

The Thumb-Nail Bank.

WHAT JIMMIE DID.

A Fact in 'Wellspring'—By Anna F. Burnham.

Jimmie was dead. But that did not make any difference. Some people live so well while they do live that their sweet influence shines on long after they have passed out of sight, as does the light of stars which have faded out of the visible heavens.

A ragged lot of bootblacks and newsboys stood in an angle of the wall near the busy entrance of the rearing railway station.

'See what he gimme!' said the smallest and best dressed of the number, holding up a bootblack's 'kit' as if it had been a gold nugget.

'Jimmie give you that?' cried one or two of the others eagerly.

'Last thing fore he died. Said for me to help mother an' sis with it, 'stead of going to school this winter. Used to lend it to me, sick days when he couldn't use it. It helped lots, too, times when sis couldn't get no work and mother's eyes got bad over the 'broidery.'

'That's Jim, all over, wa'n't it?' said a taller ragamuffin. 'Many's the time he's give me a bite o' his apple; he was always fer giving other fellers a bite!'

'That's him!' said the others heartily, as they separated. 'First bite, too, fore he'd stuck his teeth into it!'

'An' a good big one, or he'd punch yer!' called back some body over his shoulder, as the touching little "memorial service" broke up, and the grimy, tattered little eulogists went their way to their several places of business.

Little Joe went off with his kit and established himself in front of a handsome hotel where a friendly policeman nodded a welcome to him, having often seen him before on some of Jimmie's 'sick days.' It was early yet for customers, and he clapped his cold hands together to keep them warm, and stamped upon the ground as if calling up the invisible genii that (in fairy tales) always waits upon all good boys and girls and their wishes.

'Shi-i-inne! shi-i-ine! shi—'

The last two or three syllables of that long word broke off short as a good-looking boot plumped down on the block made ready for it, and little Joe instantly pounced on it, like a hawk on a chicken. How he did make those brushes fly! It was the first job of the day, and Joe had an odd kind of feeling, not altogether wrong, that the first job was a fortune-teller. If he was careless and slow on the first pair of boots, he was not apt to improve much on the others offered him, and the other boys had 'all the luck.' Mother insisted that there wasn't any luck about it, but the plainest of good plain reasons, but Joe shook his head, and kept on thinking a good deal of that first job. Besides, this morning he was glad to work fast and warm up.

The young man who was having his boots polished stood looking down at him with pleasant amusement. He saw that Joe was giving his whole mind to those boots, and hadn't looked up to recognize him. By and by he spoke, and the voice was as cordial as a Christmas greeting.

'Good job, Joe!'

'Well, I'm a beauty!' was Joe's astonished remark, looking up to find that he had been working five minutes for a friend without knowing it. 'Why didn't you tell me who I was doing it for?'

'You couldn't have done it better if you had known,' responded the young man, who was Joe's Sunday-school teacher for about an hour a week in a large Sunday-school

lately planted in that end of the city. 'Besides, I hadn't seen you for so long, I didn't know but what you had forgotten how I looked!'

Joe's face was red with exercise, or something else, but his mumbled answer was too low for any one to understand much by it.

'Where have you been?' persisted his friend. 'I thought you went to school.'

'Did.'

'And you don't now, seems to me!'

'Hard times, don't you know,' said Joe at last, trying to speak as if it didn't hurt him. 'Takes a pile o' money to run things, and mother took sick a while ago. Course, I'm the only boy and I ought to. The rest's nothing but girls, anyway.'

'And you don't come near me any more!' said his teacher in a tone that won Joe to a sudden burst of confidence.

'Why, you see it's just this way! I wouldn't be staying away but you can see I don't put on no style any more. Look at my clo'es. And there ain't any o' your fellers bootblacks, you know. And—and—I thought it might make 'em kind o' want to shy off 'way from the class and from you—'

'So you thought you'd shy off from me first, and make a sure thing of it!' said the young man as Joe stopped appealingly. 'You call that treating me fair? Where'd you get this?' touching the 'kit,' which was Joe's visible means of livelihood.

'This?' said Joe, touching it too, and in a curiously reverent, lingering way, as if he loved it. 'Jim give it to me, a feller that lived in the same house 't I did. He was a—say, I guess you dropped something! This your'n?'

'Why, yes!' said the young man, taking the small, shining trinket offered him, and fastening it again on his watch guard. 'I wonder how I happened to do that? Must look out for it.'

