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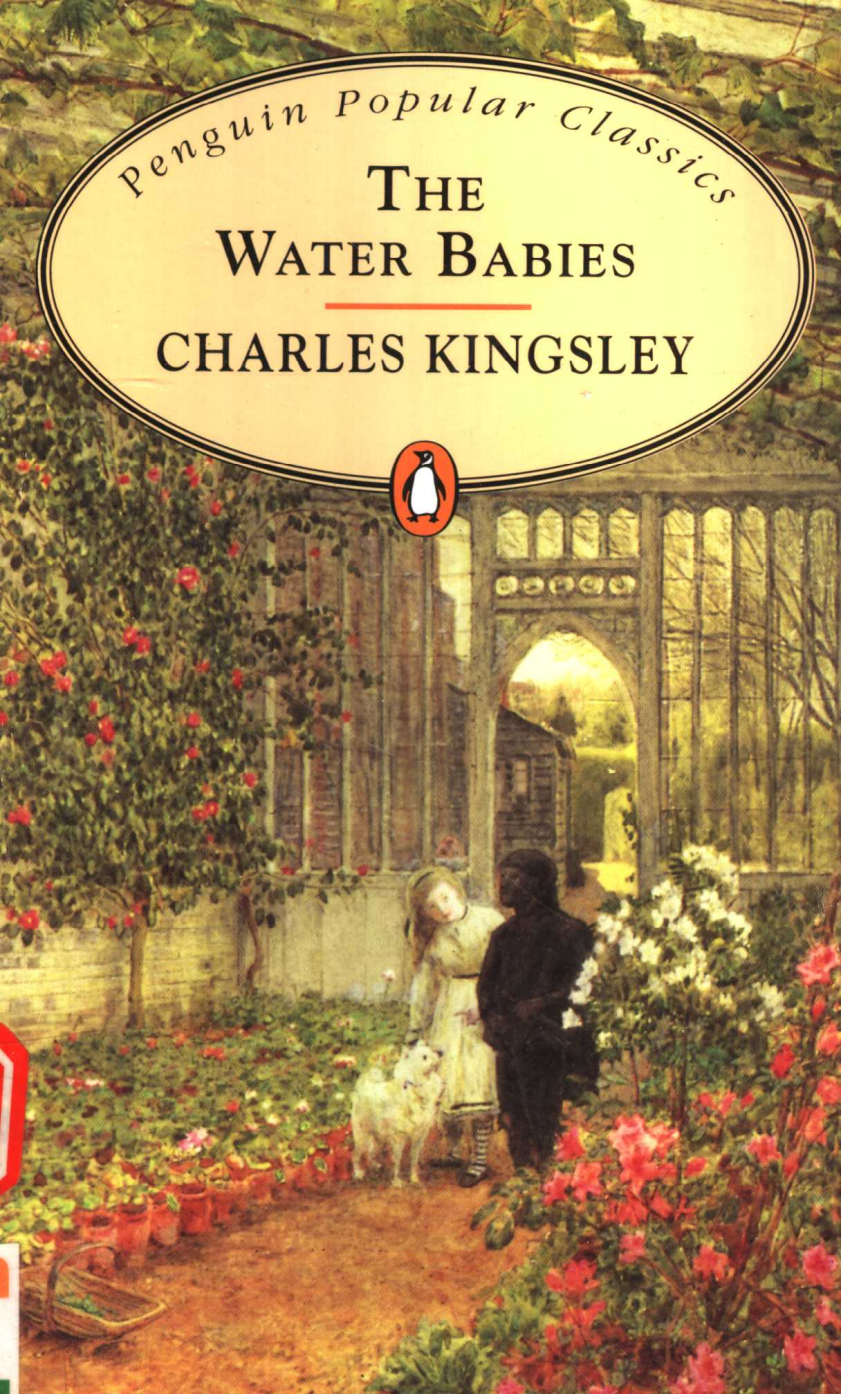
THE WATER BABIES

CHARLES KINGSLEY



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THE WATER-BABIES

BY CHARLES KINGSLEY

CHARLES KINGSLEY (1819–75). Prodigious writer of songs, poems, ballads, sermons and historical romances, he is probably best remembered for his children's classic, *The Water-Babies*.

