joy."¹⁵⁸

Jessica's First Prayer was

. . . translated into almost every European language, as well as into the chief tongues of India, the widespread Arabic of Asia and parts of Africa, and also into the tongues of Japan and Madagascar.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵Cruse, p. 80.

¹⁵⁶"Memoir," p. 123.

¹⁵⁷Mary Thwaite, From Primer to Pleasure in Reading, p. 94.

¹⁵⁸"Memoir," p. 123.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 122.

The translations were popular as the book met with ". . . enormous success in Budapest--three hundred copies were sold in 1901--and Beirut, where missionaries found the Arabic version to be an excellent inducement to conversion."¹⁶⁰ An edition was also printed in Braille. The book's influence caused the Tsar of Russia, Alexander II, to issue a special ukase requiring the story to be placed in all the Russian schools. That decree was later rescinded by the succeeding Tsar when Hesba Stretton wrote a book which criticized Russia's treatment of political prisoners in Siberia. As a result, the Tsar condemned all the copies of Jessica's First Prayer in Russia and ordered them to be burned in the public squares of Russian cities.

Although not as popular as her first work, Little Meg's Children (1868) and Alone in London (1869) together reached a sale of three-quarters of a million copies. Including the three titles already mentioned, Hesba Stretton had some fifty titles published between 1866 and 1906. The majority of the works were short religious and moral tales issued by the Religious Tract Society. "Samuel Green, in his history of the Religious Tract Society, has said that Little Meg's Children and Sarah Smith's other stories of destitute children bore good fruit."¹⁶¹ Her final two books which the

¹⁶⁰Salway, p. 20.

¹⁶¹Mortimer, pp. xi-xii.

Religious Tract Society published were the longer, religious works entitled The Sweet Story of Old and The Parables of Our Lord. Many of her shorter, pietistic tales involving children were distributed as Sunday School annual prizes. Hesba Stretton received an international prize for the best temperance story and the George Wood Medal, awarded to her by the American Tract Society in 1876 for the volume A Night and a Day. In addition to the writings which have been classified as the "Stretton Juvenile"¹⁶² style, Hesba wrote several long novels. The two and three volume works include titles such as The Clives of Burcot (1866), David Lloyd's Last Will (1869), and The Doctor's Dilemma (1872). Although the works were often favorably noticed by London reviewers, many critics claim that none of her two or three volume books were ever a success because she could not sustain her characters and plots for longer than one volume. For the most part, however, Hesba Stretton was fortunate with her writing because

her subjects were popular, the style easy and simple; though writing for her livelihood, she never knew the dreadful nightmare of a half-finished novel already coming out as a serial, nor had she at any time to face the fire of adverse criticism.¹⁶³

¹⁶²Michael Sadleir, "Hesba Stretton," XIX Century Fiction: A Bibliographical Record Based on His Own Collection, I, 334.

¹⁶³H. Webb, p. 125.

A biographical assessment of Hesba Stretton in The Sunday at Home contends that "those who were honoured with her friendship found her rather shy and sensitive, but a charming friend, a live woman, and a real companion--a soul well worth knowing and loving."¹⁶⁴ Indeed, such friends of hers as Dickens, Chambers, Lady Henry Wood, Sara Manning, the English minister Hugh Price Hughes, the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Lady Sudeley, Stepnick, and the well-known journalist Miss Hulda Friederichs may have viewed these characteristics in her. However, many publishers and editors had reason to form a quite different opinion of Hesba's nature. Because they often encountered a demanding woman who conducted her business affairs in an exacting manner, they tended to regard her as being unreasonable and excessively irritable. As T. C. Hancox aptly states the situation: "It would appear, however, that she certainly never needed a business manager, even if one would have borne with her for long"¹⁶⁵ The Sunday at Home records an early indication of her businesslike attitude. According to their account, the £ 5.5 which Hesba received from Mr. Wills in payment for the story "The Lucky Leg"

. . . came as a delightful surprise and when presenting the cheque at the bank for payment, Miss Stretton said,

¹⁶⁴"Memoir," p. 124.

¹⁶⁵Hancox, 20 July 1976, p. 4.

"Give me all the money in silver, please." and together the girls enjoyed the weight of this precious bag of money which represented the first fruit of the literary aspirations of one of them.¹⁶⁶

Although Hesba seemed to care little for material prosperity and was critical of those who displayed it, she nonetheless inquired personally after the proceeds from her writings. With the royalties, she supported herself and Elizabeth as well as contributed generously to charitable works. Because of Hesba's fiery temper, a number of publishers would maneuver their schedules so they were out of the office on the first of the month just in case Hesba might decide to drop in to inquire about royalty payments. She had several disagreements with the Religious Tract Society editors, whom she considered "extremely fussy,"¹⁶⁷ when she discovered that royalties were diminishing and some of her books were out of print. By 1888, she obtained a contract for yearly payments, regardless of royalty amounts.

