

CHAPTER I

A PAIR OF PA—TROUSERS

EVERYBODY knows Fourteenth Street. It has its character. All day long on the south side a stream of shoppers passes to and fro before the stores philanthropically engaged from one year's end to another in selling out below cost. The pavement vendors add variety to the scene. Toy automobiles dart among the feet of the walkers and fall over with an expiring whir. Small boys in blue tin stagger from foot to foot swinging amazing weights—of celluloid. In little backwaters out of the current on the squared circle of a handkerchief those ancient cockfights are still taking place manipulated from the pocket of the showman by a black thread, which deceives nobody.

Then there are the faces in soft red rubber which lend themselves to such hideous distortions. For thirty years they have made mouths on Fourteenth Street without anybody having been seen to buy. Dealers in sweet lavender, chamois skin and china cement are other peculiarly Fourteenth Street institutions. The clink of the mended china as it is swung on its paving-stone pendulum is one of the leading motives of the tone poem.

On the other hand, the north pavement has always been quiet. You cross to this side if you are in a hurry to get to the bank before it closes. Here little girls mind baby carriages, while their mammas hunt bargains across the street.

Real estate agents ascribe the backwardness of this side to the splendid, decayed mansion which still proudly holds the fort against trade, though its front stoop has been