They had not, however, driven very far, when something seemed to frighten the pony and he bolted. Mrs. Phillips was thoroughly alarmed, but she did not lose her presence of mind, and did her best to check the mad gallop of the animal. All in vain, however; her efforts to restrain seemed only to infuriate him, and his headlong career was stopped only by his coming to grief against a tree. Mrs. Phillips was flung violently to the ground, where she remained for some time in a state of unconsciousness. Fortunately she was discovered by some other trippers to the famous forest before the shades of night had fallen; but when they had restored her senses, and she had again opened her eyes on the world, it was only to find that her idolised child had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed her. All the machinery of Scotland Yard was set in motion; every gipsy encampment in the neighborhood was exhaustively searched, and the whole country was scoured by private detectives, but no trace of little Marion could be found. The mother's heart was almost broken, and she became a sad and silent woman, careworn and prematurely aged. Her one absorbing thought when she lay down to rest was little Marion, and when she opened her eyes in the grey morning light, it was only to find her great grief, like a grim and ghastly skeleton, staring her in the face.

Marion Phillips had sat for a long time at the open window, plunged in sad thought, when the door opened, and an old Irishwoman, who had recently been engaged to do odd jobs about the house, entered the room with the object of effecting some alterations which she had been directed to make.

'I thought you was out, ma'am,' said Mrs. Cahill, as she entered, 'or it's not comin' in to disturb ye I'd be.'

'Oh, never mind me, Mrs. Cahill,' answered Marion Phillips: 'you can go on with your work; you won't disturb me in the least.'

There was a depth of sadness in the voice in which the words were spoken which attracted the attention of the good-natured old Irishwoman, and she cast a long and scrutinising glance at the speaker.

'I do hope that you're not in any trouble, ma'am,' said she, when her observation had concluded: 'but you do look as if there was something frettin' an' worryin' you to death; and afther all, frettin' and worryin' never yet did anywan any good or helped to mend things.'

Mrs. Cahill's remarks elicited from Marion Phillips the cause of her woe and the whole story of little Marion's disappearance.

The old Irishwoman evinced such warm sympathy and showed such intelligent interest in the case, that the desolate mother, though it cost her many a pang, related once again the history of the child's disappearance, even to its minutest details.

'I shouldn't give up hope, ma'am, if I were you,' said Mrs. Cahill, when the recital was finished. 'God is good, and His Blessed Mother. They know where everyone is, and sure maybe it's findin' your little girl you'll be wan o' these days if you'll only trust in them, an' not give up prayin'.'

'Oh! I hardly believe there is a God, and if I do pray it's more through custom than anything else,' answered Mrs. Phillips.

Mrs. Cahill listened to this speech in wide-eyed, horrified amazement. To the Irishwoman with her deep, strong, firmly-rooted faith the heritage of centuries, the legacy bequeathed to Ireland's sons and daughters by generations of saints and martyrs—this state of mind seemed incredible.

'Sure you can't help the way you're brought up, ma'am, nor believin' what people teach you, but I've known of wonderful answers given to people's prayers that had faith in God. Sure a neighbor of my own in Ireland, that couldn't go half an inch without crutches, went to Lourdes—that's the place, you know, ma'am, where the Blessed Virgin appeared to Bernadette—and didn't she come home as lively as a cricket and able to run up the hills like a goat. It's to the Blessed Virgin you ought to pray, ma'am. She knows what it is for a mother to lose her child.'

'What would be the good of my praying to her, when I don't believe that she could do anything to help me? But as you have such strong faith, perhaps you would be good enough to pray for me instead.'

'That I will, ma'am, with a heart and a half, and if your little girl is found——'

'If my little girl is found, Mrs. Cahill, I shall become a Catholic that very instant, and believe everything that your Church teaches.'

'I'll start a novena this very day, ma'am, in honor of our Blessed Lady. Let me see: to-day is June 24, so that the novena will finish on a feast of our Blessed Lady—the Feast of the Visitation, which is on July 2; and I regard that as being very much in favor of a good answer.'

Mrs. Phillips had never heard of such a thing as a novena before, and it took a good deal of explanation on the part of Mrs. Cahill to make her understand what it was. The old Irishwoman wished her to join in it, but to this she demurred, as she said she regarded it more as a Romish superstition than anything else. This almost brought the tears to Mrs. Cahill's eyes. However, she succeeded in making her promise to perform some act of charity during the novena, as such an act, Mrs. Cahill informed her, always inclines God to listen more favorably to our prayers.

Mrs. Phillips was fortunate in having secured for herself the prayers of the poor old Irishwoman, for the latter hid within her shabby exterior the soul of a saint.

Once she had been in very easy circumstances, but her husband had died of an infectious disease, and their only child quickly followed him to the grave. Then she was thrown on her own resources, and managed to earn a livelihood by doing an occasional day's charing and any other odd jobs which came in her way. But she did not repine. She accepted her heavy cross with resignation, and even in the moment when it pressed upon her the most severely her lips were able to frame that prayer so familiar to the Irish peasant in the days of hardship and persecution: 'Welcome to the Will of God.'

For a long time Mrs. Phillips puzzled her mind as to what act of charity she should perform in order to fulfil her promise to Mrs. Cahill. Finding some difficulty in solving the problem, she resolved at last to ask her humble friend as to what she should do.

Mrs. Cahill thought for a long time before replying. She knew so many people who needed help, and such a number of deserving charities to which even the smallest sum of money would be most welcome.

As she was thinking, she happened by a lucky accident (or was it an accident?) to look out into the street, and her eyes rested on that most pathetic-looking of objects, a little London waif. The shabby clothes, the hollow cheek and hungry eye, and the utter forlornness of the little figure made a strong appeal to her heart, and, turning to Mrs. Phillips, she said:

'There's a lot o' little children in the slums and back streets near where I live that's pinin' for a breath of fresh air in this hot weather. Maybe it wouldn't be beyond your means, ma'am, to give them a day in the country. 'Twould be like a sight o' heaven to most o' them, ma'am, for they've never seen a green field in all their lives.'

Mrs. Phillips was delighted with this proposal, and she gave orders to the old Irishwoman to collect as many poor children and waifs and strays as she liked, all of whom were to be given a day's outing in the country at her expense.

In the street off the Mile End road in which Mrs. Cahill lived there was a multitude of poor children, whose only playground was the pavement. The younger among them had never been beyond the limits of this street in all their lives, whilst a rare visit to Victoria Park was the only idea of a holiday which even the oldest of them possessed.

Now, in the sultry June days the atmosphere of the narrow street in which they lived was simply stifling, and many of the poor little things either kept within