Her response to a lack of royalties was not always the most admirable, nor did she exhibit much compunction over some of the schemes which she contrived if no royalties were forthcoming. In such a situation, she would insist upon another printing of an edition of a story which had originally sold well. If the publisher declined her request, she would

¹⁶⁶"Memoir," p. 122.

¹⁶⁷H. Stretton, Diary, 5 November 1866.

then attempt to persuade a different publisher in another part of the country to publish the work as a separate issue. She would also compile various stories of hers into book form for publication if no other work was available or acceptable to the publishers. Naturally, her short story compilations would not include all her popular stories, so the reader would have to buy several books in order to obtain all the stories which he wanted. Although some of Hesba Stretton's business procedures were ethically questionable, the options which she chose were within her legal rights. On one occasion, however, she was challenged on the grounds of legality. That instance involved the title of one of her works, The Doctor's Dilemma. George Bernard Shaw had used the same title for one of his works and, therefore, he threatened a court action against her. The case was settled out of court to the satisfaction of both authors.¹⁶⁸

In addition to her literary works, Hesba Stretton expressed her sympathies for the oppressed and underprivileged through humanitarian and philanthropic movements. In commenting upon this aspect of her life, Lance Salway says, "The 'special purposes' of her books were therefore realized in practice."¹⁶⁹ Poor and neglected children always remained

¹⁶⁸Hancox, 20 July 1976, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹Salway, p. 26.

her prime concern in her campaigns against social inequities. While living in Manchester, Sarah and Elizabeth heard a sermon which depicted the lives of hundreds of children, poor and deliberately maimed, who were being hired out to professional beggars within a half mile radius of St. Paul's in London.¹⁷⁰ When Hesba challenged the minister to prove his statements, he guided them on a tour through an area populated with the disgraceful scenes which he had so vividly described. The two sisters also attended a series of lectures delivered by Captain Agnew in Liverpool. Speaking on man's inhumanity to man, Captain Agnew attributed the brutal treatment within families to lapses in legislation which allowed anything to occur within the confines of a man's own home. At that time, England had its Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals with its legislative precedents, but the country had little recourse for cases involving cruelty to children. Several areas, especially in Liverpool and Scotland, developed their own schemes for handling such situations, and some relied upon the American process, as related by Captain Agnew, of introducing a case of child abuse by prosecuting under the title "Cruelty to an Animal." If the case were successful, the parents were placed in jail and the child cared for by others. However, not until the establishment of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty

¹⁷⁰Hancox, 20 July 1976, p. 3.

to Children, of which Hesba Stretton was an influential founding member, was there a unified, systematic approach to the problem.

In regard to philanthropy during the Victorian Era, Harriet Schupf comments that

. . . with the opening up of new areas for charitable activities as a result of the twin forces of urbanization and population growth, it is not surprising to find large numbers of the unmarried engaged in philanthropic works by the second half of the century. Nevertheless, only a few of these women achieved positions of leadership or prominence and only a handful had any discernible impact on the direction of social reform.¹⁷¹

Hesba Stretton, as a result of her work and leadership in the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, ranks among the few women who effectively strove for social reform. Prior to the formation of the London Society, Hesba Stretton conferred with Reverend Benjamin Waugh, a Congregationalist clergyman, about the need of a society for the defense and protection of children. After consulting with Waugh, Hesba Stretton wrote numerous letters to The Times directing the people's attention to the need for such a society. One of the early letters appeared in The Times on January 8, 1884.

Few people have any idea of the extent of active cruelty, and still more of cruel neglect, towards children among our degraded and criminal classes. Some years ago the rector of Spitalfields stated . . . that hundreds of children were systematically ill-treated and starved for begging purposes. Cases of flagrant and excessive

¹⁷¹Schupf, p. 302.

cruelty are constantly being brought before the magistrates, but hundreds of others a little less malevolent never come to the light of public courts. In Liverpool, a 'Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children' has been started. . . . The need for a national society of this kind is very great. . . . I trust that some of your philanthropic and influential readers who possess the gift of organisation may plan out and set on foot such a society, and deliver us as a nation from the curse and crime, the shame and sin, of neglected and oppressed childhood.¹⁷²

In a later letter, also printed in The Times, she emphatically states her cause once more: "The inarticulate cry of London children ought to be listened to, and will be listened to sooner or later. Only while we linger they perish."¹⁷²

Hesba Stretton, the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Dr. Barnardo, and Lord Shaftesbury were among the twenty persons who attended a meeting, which was held at the Mansion House of July 11, 1884, when the Society's founding principles were decided. The subsequent report which Stretton wrote in regard to an organizing sub-committee was printed and circulated.¹⁷⁴

As an influential founder of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Hesba Stretton remained an active member of the executive committee until December 15, 1894, when she resigned upon request. The Baroness Burdett-Coutts, advised by Charles Dickens and

¹⁷²The Times, Tuesday, 8 January 1884.

