

### "LET'S GO!" ON THE BOWERY.

(By Ariel Gross).

"Houston street!" shouts the conductor of a New York elevated train. You jump to your feet suddenly realizing that you must get off, for you are on the way to play the piano for a Community sing. It is seventhirty, on a hot evening in August waydown on the Bowery. You fumble for your directions, but judging from the sight in the streets below these will not be necessary, for undoubtedly it is toward that noisy mob you are expected to go. In the distance you see Mr. Robert E. Lawrence, director in chief of Community singing, conducting the street play, and you move along the road slowly picking your way in and out among groups of little dirty children, until you think you are near enough to be heard.

"Mr. Lawrence!" He does not hear you. What is the matter with your voice? It is usually loud enough. You look up and down the street at the crowds of children whom play instructors have formed in different circles; the babies in tiny ones, likewise the others according to their size. Sometimes an older girl cannot be separated from her small charge and stands at the side wistfully watching. The teacher soon spies her and reaches for the baby so that wistful Jane can be center "It" in "Farmer in the Dell."

Light is fast leaving the long tunnel of houses bridged with lines of washing that flaps back and forth like the banners of a Fourth of July celebration. Feather ticks, rolls of bedding and occasionally a length of red petticoat fill the windows, airing it seems amid the grime and odors of the settlement. The more indolent residents, who would rather be entertained than participate in the evening's program, are craning their necks through every conceivable opening.

This is your gallery audience and there on the sidewalk is the piano, harsh in tone as the voices around you. To the right the director's stand, a kitchen table, rests uneasily on the rough pavement, while a white sheet stretched along the settlement house front waist for moving pictures. Thus the stage is set.

You again find Mr. Lawrence and firmly pronounce "How do you do," with the determination to let him know you have arrived. "You here. That's fine!" and after his smile you feel better already. What an idea! You'll smile too; that might help! You decide to assist with the games.

"Do you little girls want to play?" you ask of a pale and starved looking group of children. They hang their heads. You know they are not shy because you have noticed particularly their aggressiveness. It can't be possible they are politely turning you down? That's just it. They do not like you. What is the matter with you? You are discouraged for the children do not re-

spond. They are dirty, the boys make fun of you, pull your hat off, throw stones at you. You don't like the work and that night you go home a much disgusted person.

But those faces! They haunt you. You find yourself returning, irresistibly drawn back. You try it again. This time some little group of girls takes pity on you—those little girls, far older than their years, understand it. Some little hand creeps into yours and some little face looks up asking for love, some of your kind of love that comes from a world outside of their street of which they know nothing but can only imagine! If we could but know what fairy pictures dance around us in their imagination! Those lonely eyes and that little perform the miracle. A feeling of companionship grips your heart—now you know their language.

You wonder if a man has the same problem—to reach the boys! If he brings a rope for "tug of war," a football or slides for moving pictures, he feels lucky if the mob do not kick his ball in the river, or run away with his slides. In fact he must divine their intention before the football gets wet; all this while he prevents the less clever ones from breaking up circles of girls in "drop the handkerchief."

"How can he understand them so well?" you ask yourself. Yet after a few visits, marred by much difficulty in keeping time with the conductor and controlling the temper of the crowd, the way is clear.

Now that you understand caste in the slums, you forget the banner hung street and feel more in the games than violent exercise of mind and limb, you call with a new strange confidence, some evening, "Come on girls, let's play!" They tumble over you, grab your hands, your sash, pull your dress, smother you with hugs and fight each other to get to you. Why is it? Are you pretty? No! That isn't it, has nothing to do with it. They like you, yes, love you, because you love them; love the work, look at them as if they were individuals, sympathizing with all of their peculiarities. When they want Mary to play in their crowd, instead of scolding them you find some plausible reason why Mary should play with them. Thus you add Mary to your list of friends and Mary's influence. This is real diplomacy.

After it becomes dark enough to make visible the words of the song, Mr. Lawrence and the play leaders come in from the street. This is the signal for the sing to commence.

"Get away from the piano!" you say. This you repeat many times during the evening. They crowd around you so that you cannot breathe. In fact they almost sit on your shoulder. This won't do. You cannot see the directions of the song leader. When your eyes are looking at the right they are thumping the