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NAN THE NEWSBOY.

BY W. H. BISHOP.

Nan, the Newsboy, is among the latest of the odd characters which spring into fame from time to time out of the varied life of the great city of New York. A year ago he formed a little band, consisting of himself and two others, to patrol the East River docks at night and rescue persons from drowning.

Some charitable persons heard of the boys, gave them a floating station to live in, boats, neat blue uniforms, and a small weekly salary to devote their whole time to the work.

Nan's real name is William J. O'Neil. He is a thorough street Arab in his manners, and uses the dialect common among ragged newsboys and boot-blacks.

The regulations by which the association should be governed, according to his idea, are few and simple. As jotted down with other matters in his rough log-book, they are:

1. Members shall do whatever the president orders them.
2. No one shall be a member who drinks or gets drunk.
3. Any members not down in Dover dock, and miss one night except in sickness, shall be fined fifty cents by order of the President.
4. No cursing allowed.

Spelling is not Nan's strong point, and I have taken the liberty to arrange this according to the usual custom. Nor does he keep records in a scientific manner. Case four, in his list of rescued, sets down only "A Jew boy." Case five is "A red-headed boy who fell in the water, but could not find his name."

The first meeting of the association took place one pleasant day in June, 1878.

"We was a-sittin' on Dover dock," Nan says, "tellin' stories. We got talkin' about how a body was took out 'most every day, and some said two hundred was took out in a year. We'd heered about life-savin' on the Jersey coast, too. So I says: 'Say we makes a 'society of it, boys, for to go along the docks 'pickin' 'em up regular.' 'All right,' they says, and they nomernates me for pre-

serdent. We thought we might as well be doin' that as loafin' on corners."

Might as well be brave and humane fellows, that is, as idle and dangerous loungers! Yes, indeed they might, and this modest way of putting it is infinitely to Nan's credit.

There are three of them. Nan has a rosy complexion and a serious manner. He has sold papers almost ever since he can remember. Edward Kelly is paler and slighter, and has quite a decided air of dignity. Gilbert Long is sun-browned, and has a merry twinkle in his eye. He looks as if likely to be the most recklessly persistent of the lot in any dangerous

boat, and a life-saving raft of the catamaran pattern.

Inside, the station has three bunks, some lockers to hold miscellaneous articles, a small stove in a corner, and a small case of books contributed by the Seaman's Friend Society. These are largely accounts of courage and ingenuity in danger likely to be appreciated by boys in their circumstances. When they unbend after duty is over, Nan plays the banjo and what he calls the "cordeen," and there is quite a social time.

But it is drawing on toward seven o'clock, and we are to make the rounds to-night. The volunteers begin to drop

the distinction of having made a speciality of frustrating suicides, and Cody, from the line of business he is in, is spoken of as pretty "educated."

The apparatus taken along consists of boat hooks, life-lines, an iron ladder, folding up neat'y like a camp-stool, and lanterns. The life-line is a common cord, about twenty-five feet long, with a small billet of wood attached to the end to be thrown to the person in the water.

We do not have the luck to see a genuine case to-night. Up we go along the strange river front to the foot of Montgomery street, then down to the Battery, perhaps two miles in a straight line. How imposingly the vast black hulls stand up against the sky! The water clucks and chuckles to itself, as if with a secret cruel humor, under the planks on which we walk. Whoever is drifted by the tide in under there, where the rays of the dark lantern will not penetrate, is lost indeed.

The vicinity of the ferries is where there are the most bustling crowds, the water's edge is the most easily reached, and the principal liability accidents exists. At Pier Two, near the South Ferry, where their station was then moored, Kelly and Long, at half-past two of a winter's morning, heard a cry. They ran out, explored, but could see nothing. Coming back, two hands were discerned projecting despairingly out of the ice-cakes. With a boat and the aid of their Newfoundland dog, Rover, they drew the man out. They found him to be a 'longshoreman, who had walked over the edge while intoxicated.

This is a very common story. The larger part of the rescued, or those assisted before they have a chance to come to harm,—for the boys make this a praiseworthy part of their occupation, too,—are of a similar sort. They are sailors

searching in a dazed way for their ships, persons of low condition attempting to walk straight across the open Coenties Slip, or to the lights of Brooklyn, forgetful of the water, or others lain down to sleep on the string pieces of the piers.

The suicides are generally intoxicated, too. Those who are not go out upon the ferry boats, perhaps to make surer work of it. It is a strange experience to hear one of these boys tell how he found a middle-aged woman on the edge of the pier, "prayin' and lookin' up at the sky;" how she "made a bounce" and he "grabbed" her, and how he advised her, when she groaned that she had been rob-



NAN SAVES THREE BOYS FROM DROWNING.

straits. The three boys all were born in Cherry street. Long has been a tin-smith's apprentice, and Kelly a leather-cutter.

They have with them also five unpaid volunteers who serve at night. The force is divided into three patrols.

Their house is a little box of a place, painted bright blue, moored under the shade of the great Brooklyn bridge, and close to both the Fulton and Roosevelt street ferries. The front door of the establishment, as it might be called, is through a hole in a dilapidated fence; then down a ladder, and perhaps across a canal boat or two to where it lies wedged in the crowded basin. They have a row-

in. They are shy at first at finding strangers present, but soon begin to thaw out and deliver their views freely. There is Dick Harrington, who works at sail-making; Peter Hayes, a tinker; "Bony" Hayes,—Nan thinks this stands for Bonoparte or Bonanza, he is not sure which—a porter; Thomas Cody, a printer; and Joseph Findlay, whose business is to count papers in a newspaper office.

Harrington is not beyond a boyish blush; Peter Hayes is inclined to be a little boastful; "Bony" Hayes is something of a philosopher, and claims to have seen a good deal of life while fishing for eels off the docks; Findlay enjoys