¹⁷³The Times, Monday, 26 May 1884.

¹⁷⁴Sir Sidney Lee, ed., Dictionary of National Biography, III, 346.

assisted in her works of charity by Hesba Stretton, also resigned from the Society prior to the granting of a royal charter for a National Society in 1895. Both the Baroness and Hesba Stretton objected to national incorporation because they were concerned about the financial straits of the Society. Although the Society had received no royal charter, as early as 1888 the organization was established on a national, non-sectarian basis with an approved constitution. Coinciding in time with this national expansion, the Society fell into debt. Although she was not personally responsible, Hesba Stretton was alarmed by the incurred debt. She made several notations concerning the matter in her log books and attributed the cause of the debt to dishonesty and the embezzlement of funds at the S.P.C.C.¹⁷⁵ Her apprehension over the financial status of the Society was further aggravated by her forced resignation from the executive committee immediately prior to the national incorporation of the Society. Reluctant to relinquish her position in the Society, Stretton resented Benjamin Waugh's initiative in the matter. Her association with Waugh began through the periodical Sunday Magazine and continued during the formation of the London Society. However, Waugh, who became the paid director of the National Society in 1895, was instrumental in voting Hesba

¹⁷⁵H. Stretton, Diary, July 1888; 3 November 1889; January 1895.

Stretton off the committee. In regard to the two societies, historians credit Hesba Stretton with the founding of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Benjamin Waugh with the establishment of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The scope of Hesba Stretton's humanitarian pursuits extended beyond England and her children. Always concerned with the outcast and downtrodden, Hesba attended a committee meeting of the Friends of Russian Freedom in July of 1890. The Russian Stepnick, a good friend of hers, was among the committee members at the meeting. After helping the Free Russians in 1891, Hesba Stretton's concern for the conditions in Russia led her to establish the Russian Famine Fund in 1892. Reports of the amount of money collected vary between £ 800 and the official account of £ 1000,¹⁷⁶ but, more significantly for the time, she tried to ensure the proper distribution of the money for the purpose it was collected, i.e. for the relief of the peasants threatened by starvation.

During the last nineteen years of their lives, Hesba Stretton and her sister Elizabeth, life-long companions, resided at Ivycroft, Ham Common, Surrey. In recalling the relationship of her two spinster aunts, Hesba Webb says, "A very rare and beautiful friendship existed between these two, who for seventy-eight years were never separated. In birth

¹⁷⁶Lee, p. 346.

they were but two years apart; in death only eight months."¹⁷⁷ She later recalls, "Each always used the plural pronoun when speaking of her projects, opinions, and possessions. They lived together, travelled together, and dressed almost alike."¹⁷⁸ Their relationship succeeded for so many years largely because Elizabeth cheerfully carried the domestic burden without harboring any jealousy for Hesba's fame and notoriety. Because of their close relationship, Hesba never fully recovered from the shock of Elizabeth's death in February of 1911.

Her own death, after four years of confinement at home, was hastened by a stroke from which she never regained consciousness during the ten days until her death. She passed away on October 8, 1911, at the age of seventy-nine. In a diary entry on her sixtieth birthday, July 27, 1892, she wrote,

I have lived ten years longer than I fixed for myself when I was young and thought life would not be worth living after fifty. The last ten years have been more interesting, more peaceful, and I think more useful than any other ten years.¹⁷⁹

Prior to her actual death, Hesba Stretton read her own obituary twice. As related in the Thames Valley Times of Wednesday, October 11, 1911, after the actual death of Hesba

¹⁷⁷H. Webb, p. 125.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹H. Stretton, Diary, 27 July 1892.

Stretton, the first obituary

. . . was in January, 1909, when the report that she was dead was printed before her friends had the opportunity to contradict; and the second was as recent as February of this year [1911] when the death of her elder sister, Miss Elizabeth Stretton, led to the death of Miss Hesba being announced.¹⁸⁰

As requested, Hesba Stretton's funeral ceremony was quiet with only a few relatives and close friends in attendance. Hesba was buried beside her sister Elizabeth in the Ham Common cemetery. The tombstone merely bears the simple inscription: "Hesba Stretton/ Born 27th July, 1832/ Died 8th October, 1911."¹⁸¹

Upon Hesba Stretton's death, various newspapers attempted to pay homage to her by delineating her character. The articles agree that simplicity and serenity characterized her life. According to Hesba Webb, "her pleasures were of the simplest kind--reading, beautiful scenery, talks with children, and latterly, the visits of old friends."¹⁸² "During the most strenuous years of work she habitually breakfasted in bed, rose, took a solitary walk and returned to her study by 10 a.m., where she wrote till 1 p.m."¹⁸³ In the final years of her life, Hesba Stretton would frequently

¹⁸⁰"Death of Miss Hesba Stretton," Thames Valley Times, 11 October 1911.