'What is it?' asked Joe, curiously eyeing it. 'Looks like a little dime bank they was selling around the streets a while ago—shaped just like that, and a little horseshoe on it, and the word "Luck." Every ten-center you got, you put in for luck.'

'No luck about this, my boy. It's an investment.'

'Dead sure?'

'Can't fail. Pays a bigger interest than any other bank I ever put my money in. But if I put any mark on it, it wouldn't be a "lucky" horseshoe or any such heathenish thing, but a little gold cross, to remind me what I was saving my dimes for. "For Christ and the Church" is the meaning of it—see?'

'"Sunday-School Society,"' read Joe, wonderingly, as his friend held the little box down on a level with his eyes, and showed him the legend on the cover 'What does that mean?'

'I call it my "Thumb-nail Bank,"' explained the other. 'About that shape, you see, and not much bigger. It holds just ten dimes. Do you know what that means—a whole dollar—when you send the box back where it belongs, to the Sunday-School Society?'

'A dollar more in someb'dy's pocket, o' course,' said Joe, putting his cold hands in his own pockets, by way of filling them.

'It means,' said his friend in a low, thrilling voice, leaning down and looking at him with intense, far-seeing eyes that saw, not Joe, but a thousand boys just like him,—'it means that every time one of those little boxes gets filled, it says to some boy, "Here, take a year's schooling!" It gives some poor boy or girl a whole year's chance to learn about Jesus! It gives them books and papers and teachers, and all that goes to make up a chance—for children that haven't

any chance. That's what ten little silver dimes mean when you get 'em in this box!'

'And who's to put 'em in?' asked Joe, his face beginning to light up with some of the enthusiasm that glowed in his teacher's. 'Fellers like me? I'd like to give some other feller a chance! Say, I'm coming back next Sunday, style or no style!'

'Good!' said his teacher briefly. 'Who helps? Everybody is helping; some folks not half so well off as you are. But they have begun to find out what Sunday-schools can do for boys and girls, and they want to give somebody else a piece of their chance.'

'Just like Jimmie!' burst out Joe appreciatively.

'Like what?' said the young man blankly.

'Jimmie—the one that give me this here!' said Joe, pointing to his stock-in-trade. 'He's dead, Jimmie is. But he's more alive than lot o' folks ever are, I tell ye now! Won't any of us fellers ever forget the kind o' chap he was! Always fer givin' the other fellers a bite! That's what a boy said about him this very morning. And I guess the folks that fills them boxes are some like him! Say, gimme one, will yer? I know some fellers that would liko to help fill up one.'

'Do you mean it, Joe?' asked the young man doubtfully, beginning to undo the little treasure box. 'Who are they—boys that come over to the school, ever?'

'No—does that make a difference?' asked Joe disappointedly. 'Can't anybody but Sunday-schoolers put in? No matter—give it here! I'll see 't they do come! For Jimmie's sake they will, you see if they don't. Hang her round my neck, here! Thank ye. Now, if I got ten good silver dimes in her, will ye send her on? Sure? All right! That's a bargain.'

Joe's teacher was about to explain to him that the box would gladly receive donations from any quarter, and would-be givers need not be shut out because they did not happen to belong to a Sunday-school, but he was luckily saved from any such undoing. A gruff customer approached who summoned Joe in no gentle tones to 'tend to business if he had any business, and if he hadn't, he'd like to know what business he had to be there anyway. Joe fell zealously upon the offered boot, and his early morning caller disappeared in the crowd with a heart full of new thoughts and projects for 'his boys,' as he loved to call them. A worker in city slums or neglected country districts who does not come to love those whom he would rescue, will soon cease to work there. For those who do remain in the work the personal interest is absorbing. They know poor children as Jesus would have known them, by name, by sight, by touch of hand and arm.

Three days after the beginning of our story the 'opening exercises' were just drawing to a close in the big Sunday-school room where Joe's class usually gathered; the bible-class doors were going up, the last strains of 'Jesus loves me' were floating in from the primary room, and the superintendent was waiting for a chance to say, 'The classes will now attend to the study of the lesson,' when the outer door opened and a tattered, streaked, defiant-looking file of boys marched in, and advanced as far as the middle aisle, where the leader, who was the youngest and smallest, looked round doubtfully, looked up at the superintendent appealingly, and then attempted to make a bee line for the north-east corner of the room where his teacher was standing up and beckoning to him. The line was rather crooked and took him close past the superintendent's desk and over to a corner of the platform, but the boys followed as closely as if it was an every-day game of Follow-