

**SEVEN
YEARS' HARD**

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Seven years' hard by Richard Free

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RICHARD FREE

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BY

RICHARD FREE

AUTHOR OF "A CRY FROM THE DARKNESS"

"I spoke as I saw."



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1904

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TO MY BROTHER

Hard-handed Brother, stunted and warped with toil,
Thy stolid face, thy dull, unseeing eyes,
Thy lips too stern and shut for moans or sighs,
Thy very flesh defiled with daily toil
Fill me with shame and pity. Son of the soil,
Helpless and hopeless, spent in the scuffle of life,—
Thou, with thy little ones and the pale, patient wife,
What's left to thee but the submissive smile
That glows, like the last flash of dying day,
Kindly but coldly, rare and yet ever rarer?
"Let be!" thou criest. "Say that I pinch to pay
The weekly rent, the cupboard growing bare,
My belly emptier—why, what's the odds?"
And thus thy great calm soul is one with God's.

The author begs to acknowledge the courtesy of Messrs. Francis Day, and Hunter, for their kind permission in allowing him to quote the words of the songs marked with an asterisk in Chapter VI., and to Messrs. Charles Sheard and Co., Messrs. Feldham, Bertram and Co., the Proprietors of the *News of the World*, and Mr. Richard F. W. Maynard, for the others that are quoted.

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A WORD TO THE READER

THIS book is a human document. It professes to be no more; it claims to be no less. The persons who figure in it are living, breathing realities, not creations of pen and inkpot. The experiences recorded in it are history, not myth, and have been cast into mould piping-hot from the memory.

Being a simple record of fact, this book seeks neither to flatter nor to disparage. Therefore, parts of it may be found unpalatable; while other parts, let us hope, will be found palatable. The mixture should surprise no one. Human life is made up in that way, simply because human life is fact and not fiction. I have not written a novel, but a history.

I believe experience is given us to be used. I believe that facts have their lessons, even for the humblest. In so far as facts are faithfully recorded, they are valuable. They are valueless only when they are glossed over or misrepresented. It is certain that false inferences may be drawn from true facts; it is equally certain that the facts remain. They are "stubborn things," very