

THE "BOYS' BRIGADE" AND BILLY'S SPEECH.

All of the boys, with one exception, who belong to the "Boys' Brigade," of Englewood, had fine uniforms, of which they were justly proud. That one exception was William Duncan, familiarly called "Billy." Of course, it was poverty that prevented Billy from having a blue suit with brass buttons.

Billy's father was a drunkard. Billy's mother was a woman of strong character. It was a mystery to many how she could keep up her courage amidst such surroundings, but she realized that her children's future depended, in a great measure, upon their home and their mother. Consequently the home was as pleasant as it was possible to make any home where a drunkard lives. When the latter was absent as he was most of the time, mother and children had happy hours together.

Billy was his mother's right hand man. If it had not been for his industry and devotion the wolf would have entered their door long ago. He found many a paying job. He had been obliged to give up school to keep the domestic wheel moving.

Times were hard, so Billy had no regular work, but still earned many an honest penny. He cut kindlings for several families, getting the wood at a cheap rate from a lumber yard in the vicinity; selling it by the barrelful. He often delivered meat for the butchers and groceries for the dealers. Sometimes he carried papers, distributing them at the doors of subscribers. So in one way and another Billy provided for the dear ones at home, mother and sister Besie and baby Carl, aged three. Sometimes the father bought a few provisions for the family, but he could not be depended on.

When the Boys' Brigade met at Harry Thorin's house to talk over the proposed celebration, Billy was present.

"We might have a parade to begin with," Harry suggested, "we could show off our new uniforms."

All the boys thought a parade would be "just the thing," and all said so except Billy. He remarked, without a particle of envy:

"I'd like to see the parade, but of course I couldn't be in it, 'cause I haven't any suit."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Billy," said Harry. "I forgot about that. I'm real sorry; I wish my suit would stretch so as you and I could both get into it," and the boy laughed good-naturedly.

So did Billy.

Before the meeting closed, Billy had to leave to "clean an office" for a young lawyer. No sooner had he gone than Harry took the floor.

"There isn't a better or brighter boy in Englewood than Billy Duncan," he said, "and we must have him in our parade."

"How he'd look in his old clothes," exclaimed one boy.

"Besides, he wouldn't march," said another, "he'd think he'd spoil the looks of the procession, and he would, too."

"Not if he had on a new military suit." Harry spoke as if Billy already had one; "and that's what he must have."

"How's he going to get it?" asked Sam Weller.

"Let's give up buying all that trash we talked about, and have an entertainment. I'll get father to let us have the hall rent free. We can have speeches and music and tableaux."

"What's that got to do with Billy's suit?" called out one of the boys.

"Well," continued Harry, "I think I can get Mr. Lake to let us have a suit for Billy if we promise to pay for it. And we can charge an admission to our entertainment, you know; we can earn something that way."

A week passed by; the eventful day had come. The Boys' Brigade was in great excitement all day long, and when Mr. Lake's son, Jim, who belonged to the new band of Englewood said "the band would play for them without pay," it was difficult to keep their enthusiasm within bounds. In fact, a good many of them stood on their heads in their joy.

At seven o'clock in the evening the Boys' Brigade, bearing lighted torches, and headed by the new band, paraded through the streets of Englewood and on to "Thorn Hall," which they entered. Billy, clad in a beautiful new military suit, was in the parade. His fine blue eyes were glowing with delight, for he had never felt so proud and happy before.

At half-past seven the hall was filled. The families of the members of the "Boys' Brigade" and the "New Band" had free tickets, all the others paid. Billy Duncan's folks were all there, even the "drunkard" was seen, although Billy had not at first intended to invite his father. It had come about in this way: His father was sober that day, and when not under the influence of drink he was always kind.