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²H. Webb, p. 125.

¹⁸³Ibid.

". . . after tea, invite her visitors to sit around the fire, with their shoes off, and their feet in the fender and then engage in a good old gossip."¹⁸⁴ Throughout her life, Hesba Stretton disliked notoriety. She rarely spoke before groups although she did present personal readings from her books and new stories.¹⁸⁵ Far more interested in the development of the inner resources of humanity than in the improvement of personal appearance, Hesba Stretton owned no jewelry and disregarded fashionable dress.¹⁸⁶ In addition, she refused to attend the theater. (Lance Salway comments, "Hesba Stretton may have despised the theatre, but her plots often indicate that she could have written some stirring stage melodramas.")¹⁸⁷ She did attend some events of the day, but as she records in one instance, "Went down to Gravesend in Capt. Wood's ship, with a large and fashionable party, which, of course, went against the grain with me!"¹⁸⁸ In her desire for a quiet life, Hesba, however, deplored inactivity and stagnation. She, therefore, remained active through charitable organizations and through her writings as she looked

¹⁸⁴Hancox, 22 July 1976, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵H. Stretton, Diary, 31 March 1863; 25 July 1865; 27 July 1865; September 1866.

¹⁸⁶H. Webb, p. 125.

¹⁸⁷Salway, p. 24.

¹⁸⁸H. Stretton, Diary, May 1868.

ever forward. During her literary career, she firmly believed

. . . that her talent was a God-sent gift--"A door of utterance," as St. Paul says, through which she was to go to the help and comfort of the poor, and especially to the children of the poor, and through which also a searchlight was to stream out upon their hard lot, so that others might be drawn to help them too.¹⁸⁹

To commemorate Hesba Stretton's connection with their local area in England, the Thames Council Highways Committee recommended on December 21, 1937, the name of "Stretton Road" for one of the four new roads on the Council's Housing Estate at Ham, Surrey.¹⁹⁰ (Stretton Road now runs parallel to Black Lane and Ham Street and lies between these streets and the river.) At the request of T. C. Hancox, the Wellington Urban Council also named a street in honor of the author. The street, Hesba Close, contains an assemblage of Old Folks Bungalows.¹⁹¹ Numerous other remembrances, such as the two cited above, honor the once popular English writer. Probably one of the most special of memorials is located in a Parish Church at Church Stretton where a stained glass window depicts a little child, the Jessica of Jessica's First Prayer. A tablet with an explanation accompanies the window. The memorial was paid for by public subscription at the centenary

¹⁸⁹H. Webb, p. 125.

¹⁹⁰Hancox, 22 July 1976, p. 11.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

of Hesba Stretton's birth in 1932. The continued memorials to Hesba Stretton extend beyond the shores of her native England. One such example involves the Australian writer, Hesba F. Brinsmead, who wrote the children's book Pastures of the Blue Crane. In response to my family's inquiry about her name, she writes, "Yes, my mother, as a child, was an avid reader of the books of Hesba Stretton! So she named her youngest child after her. . . ."192

With Hesba Stretton's death, as Hesba Webb comments, ". . . we have lost one more link--and that a very noticeable and shining one--in the chain which unites us to the Victorian period."193 Although the physical link of Hesba Stretton as a member of society is lost, her literary link is retained and perpetuated through her surviving works. Her books have long passed their prime as influences upon readers. However, as a writer of children's books, Hesba Stretton still retains a prominent position among other writers of that period. The literary position which is now attributed to Hesba Stretton in history may possibly be strengthened through an analysis of her treatment of street children as compared to Charles Dickens's. Such a

192Hesba F. Brinsmead, Letter to Alice Walker, 20 July 1967. The unpublished letter is now in the possession of Alice Walker.

193H. Webb, p. 124.

comparison may more clearly delineate the relationship which the two Victorians shared and, in turn, broaden the scope of critical assessment of Victorian literature involving the children of the streets of London.

A. W.

Emporia, Kansas

July, 1977

PHOTOGRAPHS OF HESBA STRETTON



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Hesba Stretton
when she wrote Jessica's First Prayer