Charles Kingsley was born in Holme, Devonshire in 1819 and was educated at Helston Grammar School; King's College, London; and Magdalene College, Cambridge. His university career was rumoured to have been a fairly dissolute one, but nevertheless he was ordained in 1842, following in the footsteps of his father. He went on from being curate to rector of the parish of Eversley, Hampshire. Whilst engaged to Frances Grenfell, whom he married in 1844, he began work on a version of the life of St Elizabeth of Hungary, which finally appeared in 1848 as the blank verse drama *The Saint's Tragedy*. At this time he was much influenced by the writings of Maurice and Carlysle, and he revealed a deep interest in social reform. Under the pseudonym 'Parson Lot' he contributed to *Politics for the People* in 1848 and to its successor, *The Christian Socialist*, in 1850–51. His début novel, *Yeast*, was at first serialized in *Fraser's Magazine*, and was published in book form in 1850, to coincide with his second novel, *Alton Locke*. Both works deal with reform and eloquently depict the suffering of the working classes. His first historical novel, *Hypatia, or New Foes with Old Faces*, set in fifth-century Alexandria, was inspired by a trip to Germany in 1851. It was published in book form two years later to a mixed reception. Many regarded its imagery as too extreme in violence and saw it as unfairly hostile in its depiction of the Early Church. His next novel, *Westward Ho!* (1855), was greeted with far more enthusiasm, although some readers baulked at its vicious anti-Catholicism and bloodthirsty narrative. Set in Elizabethan times, yet inspired by Kingsley's burst of patriotism at the onset of the Crimean War, its hero wages war against both the Armada and his Spanish rival in love. *Two Years Ago* (1857) returns to the theme of

Christian Socialism and *Hereward the Wake* (1866) continues in the vein of historical romance, for which he was particularly popular.

In 1856 Kingsley temporarily moved away from adult literature and wrote *The Heroes*, relating the stories of Perseus, Theseus and the Argonauts for young readers. Seven years later he was to publish *The Water-Babies*, his famous and best-loved fairy tale for children. Kingsley also wrote a multitude of songs and ballads, and the small volume *Andromeda and Other Poems* (1858) contains his most famous poem, 'The Sands of Dee'. Kingsley was Professor of Modern History at Cambridge from 1860 until 1869, and further honour was bestowed upon him when he became canon of Chester in 1866 and of Westminster in 1873. Despite this public approval, however, he remained a fascinating figure of controversy, which is particularly displayed in his celebrated confrontation with Cardinal Newman. This was initiated by Kingsley's review of Froude's *History of England* in *Macmillan's Magazine*, January 1864, when he misinterpreted Newman's sermon on Wisdom and Innocence. The crushing rejoinder formed the famous *Apologia pro vita sua*, and so in the public's eyes the Catholic was the victor. However, Charles Kingsley remained a popular if somewhat mercurial character up to his death in 1875.

The Water-Babies was a Victorian classic, filled with beautiful and evocative imagery of seashore and underwater life, in which Kingsley had a profound and abiding interest. A fantastic tale blending innocence and social conscience, this delightful story remains as popular today as when it first appeared in 1863.

TO

MY YOUNGEST SON

GRENVILLE ARTHUR

AND

TO ALL OTHER GOOD LITTLE BOYS

COME READ ME MY RIDDLE, EACH GOOD LITTLE MAN;

IF YOU CANNOT READ IT, NO GROWN-UP FOLK CAN.

"I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined;
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

"To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think,
What man has made of man."

WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER I

ONCE upon a time there was a little chimney-sweep, and his name was Tom. That is a short name, and you have heard it before, so you will not have much trouble in remembering it. He lived in a great town in the North country, where there were plenty of chimneys to sweep, and plenty of money for Tom to earn and his master to spend. He could not read nor write, and did not care to do either; and he never washed himself, for there was no water up the court where he lived. He had never been taught to say his

prayers. He never had heard of God, or of Christ, except in words which you never have heard, and which it would have been well if he had never heard. He cried half his time, and laughed the other half. He cried when he had to climb the dark flues, rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw; and when the soot got into his eyes, which it did every day in the week; and when his master beat him, which he did every day in the week; and when he had not enough to eat, which happened every day in the week likewise. And he laughed the other half of the day, when he was tossing halfpennies with the other boys, or playing leap-frog over the posts, or bowling stones at the horses' legs as they trotted by, which last was excellent fun, when there was a wall at hand behind which to hide. As for chimney-sweeping, and being hungry, and being beaten, he took all that for the way of the world, like the rain and snow and thunder, and stood manfully with his back to it till it was over, as his old donkey did to a hail-storm; and then shook his ears and was as jolly as ever; and thought of the fine times coming, when he would be a man,

and a master sweep, and sit in the public-house with a quart of beer and a long pipe, and play cards for silver money, and wear velveteens and ankle-jacks, and keep a white bull-dog with one gray ear, and carry her puppies in his pocket, just like a man. And he would have apprentices, one, two, three, if he

could. How he would bully them, and knock them about, just as his master did to him; and make them carry home the soot sacks, while he rode before them on his donkey, with a pipe in his mouth and a flower in his button-hole, like a king at the head of his army. Yes, there were good times coming; and, when his master let him have a pull at the leavings of his beer, Tom was the jolliest boy in the whole town.

One day a smart little groom rode into the court where Tom lived. Tom was just hiding behind a wall, to heave half a brick at his horse's legs, as is the custom of that country when they welcome strangers; but the groom saw him, and halloed to him to know where Mr. Grimes, the chimney-sweep, lived. Now, Mr. Grimes was Tom's own master, and Tom was a good man of business, and always civil to customers, so he put the half-brick down quietly behind the wall, and proceeded to take orders.

Mr. Grimes was to come up next morning to Sir John Harthover's, at the Place, for his old chimney-sweep was gone to prison, and the chimneys wanted sweeping. And so he rode away, not giving Tom time to ask what the sweep had gone to prison for, which was a matter of interest to Tom, as he had been in prison once or twice himself. Moreover, the groom looked so very neat and clean, with his drab gaiters, drab breeches, drab jacket, snow-white tie with a smart pin in it, and clean round ruddy face, that Tom was offended and disgusted at his appearance, and considered him a stuck-up fellow, who gave himself airs because he wore smart clothes, and other people paid for them; and went behind the wall to fetch the half-brick after all; but did not, remembering that he had come in the way of business, and was, as it were, under a flag of truce.

His master was so delighted at his new customer that he knocked Tom down out of hand, and drank

more beer that night than he usually did in two, in order to be sure of getting up in time next morning; for the more a man's head aches when he wakes, the more glad he is to turn out, and have a breath of fresh air. And, when he did get up at four the next morning, he knocked Tom down again, in order to teach him (as young gentlemen used to be taught at public schools) that he must be an extra good boy that day, as they were going to a very great house, and might make a very good thing of it, if they could but give satisfaction.

And Tom thought so likewise, and, indeed, would have done and behaved his best, even without being knocked down. For, of all places upon earth, Harthover Place (which he had never seen) was the most wonderful, and, of all men on earth, Sir John (whom he had seen, having been sent to gaol by him twice) was the most awful.

Harthover Place was really a grand place, even for the rich North country; with a house so large that in the frame-breaking riots, which Tom could just remember, the Duke of Wellington, and ten thousand soldiers to match, were easily housed therein; at least, so Tom believed; with a park full of deer, which Tom believed to be monsters who were in the habit of eating children; with miles of game-preserves, in which Mr. Grimes and the collier lads poached at times, on which occasions Tom saw pheasants, and wondered what they tasted like; with a noble salmon-river, in which Mr.

