

BOYS AND GIRLS

Against Odds.

(By Frank H. Sweet, in 'Wellspring.')

'Clams and mussels! Clams and mussels!'

The cry began at the upper end of the village, and was repeated at frequent intervals until the two boys found themselves among the saloons and rickety tenements of the lower part of the town. By this time their stock was nearly exhausted. A few more cries, and a few more visits to kitchen doors, and their pails were emptied. Then they looked at each other with beaming faces

'Splendid luck!' whispered the one with the large wooden buckets; and the little fellow who carried the quart measure and a tin pail nodded and laughed gleefully.

The woman who had bought the last pint of clams watched them compassionately, as they descended the crooked flight of steps which led to her upstairs tenement.

'It's a shame,' she muttered, 'a burnin' shame that them two young uns is 'lowed to go so! Old Wilson ought to be shot up. The idee!'

Whatever the 'idee' might be, it was emphasized by the violent slamming of her door.

When the boys reached the sidewalk, they looked at each other questioningly.

'Where you goin', now?' asked the little fellow; 'to the store?'

'N—no; s'pose we go down behind the bushes, next the river, an' count our money. Maybe there'll be enough to buy her some shoes.'

From the doorway of a saloon opposite, a slouching figure was watching them, curiously. But in their eagerness the boys failed to notice him. As they turned down a narrow lane which led to the river, the figure lurched from the door and staggered after them.

Reaching the bushes, the boys looked about carefully to see if anyone were in sight; then the one with the wooden buckets emptied his pockets into the brimless straw hat which the little fellow held for him.

'A dollar an' fifty-three cents,' he said, slowly, as the last coin tinkled upon the heap. 'I don't suppose that'll be enough to buy shoes an' stockin's both.'

'Shoes cost an awful sight,' acquiesced the little fellow; 'but maybe we can find some cheap ones.'

'We've got to git somethin',' said his brother, decidedly. 'It's gittin' cold, and ma's beginnin' to feel her rheumatiz. She's been barefoot all summer; but she can't go that way in the winter, 'cause she ain't well. Maybe we can find some kind of slipper shoes that don't cost much.'

'How s'prised she'll be!' cried the little fellow, gleefully. 'Shoes an' stockin's both. She didn't have no stockin's at all last winter—nothin' but shoes.' Then a wistful expression crept into the pinched little face. 'Say, Tom, don't you wish you an' me could have shoes?'

The sound of unsteady footsteps coming down the lane caused them to thrust the money quickly into their pockets.

'Hullo! Tom—Jim, where be ye?' called an angry voice. 'Come out an' show yourselves! It ain't no time for foolin'.'

The boys stepped reluctantly from the bushes.

'Now hand over that money—quick!' as Tom moved back almost imperceptibly. 'I know ye've got it, for I seen the old woman pay ye. Come hand it over!'

'But, pa,' expostulated Tom, eagerly, 'we're goin' to git ma some shoes and stockin's. She's beginnin' to feel her rheumatiz.'

The drunken man's face became livid. 'D'ye hear what I said?' he demanded, fiercely. 'Fork that money over, or I'll—I'll—you know me!'

Tom slowly drew a handful of small coins from his pocket and placed them in the unsteady hand.

'I wish you'd let me keep part of 'em,' he

But the little fellow buried his face in the grass and continued to sob bitterly. The man gazed at him moodily for a few moments, and then turned away and went staggering up the lane. Tom watched the reeling figure until it disappeared round the corner.

'Come, Jimmy,' he said, at last; 'you may's well git up. 'Tain't no use frettin'. We might have knowed how 'twould come out. Things always end this way with us.'



A DOLLAR AND FIFTY-THREE CENTS, HE SAID, SLOWLY.

said, wistfully. 'It's gittin' awful cold for folks to go barefoot.'

'Is this all ye've got?'

The boy was silent.

'Is—this—all—ye've got?' The voice rose into an angry snarl.

'Jim has the rest.'

'Give it to me!' fiercely.

Jim gave him the money, and as he saw the coins disappear in his father's pocket, he threw himself upon the ground with a sharp cry.

The man spurned him contemptuously with his foot. 'Git up, ye baby,' he snarled, 'an' be thankful I let ye off so easy.'

Jim rose slowly to his feet and began to dry his eyes with his ragged jacket.

'If we'd kept some of the money hid an' not told him,' he ventured, doubtfully, 'maybe we'd 'a' saved it.'

Tom turned on him, sharply. 'If we'd done that we'd 'a' had to lie about it,' he said, sharply; 'an' you know ma wouldn't like that. Come, let's be goin'.'

His face had grown hard, and there was a defiant look in his eyes.

'We'll go up the river past the factories,' he said, 'an' then cut through the fields. I don't care to go back by the rum shops.'

Jim nodded gloomily and picked up the