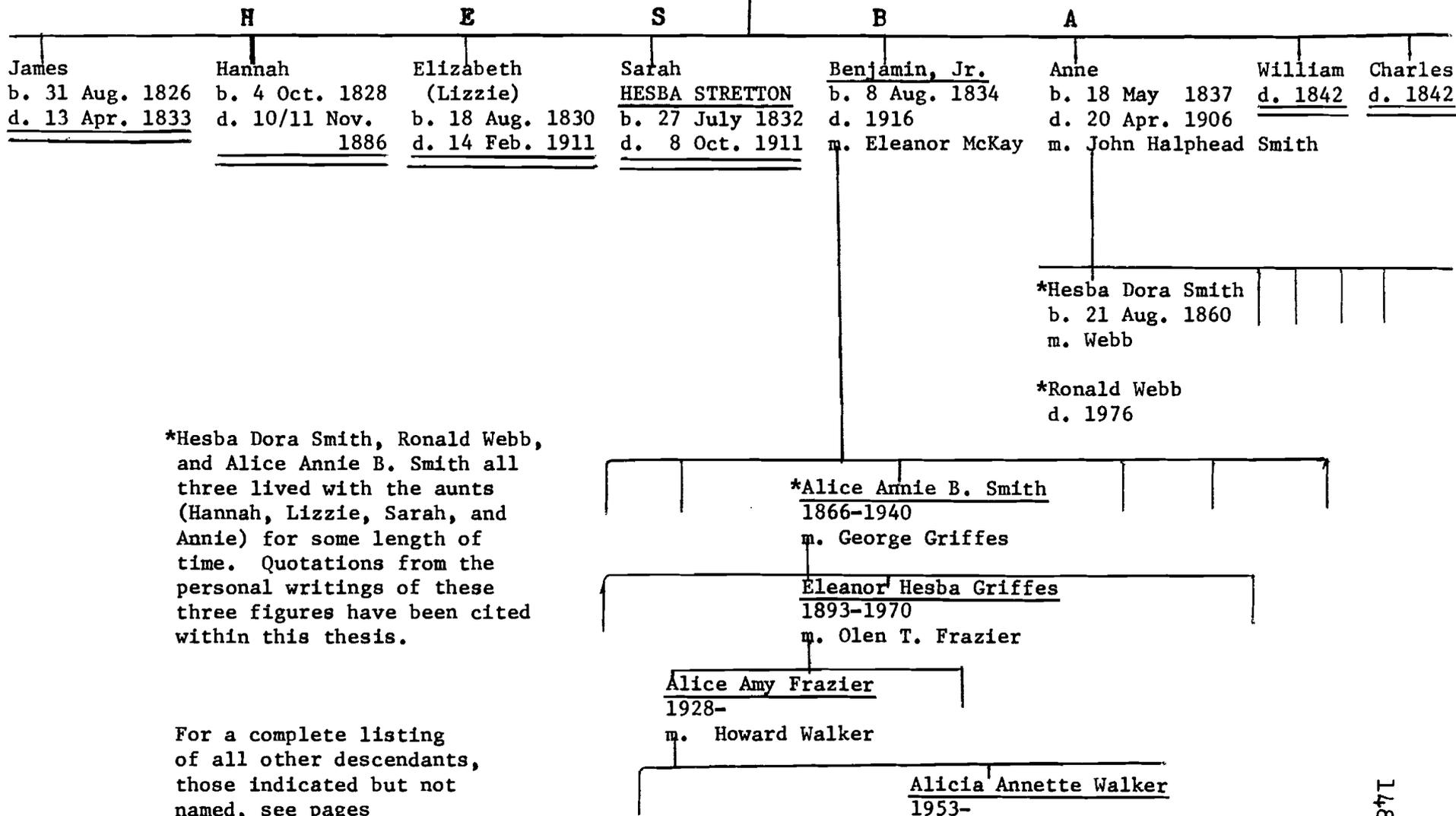
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Miss Hesba Stretton

Benjamin Smith
b. 4 Oct. 1793
d. 1 Jan. 1878

m.

Anne Bakewell
b. 1798
d. 1842



*Hesba Dora Smith, Ronald Webb, and Alice Annie B. Smith all three lived with the aunts (Hannah, Lizzie, Sarah, and Annie) for some length of time. Quotations from the personal writings of these three figures have been cited within this thesis.

For a complete listing of all other descendants, those indicated but not named, see pages of Appendix.

b) James Donald Spencer
 (15 May 1927-living)
 m. Dorothy Davonna Toll
 Oct. 1947

1) James Douglas
 (12 Feb. 1948-)
 m. Marilyn Harper
 1 June 1968

(a) Courtney Rennin
 (Female)
 20 Apr. 1975

2) Cynthia Luellen
 (10 Feb. 1949-)
 m. David Goff
 25 Jan. 1969

(a) Kari Ann
 20 Apr. 1975

(b) Spencer Allen
 Aug. 1976

3) Linda Dianne
 (23 Aug. 1952-)
 m. James Stuart
 3 step-children

4) Christina Elizabeth
 (16 Nov. 1961-)

2. Eleanor Hesba (13 June 1893-6 Oct. 1970)
 m. Olen Todd Frazier 30 June 1925

a) Alice Amy
 (3 Sept. 1928-living)
 m. Howard Ramsay Walker 5 Feb. 1950

1) John Howard (17 July 1951-)
 m. Peggy Ann Edwards
 11 Aug. 1973

(a) Mary Jane
 (19 Sept. 1974-)

