

The Inglenook.

Ted's Strike.

BY EDWARD B. NITCHIE.

Ted's father was a large employer of labor, and one of his laborers was Ted himself. Ted was out of bed at 6.45 sharp every morning, and, shined his father's shoes before breakfast. No bootblack ever coaxed a better gloss from leather than Ted did. Usually there was but one pair of shoes, but sometimes when his father had been out the night before there were two. But one pair or two, Ted had done his work cheerfully for almost six months, and at the end of each month his father gave him a crisp dollar bill.

Then came the strike at the factory; and though it was his father who told Ted all about it. Ted did not feel as though the men were very wrong. For Mr. Martin was a man who could see two sides to any question even though he believed in only one. But the strike set Ted thinking, and it hardly ended when Mr. Martin had another strike, Ted's strike, on his hands.

"Papa," said Ted at the dinner table, "I'm going to strike. I black about forty pair of your shoes every month. At five cents a pair that ought to be two dollars. I think you ought to pay me more than just the one dollar."

Now Mr. Martin did not know, but he thought he had guessed, what Ted wanted to do with the money he earned. Still he said:

"If you strike, I'll have to hire some one else. There's Tom, you know, or your friend Billy, and any number of others. better think it over before you strike."

And think it over Ted did. In the evening, after his father had finished the paper, Ted perched himself on the arm of his Morris chair.

"Papa, what do the men in the factory do when they want to keep other men from working in their places?"

Mr. Martin smiled into the little earnest face beside him.

"That's the game, is it?" he said. "Well, I'll tell you. They form a union. All the men in the shop belong, and all agree to do just what the union tell them to do. So if most of them vote to strike, they strike. And if outsiders come, 'the walking delegate,' as he is called, or others from the union, try to persuade these outsiders not to take their work. Sometimes they succeed, sometimes they don't."

"I think I'll form a union, papa," said Ted.

Ted was serious about it. It wasn't as if he wanted the money for himself; he had his spending money besides what he earned. The next afternoon he was lying on the grass under the trees in the garden. "March, April, May, June, July, August," he muttered to himself, counting on his fingers, "that's six; and September, October, November, that's only nine dollars, and I've got to have ten. And the second of December is—"

"Hullo, Ted!" A cheery boy's voice rang out from the gate; you would never think that such a cheery voice came from a little one-legged cripple hobbling up the walk. His crutch was merely a pole with a rest for the arm, and the pole was too short at that. Under the other arm he carried a paper.

"Good morning," he said as he threw himself down beside Ted. "Sold all my papers, and got ten more and sold them, and I've only this one left, and that's for your folks." He jumped up again. "I'll be back in a jiffy; I'll just deliver it."

Billy's folks were poor, very poor, though they had seen better days when his father was alive. There was only his mother now, and a baby sister. And his mother was not well, though she managed to do a little sewing and mending each week. But Billy was the family's prop.

"I'm the family's prop, and this is my prop," confided Billy once to Ted, as he tapped his crutch. "But I wish I had a better one, or two. I could get around livelier."

"Billy," said Ted, when his friend had once more thrown himself down beside him, "I'm going to strike on shining papa's shoes. He says he'll get some one else if I do, and I want you to promise me you won't do it for him."

"Hope t' die if I will," responded Billy, with a loyalty the greater because an extra dollar a month would have meant much to him. "But tell me why."

So Ted told him, only he didn't tell him what he wanted the money for.

"And I'll bet there won't be a newsie or a bootblack in the town 'll do it for him, either, I'll see to 'em." Billy was sure of his ground, for all the newsboys and bootblacks were intensely loyal to the little cripple; and they knew Billy's loyalty to Ted began at the time Ted saved Billy's life when Billy had slipped and fallen at the depot one day in front of an incoming train.

Next Ted had to talk with his older brother, Tom. But Tom didn't want the extra money, or didn't want it badly enough to get out of bed so early every morning, and so his loyalty to the "union" was easily secured.

That evening again Ted perched himself on the arm of his father's chair, and said:

"Papa, I've made up my mind to strike. Day after to-morrow's the first of September. I'll shine your shoes untill then, but then I'll strike unless you pay me more."