Grimes and his friends would have liked to poach; but then they must have got into cold water, and that they did not like at all. In short, Harthover was a grand place, and Sir John a grand old man, whom even

Mr. Grimes respected; for not only could he send Mr. Grimes to prison when he deserved it, as he did once or twice a week; not only did he own all the land about for miles; not only was he a jolly, honest, sensible squire, as ever kept a pack of hounds, who

would do what he thought right by his neighbours, as well as get what he thought right for himself; but, what was more, he weighed full fifteen stone, was nobody knew how many inches round the chest, and could have thrashed Mr. Grimes himself in fair fight, which very few folk round there could do, and which, my dear little boy, would not have been right for him to do, as a great many things are not which one both can do, and would like very much to do. So Mr. Grimes touched his hat to him when he rode through the town, and called him a "buirdly awd chap," and his young ladies "gradely lasses," which are two high compliments in the North country; and thought that that made up for his poaching Sir John's pheasants; whereby you may perceive that Mr. Grimes had not been to a properly-inspected Government National School.

Now, I dare say, you never got up at three o'clock on a midsummer morning. Some people get up then because they want to catch salmon; and some because they want to climb Alps; and a great many more because they must, like Tom. But, I assure you, that three o'clock on a midsummer morning is the pleasantest time of all the twenty-four hours, and all the three hundred and sixty-five days; and why every one does not get up then, I never could tell, save that they are all determined to spoil their nerves and their complexions by doing all night what they might just as well do all day. But Tom, instead of going out to

dinner at half-past eight at night, and to a ball at ten, and finishing off somewhere between twelve and four, went to bed at seven, when his master went to the public-house, and slept like a dead pig; for which reason he was as piert as a game-cock (who always gets up early to wake the maids), and just ready to get up when the fine gentlemen and ladies were just ready to go to bed.

So he and his master set out; Grimes rode the donkey in front, and Tom and the brushes walked behind; out of the court, and up the street, past the closed window-shutters, and the winking weary policemen, and the roofs all shining gray in the gray dawn.

They passed through the pitmen's village, all shut up and silent now, and through the turnpike; and then they were out in the real country, and plodding along the black dusty road, between black slag walls, with no sound but the groaning and thumping of the pit-engine in the next field. But soon the road grew white, and the walls likewise; and at the wall's foot grew long grass and gay flowers, all drenched with dew; and instead of the groaning of the pit-engine,

they heard the skylark saying his matins high up in the air, and the pit-bird warbling in the sedges, as he had warbled all night long.

All else was silent. For old Mrs. Earth was still fast asleep; and, like many pretty people, she looked still prettier asleep than awake. The great elm-trees in the gold-green meadows were fast asleep above, and the cows fast asleep beneath them; nay, the few clouds which were about were fast asleep likewise, and so tired that they had lain down on the earth to rest, in long white flakes and bars, among the stems of the elm-trees, and along the tops of the alders by the stream, waiting for the sun to bid them rise and go about their day's business in the clear blue overhead.

On they went; and Tom looked, and looked, for he never had been so far into the country before; and longed to get over a gate, and pick buttercups, and look for birds' nests in the hedge; but Mr. Grimes was a man of business, and would not have heard of that.

Soon they came up with a poor Irishwoman, trudging along with a bundle at her back. She had a gray shawl over her head, and a crimson madder petticoat; so you may be sure she came from Galway. She had neither shoes nor stockings, and limped along as if she were tired and footsore; but she was a very tall handsome woman, with bright gray eyes, and heavy black hair hanging about her cheeks. And she took

Mr. Grimes' fancy so much, that when he came alongside he called out to her:

"This is a hard road for a gradely foot like that. Will ye up, lass, and ride behind me?"

But, perhaps, she did not admire Mr. Grimes' look and voice; for she answered quietly:

"No, thank you: I'd sooner walk with your little lad here."

"You may please yourself," growled Grimes, and went on smoking.

So she walked beside Tom, and talked to him, and asked him where he lived, and what he knew, and all about himself, till Tom thought he had never met such a pleasant-spoken woman. And she asked him, at last, whether he said his prayers! and seemed sad when he told her that he knew no prayers to say.

Then he asked her where she lived, and she said far away by the sea. And Tom asked her about the sea; and she told him how it rolled and roared over the rocks in winter nights, and lay still in the bright