(b) Julie Ann
 (8 Nov. 1975-)

2) Alicia Annette
 (23 Apr. 1953-)

- b) Stephen Terrell (legally changed
from Olen Todd, Jr.)
(30 Oct. 1930-living)
m. Sachie Nakabayashi
11 Oct. 1954
- 1) Natasha Leland
(21 Dec. 1957-)
 - 2) Clifton Nakabayashi
(16 May 1960-)
3. James Smith Griffes (7 Jan. 1905-living)
m. Marie Isacu 18 Aug. 1932
- a) Christina Marie
(7 Dec. 1935-)
m. Harry Caldwell 26 Mar. 1960
- 1) Charis Marie
(26 Nov. 1960-)
 - 2) Heather Bernice
(4 Feb. 1966-)
- b) James Gregory
(15 Apr. 1940-)
m. Patricia Morley 3 July 1965
- 1) Paul Christopher, adopted
(22 April 1969-)
 - 2) Corretta Ann, adopted
(27 April 1971-)
 - 3) Matthew James, natural
(26 Dec. 1972-)
- D. Benjamin Stephen (26 Dec. 1868-July 1939)
m. 1st. Della, no children
m. 2nd. Anna Hedge, no children
- E. David McKay (24 Jan. 1871-2 Mar. 1889) single
- F. Hesba Eleanor (5 July 1873-Dec. 1943)
m. Alvin Grant Morris 25 Sept. 1895
1. Alvin Everett (1 Dec. 1897-died at Nucla CO)
m. 1st Binnie Siegrist 1 June 1920

a) Marguerite Enid
 (23 Mar. 1921-)
 m. 1st Robert Miller 10 Aug. 1937
 (divorced)

1) Kerry Dale
 (29 Oct. 1939-)
 m. Joan Elaine Duncan
 13 Feb. 1965

(a) Scott Anthony
 (25 May 1968-)

(b) Dianna Leigh
 (11 Mar. 1970-)

2) Carla Rae
 (11 Sept. 1942-)
 m. 1st James Purvis
 28 June 1959

(a) James Lynn
 (7 Feb. 1962-)

m. 2nd Donald G. Layman
 Mar. 1968

m. 2nd Loyd Rainwater 29 June 1949

3) Nicholas Joe
 (26 Aug. 1950-)

Alvin m. Thelma Ione (1904-1947)

2. Benjamin Smith (1 Sept. 1900-1954)
 m. 1st. Ethel C. Kinilaud, divorced
 m. 2nd. Lucille M. Lewis

a) Benjamin Gordon

3. David Gordon (4 Nov. 1903-3 July 1941)
 m. Melba Cameron 16 Aug. 1931

a) Betty Jo, adopted

VI. Anne (18 May 1837-20 Apr. 1906)
 m. John Halphead Smith

A. Hesba Dora (21 Aug. 1860-died)
 m. _____ Webb 13 Nov. (?) 1889

1. Ronald (1892-1976)
m.

2. Hesba Delia (dates unknown)

B. Gilbert Bakewell (30 Aug. 1861-Oct. 1948)
Changed Smith to Stretton

C. Philip M. Eustace (19 July 1863-died prior 1948)
Changed Smith to Stretton

D. Elsie Mabel Hope (-died prior to 1948)

E. Margaret (Daisy) (-died prior to 1948)

VII. William (17 Oct. 1838-16 Jan. 1842)

VIII. Charles Edward (26 July 1840-21 Jan. 1842)

AN ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF
HESBA STRETTON'S WRITINGS*

<u>Titles of Works</u>	<u>Publication Date</u>
"Abroad an Emigrant Ship" "An Emigrant Ship" "Emigrant Vessel"	April 12, 1862 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , vii, 111-115
<u>An Acrobat's Girlhood</u>	[1889]
"Alice Gilbert's Confessions" (Article)	n.d.
<u>Alone in London</u>	1869
"Am Hungered and Ye Gave Me Meat" (Article with temperance theme)	n.d.
"Annie and Roger" (Published as "A Christian Christmas")	1861
"Another Past Lodger Relates Certain Passages to Her Husband" (Published in "Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy")	Dec. 1, 1864 <u>A.Y.R. Christ-</u> <u>mas No.</u> , pp. 40-47
"Aunt Margaret's Trouble"	n.d.
<u>Bede's Charity</u>	[1872]
"Blackburn Sewing Schools" (Article)	Feb. 2, 1863 <u>Temple Bar</u>
"The Bridgewater Millions"	n.d.
"British Pompeii"	1859 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , pp. 148-51

*Identification of Hesba Stretton's writings is a difficult task because many of them were published anonymously. Therefore, this compilation may not be considered conclusive even though it is an extensive record. In all cases, I have attempted to verify the information.

