

The Victorians

Up the chimneys: Dr Barnardo

By Nigel Bryant

CHARLIE:

Me name's Charlie – one time climbing boy. And if you 'eard my story of me days up the chimneys, you'll know I ended up sleepin' rough in the fish market, wiv loads of other kids like Maddy, Jacko and Gyp. But we ain't in the fish market no more. We're all 'ere together in this new place, where they're feedin' us an' givin' us beds. An' I'll tell yer 'ow it 'appened.

Last night I took Maddy an' Jacko an' Gyp down to Covent Garden market – where they sell the fruit an' veg – cos it's August, see...

CHARLIE:

An' this time o'year there's real rich pickin's 'ere!

JACKO:

What, thievin', you mean?

CHARLIE:

No, no! The fruit's real ripe, see? Every day they chuck loads o'stuff out cos they won't be able to use it no more. I'll show yer!

CHARLIE:

An' I took 'em to the tip round the back of the stalls...

JACKO:

Oh, my life! Look at this lot!

CHARLIE:

I told yer!

MADDY:

But it's a muck-heap. It's all goin' rotten.





GYP: Don't matter. Cor! This is lush!

MADDY: I ain't sure about this – they don't look right.

JACKO: Come on, Maddy! Oi give us yer cap, Charlie-boy, an' I'll fill it full o'plums.

JACKO / GYP: Yeah! / Good one!

CHARLIE: An' that's what we did. We took a whole hoard o' fruit an' found a new place to sleep, hidden behind the sacks an' crates an' barrels in the market there. We 'ad a right royal feast, but right in the middle of it, a bloke comes near to us.

JACKO: Shhhh. It's one of the traders.

GYP: Yeah, an' a well dressed bloke wiv 'im – what's 'e doin' 'ere?

MADDY: They seen us!

BARNARDO: Hello! What have we here?

TRADER: They're wild things, sir – you wanna watch 'em!

JACKO: We ain't doin' no 'arm!

BARNARDO: And I mean you no harm, I promise you.

JACKO: Who are yer, then?

GYP: We ain't done nuffin!

BARNARDO: My name's Doctor Barnardo and –

JACKO: Don't need no doctor –





GYP: We ain't sick.

BARNARDO: Not yet.

MADDY: What d'yer mean?

BARNARDO: Have you been eating this fruit?

GYP: Yeah, it ain't stealin'!

CHARLIE: It was just bein' left to rot!

BARNARDO: There's cholera enough in those plums in your cap to kill a dozen strong men.

MADDY: I told yer it didn't look right!

TRADER: You young vermin – you've no business meddling in our rubbish!

BARNARDO: And you, sir, have no business leaving it there in poisonous piles!

TRADER: You don't want to worry 'bout them, sir – they're not like you an' me. These kids are like rats: their insides are such that nails an' bolts wouldn't hurt 'em.

BARNARDO: Be that as it may. It's not their health that concerns me –

GYP: You can't be much of a doctor then.

BARNARDO: – it's the fact that you're here on the streets. Where will you be sleeping tonight?

JACKO: None o' your business.





- BARNARDO: I make it my business to help children such as you. Have you heard of the Ragged School?
- GYP: Don't need no school. Know everythin' I need to know to stay alive.
- BARNARDO: I could teach you a good deal more if you'd let me.
- CHARLIE: Like what?
- BARNARDO: How to read and write.
- JACKO: What's the use if you ain't got the money to buy a book?
- BARNARDO: I could teach you about the wider world. What do you know of the world beyond these streets, across the sea?
- MADDY: The sea? What's the sea?
- JACKO: It's the salt water. It's where they gets fish from.
- BARNARDO: Do you know where it is? Do you know what lies beyond it? Have you heard of France?
- JACKO: No.
- BARNARDO: And do you know who made the sea, and the world, and when? Have you ever heard of God?
- GYP: Yeah, yeah, I've 'eard of 'im, but I don't know what 'e does.
- BARNARDO: He cares for each and every one of us.





- JACKO: Well I ain't seen 'im round our way!
- GYP: Maybe 'e don't like the smell!
- TRADER: You're wasting your time, sir – these children are born ignorant and stay that way.
- BARNARDO: Because no-one's given them a school. Or a home. Let me tell you about Carrots.
- JACKO: We don't need teachin' 'bout carrots, guv – we see 'em down the market every day.
- BARNARDO: Carrots was a boy like you. His name was John Somers, but he was nicknamed Carrots because of his red hair. He never knew his father, and his mother turned him out when he was seven years old. I found the boy in the early dawn, with many other starving, ragged children in shelters they'd made – just as you've done now – out of old sacks and crates. I chose him and four others to fill five beds in our Home.
- MADDY: What home?
- BARNARDO: An old stable that a friend and I turned into a school for poor children. But I soon realised a school was not enough. So we opened an all-night shelter, too, for homeless children. I promised Carrots and the other four that they'd have beds there within a week. But it wasn't soon enough for Carrots. Before the week was out he was found one morning by a market trader, lying asleep behind a sack of sugar. He shook him awake to move him on, but the little lad didn't answer. He was dead.
- JACKO: I seen a good few dead down the fish market.





BARNARDO: But there's no reason why you should end that way. Come with me and you'll be lodged and washed and fed.

MADDY: Fed? You mean you'll give us grub?

BARNARDO: And schooling.

CHARLIE: What, an' you're gonna let us all in?

BARNARDO: 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' John: Chapter 6, verse 37.

JACKO: Look, guv, I don't really get yer drift and you don't 'alf talk funny, but if you're sayin' you'll give us beds an' grub –

BARNARDO: And schooling.

JACKO: Yeah, yeah, an' schoolin', we'll take you up on it, won't we?

MADDY/GYP/CHARLIE: Yeah. / Dead right we will. / I'll come.

BARNARDO: Praise be to God.

CHARLIE: And that's the story of how Jacko, Maddy, Gyp and me ended up at the Ragged School. Who knows what'll 'appen in the future...but a bed and a full belly has to be better than sleepin' in the market...

JACKO: Right you are, sir. Can we go now?

MADDY: I ain't 'ad a proper meal since I don't know when.

GYP: And a bed...

CHARLIE: Yeah...And will you really teach me to read?

