

"Shine your boots, sir?"

And in a voice steadier than on the day before. The little bootblack was gaining confidence in his new calling.

The man stopped, placed his boot on the foot-rest, and the boy set his brushes to work in the liveliest way.

"Where do you live, my little man?"

The boy brushed on, seeming not to have heard. As he finished one boot, and was about commencing the other, the man said, changing the form of his question:

"Where is your home?"

"Haven't got any." As the boy made this answer, he looked up into the man's face for an instant, and then let his eyes fall upon his work. What large, soft, beautiful eyes they were!

"No home?"

"No, sir."

"Where do you sleep?"

"Most anywhere that I can creep in," replied the boy, as he brushed away with all his might. Then as he rose up he said, with a business air:

"That's a good shine, sir!"

"First-rate," answered the man, whose interest in the boy was increasing. "Can't be beaten. And now, what is the charge?"

"Ten cents, sir."

The ten cents were paid. "Sleep 'most anywhere you can creep in?" said the man, as he stood looking at the boy's face, so strangely unlike the faces of those with whom his lot had been cast. "What do you mean by that?"

"Well, sir, it is so. Sometimes I get a bed in a cellar, and sometimes in a garret, just as it happens."

"Do you pay for it?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. They won't let you sleep for nothing."

"How much do you pay for a bed?"

"Sixpence or a shilling, 'cording to where it is."

"Why don't you stay in one place?" asked the man. "Why do you go from cellar to garret, as you say, just as it happens?"

"'Cause, sir, they get drunk, and swear and fight so 'most everywhere I go in, that I don't care to go again; and so I keep moving round. Shine your boots, sir?"

And, seeing a customer, off the boy ran, for he had his living to earn, and couldn't stop to talk when there was business to do.

The man walked away more than ever interested in this brave little fellow fighting at so tender an age the battle of life,—a child Bayard, in the midst of enemies, yet "without fear and without reproach."

A few hours later in the day,—it was midsummer, and the air hot and sultry,—as this man was passing the corner of a street where an apple-woman had her stand, he witnessed a scene that we will describe.

The apple-woman had fallen asleep. Two boys,—a newsboy and the little bootblack just mentioned,—were at the stand. The newsboy, who was larger and stouter than the bootblack, seeing a good chance to get apples without paying for them, was just seizing two or three of the largest, when the little bootblack pushed bravely in, and the man heard him say:

"That's stealing, and it can't be done!"

The newsboy grew red with anger, as he turned fiercely upon the little fellow, raising his fist to strike him; but his well-aimed blow did not reach the soft, yet bravely indignant face, for an arm stronger than his caught the descending fist, and held it for an instant with a firm grasp. In the next moment the scared newsboy had broken away, and was scampering down the street as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Honest and brave! That was well done, my little fellow!" exclaimed the man, turning to the young bootblack. "And now," he added, "you must come to my store. We'll find some better way for you."

"Where is it, sir?" asked the boy.

"Not far away. Come," said the man, as he moved on; and the boy followed him. They walked for a distance of two or three blocks, and entered a store, the man moving along through bales and boxes until he reached a counting-room at the rear end. Laying off his hat, he took a chair, and turned to the lad, who now stood before him with a curious, wondering face,—too heavy for so small a child,—his foot-rest, containing brushes and blacking, slung across his shoulders.

"Take that thing off, and set it out in the store, or throw it into the street, I don't care which," said the man, pointing to the dirty box.

The lad took it off, and set it outside of the office door, then came back, and stood gazing at the man earnestly.

"What is your name?"

"Jimmy Lyon, sir," answered the boy.

"Is your father living?"

"No, sir."

"Your mother?" The man's tones were a little softer as he said "Mother."

"She's dead." He saw the child's face change,—he felt the tender sorrow that crept into his voice.

"How long has she been dead?"