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<u>Brought Home</u> (Temperance theme)	1875
<u>Carola</u>	[1884]
<u>Cassy</u> (A tale)	[1874]
<u>The Children of Cloverley</u>	[1865]
<u>Children Reclaimed for Life . . .</u> (By T. J. Barnardo with an introduction by Hesba Stretton)	1875
"A Christian Patriot, an East End Sketch"	n.d. <u>Sunday Magazine</u> pp. 554-58
<u>The Christmas Child</u>	1888
<u>The Christmas Child and Other Stories</u> (Including "Only a Dog," "Sam Franklin's Savings Bank," and "The Worth of a Baby")	[1908]
<u>The Clives of Burcot:</u> (Three volume novel) <u>The Price of a Secret; or, the Clives of Burcot</u>	1866
<u>Cobwebs and Cables</u>	1881
<u>The Crew of the Dolphin</u>	1876
" . . . A cry . . . , a crash, . . . a groan"	n.d.
<u>David Lloyd's Last Will</u> (A novel)	1869
<u>A Day and a Night</u> (A tale)	1876
"Deci"	n.d.
Diaries (Seventeen of them written by Hesba Stretton and her sister Elizabeth)	1858-70 1875 1884-96
<u>The Doctor's Dilemma</u> (Three Volume novel)	1872
"Eleven Hundred Pounds"	Aug. 13, 1864 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , xii, 15-24

	156
<u>Enoch Roden's Training</u>	1863
"Exiles in an Artic Zone"	n.d.
<u>. . . The Fatal Lilies</u> (By the authors of "Dora Thorne," and <u>A Thorny Path</u> , Charlotte Mary Brame and Hesba Stretton, respectively)	1881
<u>Fern's Hollow</u>	1864
<u>Fishers of Derby Haven</u> (Incorrectly attributed to Hannah)	1866
<u>Friends till Death</u> (10th Thousand)	1876
<u>Friends till Death and Other Stories</u> (Including "The Worth of a Baby" and "How Apple-Tree Court Was Won")	1876
"French Cotton Town" (Article)	n.d. <u>Leisure Hour</u> pp. 714-16
"Gates Ajar"	Read to friends in 1870
"The Ghost in the Clock Room" (in "The Haunted House")	1859 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , Christmas No.
"Godfrey"	Nov., 1861
<u>Good Words from the Apocrypha</u> (Joint authorship of Hesba Stretton and H. L. Synnot)	1903
<u>A Green Bay Tree</u>	Written in 1887
"Gypsy Glimpses"	1869 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , pp. 536-40
"Half an Hour's Walk in Normandy"	May, 1868 <u>The Argosy</u>
<u>Half-Brothers</u> (A novel)	1892
<u>HER Only Son</u>	1887

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<u>Hester Morley's Promise</u>	1873
<u>The Highway of Sorrow</u>	1894
(A novel by Hesba Stretton and Stepnick)	
<u>The Highway of Sorrow at the Close of the Nineteenth Century</u>	1894
<u>A Story of Modern Russia; the Highway of Sorrow</u>	[1905]
<u>In Prison and Out</u>	[By Dec., 1879]
<u>Facts on a Thread of Fiction:</u>	
<u>In Prison and Out,</u>	
<u>In the Hollow of His Hand</u>	[1897]
<u>Jessica</u>	[By 1897]
Part I. "Jessica's First Prayer"	
Part II. "Jessica's Mother"	
<u>Jessica's First Prayer</u>	1866
	<u>Sunday at Home</u>
	1867
	Religious Tract Society
<u>Jessica's Mother</u>	1898
"John Martin"	Aug. 25, 1868
(Bentley's lost the manuscript but in September it was found again. Not known if ever published.)	
<u>The King's Servants</u>	1873
Part I. Faithful in Little	
Part II. Unfaithful	
Part III. Faithful in Much	
"The Knotty Question"	June 1, 1871
	<u>Band of Hope Review</u>
	pp. 22-24
<u>Left Alone</u>	1871
<u>Left Alone, and a Night and a Day</u>	[1913]
<u>Left Alone; and Other Stories</u>	1904
<u>Little Meg's Children</u>	1868
(First edition -- 10,000 copies)	
"Lord Westbourne's Heir"	<u>A.Y.R.</u> , n.d.