"All right, my boy," said Mr. Martin; "we'll fight it out on this line if it takes all—winter. Only no violence, you know, Ted," he added, with a quizzical little twinkle in his eyes.

On the first of September for the first time in six months, Ted enjoyed the luxury of sleeping until the rising bell. But when he came downstairs it seemed as though a little dagger went into his heart. Before his father's door stood a pair of shoes freshly and brilliantly shined. He caught his breath and grit his teeth hard, but said nothing, though all day long he wondered who had done it. He knew it wasn't Tom, and he was just as equally positive it wasn't Billy. Well he'd find out.

The following morning he was out of bed at the old hour, 6.45, but early as he was, there again stood his father's shoes with a perfect shine. The morning after, he was up and dressed by half-past six; and down on the back porch he found Sam Lawson just putting the last polishing stroke on the last one of two pairs of shoes. Sam was jack-of-all trades of the town.

"Sam, it's you!" exclaimed Ted.

"It suttinly is me, Ted. Who'd yuh think it was?"

"Oh, Sam, did papa tell you?"

"Tell me? Tol' me he wanted me to shine his boots for him. That's all."

"He didn't tell you I was on a strike?"—and, say, Sam I suppose you're a 'scab.'" Ted smiled as he said that, but straightway his seriousness returned to him and under promise of great secrecy, he told Sam all.

"I'll nevah shine anothah shoe him, lad," said Sam, when Ted had finished. "I'll tell him so."

But Sam forgot to tell Mr. Martin, and of the two pairs of shoes placed outside his door that night, not a shoe in the morning had been shined. Breakfast was late, too, and Mr. Martin boarded the train for the city wearing a pair of unpolished shoes. But at breakfast he had said to Ted:

"I wish you'd see Sam Lawson to-day and ask why he didn't shine my shoes this morning."

"I've already seen him, papa," said Ted. "I was a 'walking delegate.'"

Mr. Martin hurriedly drank a swallow of water, and then coughed and coughed until his face got very red. But his eyes were shining, and if you could have seen deep down into his heart you would have known that he felt quite otherwise than displeased.

The next morning again the shoes were unshined. Mr. Martin did not even put them before his door. He had seen Billy, but Billy's reply had been instantaneous. "Sorry, Sir, but I can't do it for you. Ted tells me he's on strike." He had seen a number other of the newsboys and bootblacks around the station, but the reply of all was the same, they couldn't do it. That morning breakfast was in time, and he had ten minutes to spare at the depot.

"Shine," he said to the first bootblack he saw.

"Can't, sir" replied the little fellow hurrying off to shout his "Shine yer shoes, sir?" to the other men rapidly gathering for the other train. Five minutes Mr. Martin spent vainly trying to get a shine. Even Boston, the negro with the blue coat and brass buttons and the stand in the station, refused to serve him. Then Mr. Martin gave it up and got his shine in the city.

All ways and means were not exhausted yet, however. There was an Italian bootblack "parlor" between Mr. Martin's house and the station, and the following morning Mr. Martin stopped there. Others were ahead of him, and he had to wait his turn. And when at last his shoes were shined, he ran for the station, only to see his train disappearing down the track. A twenty-minute wait, and the trip to the city in a "local," were the straws that broke, in this case, the strike.

"Ted," said his father that night, "let's arbitrate."

"All right, papa," responded Ted gleefully; "and mamma will be the arbitrator."

Now Mrs. Martin was already Ted's ally, and Mr. Martin knew it. But he only said, "All right Ted. Tell her your case."

Ted told it; but when it was Mr. Martin's turn, he said: "Well, mamma, what's it going to be? The boy told it right, I guess."

Mrs. Martin looked very thoughtfully. "I think you'll have to compromise," she said, "Ted is to have a dollar and a half instead of a dollar, but nothing extra for extra pairs of shoes."

And Ted was so happy that when he kissed them good-night he whispered into their ears: "You are the best papa and the best mamma that ever was. When he snuggled