	158
<u>The Lord's Purse-bearers</u>	1882
<u>Lost Gip</u> (14th Thousand)	1873
"Lost in the Post Office"	June 4, 1869 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , pp. 57-69
"The Lucky Leg"	March 19, 1859 <u>Household Words</u> pp. 374-80
<u>A Man of His Word</u>	1878
"Manchester Free Libraries"	June 2, 1860 <u>Chambers</u> , pp. 340-42
"Maurice Craven's Madness"	n.d.
<u>Max Krömer, a Story of the Siege of Strasbourg</u>	[1871]
<u>Michel Lorio's Cross and Other Stories</u>	1871
"The Minister's Silence"	[Jan., 1867]
"A Miserable Christmas and a Happy New Year"	[1878]
<u>Mrs. Burton's Best Bedroom; and Other Stories</u>	1904
"Mrs. Haddon's History" (Serialized)	May 7-21, 1870 <u>A.Y.R.</u>
"Mrs. Halliburton's Trouble"	[1862]
<u>Nelly's Dark Days</u>	1870
<u>The New Child's Life of Christ</u> (. . . told in easy language by . . . Hesba Stretton . . .)	[1901]
<u>A Night and a Day</u>	1876
<u>No Place Like Home</u>	[By March, 1881]
"No Work, No Bread!"	[1890]
"Not To Be Taken for Granted" (in "Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions")	Dec. 7, 1865 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , Christ- mas No. pp. 20-27

	159
<u>Old Transome</u> (Booklet -- 7th Thousand)	1871
"One of God's Servants"	n.d.
"Only a Dog" (A story)	[1888]
"Out of the World" (Four chapters)	<u>The Argosy</u>
<u>The Parables of Our Lord</u>	1903
<u>Paul Rodenks</u> (Written by Hesba Stretton for Stepnick)	n.d.
<u>Paul's Courtship</u> (Three volume novel)	1867
<u>Pilgrim Street, a Story of Manchester Life</u>	[1878]
"Poison in the Packet"	n.d.
"Political Refugee" (Sent to Syndicate of Authors)	Jan.-Feb., 1894
"The Postmaster's Daughter"	Nov. 5, 1859 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , pp. 37-44
"A Post-Office in the Provinces" "A Provincial Post-Office"	Feb. 28, 1863 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , ix, 12-16
"The Real Murderer"	Jan. 2, 1864 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , pp. 448-56
"Rhoda" (Dedicated to Mr. Wills)	1861
<u>The Ray of Sunlight; or Jack Stafford's Resolve.</u> <u>And Other Readings for Working Men's Homes.</u> By Hesba Stretton, R. Lamb . . . and Other Popular Writers	[1887]
<u>Sam Franklin's Savings Bank and Other Stories</u>	1876
"Setting Up"	n.d.
<u>The Soul of Honor</u>	1898
"Stella's Eclipse"	n.d.

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<u>The Storm of Life</u>	1876
"Story of Felicia Crompton"	Jan. 10, 1863 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , viii, 425-32
"Story of the Duchess of Veronica" (Five Installments)	1862 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , viii, Oct. 4 pp. 88-96 Oct. 11 115-20 Oct. 18 136-44 Oct. 25 164-68 Nov. 1 187-92
"A Summer's Day on the Wrekin"	1863 <u>Leisure Hour</u>
<u>The Sweet Story of Old; a Sunday Book for the Little Ones . . .</u>	1861
"Ten Years a Nun"	Dec. 1, 1867 <u>The Argosy</u> , pp. 36-48
"A Thieves Supper" (Article)	n.d. <u>Sunday Magazine</u>
<u>A Thorny Path</u> (16 Impressions)	Sept., 1879
<u>Thoughts on Old Age. Good Thoughts from Many Minds</u> <u>Thoughts on Old Age; Good Words from Many Minds</u> (Selected and arranged by H. Stretton)	1906
"Three Hours with a Boy's Beadle"	n.d.
<u>Through a Needle's Eye</u> (A tale of English village life in two volumes)	1870
"No. 4 Branch Line. The Travelling Post-Office" (in "Mugby Junction")	Dec. 10, 1866 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , Christ- mas No. pp. 35-42
<u>Two Christmas Stories: Sam Franklin's Savings Bank; A Miserable Christmas and a Happy New Year</u> (7th Thousand)	1876
<u>Two Secrets and A Man of His Word</u>	[1897]
<u>Under the Old Roof</u>	[1882]

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"A Visit to Wroxeter"	1859 <u>Chambers</u> , 3. ix
"Winifred's Trouble" (Article)	July 27, 1861 Aug. 3, 1861 <u>Welcome Guest</u>
"The Withered Daisy"	Nov. 23, 1861 <u>A.Y.R.</u> , pp. 210-16
<u>The Wonderful Life of Christ</u>	1875
<u>The Story of Jesus and the Lives of His</u> <u>Apostles</u> . . . Introduction by Rev. Daniel March . . .	[1902]
<u>The Teachings of Jesus and the Lives of</u> <u>His Apostles</u>	[1902]
<u>The Pictorial Bible and Commentator;</u> <u>Presenting the Great Truths of God's</u> <u>Word in the Most Simple, Pleasing,</u> <u>Affectionate, and Instructive Manner.</u> By Ingram Cobbin . . . Includes Hesba Stretton's "Wonderful Life of Christ"	1878