

What Was It?

BY FREDRY DAYNE.

Guess what he had in his pocket, Marbles and tops and sundry toys Such as always belong to boys, A bitter apple, a leather ball— No at all.

What did he have in his pocket? A little pipe and a rusty screw, A brass watch key, broken in two, A fishhook in a tangle of string!— No such thing.

What did he have in his pocket? Gingerbread crumbs, a whistle he made, Buttons, a knife with a broken blade, A nail or two and a rubber gun!— Neither one.

What did he have in his pocket? Before he knew it aly creep Under the treasure carefully kept, And away they fly like quicky-toes— 'Twas a hole!

While I should be the last to reproach those witty and forcible expressions which boys have a genius for coming, and which, as the professor remarked, are of genuine value, I cannot but think that there is a great deal of slang which is both vulgar and meaningless and which it is a great pity for any boy to make use of.

Many people, if they should see the words they use written as they speak them, would be shocked indeed, and it is only because we are more used to hearing incorrect English spoken than we are to seeing it written, that we do not notice our mistakes. It is only after hearing it spoken by a master that we realize what a noble and beautiful tongue our English is. It is generally conceded that there is no language which is at once so copious, so flexible, and so suited for the expression of ideas; and yet there are many people whose mother tongue it is, and who speak it all their days, who never realize its worth and who go through life poverty-stricken for want of words with which to express their thoughts, their feelings, and their desires.

less on Mackin' boots 'cept when a cut-mer won's pay or beats me down to five cents instead of ten. I make about fifty cents a day, 'cept when it rains. A box o' blackin' lasts a hull week, and this ere kit only cost thirty cents. I has a hard time though, mister. The big boys sets on me 'cause I'm humped and can't help myself. So I goes off by myself. Where do I live? At the Newboys' Home. I'm just a goin' there. Guess I'll have ter hurry, so we have to be in by nine o'clock. Oh, we lives high there. Got a bed and breakfast for ten cents and a dinner for ten cents, too. We boys that goes to St. James' Sunday-school gets a big dinner on Sunday—oh, we gets frid taters and beef and cabbage and lots of good things. When I don't make much I goes without any dinner. Save money! I put \$5 in the Savings Bank last month, and just bought a suit of Sunday clothes with it. I was in the Sick Children's Hospital for a year, but they said they couldn't do anything more for me. You remember those little tin soldiers I had last Christmas when you were at the hospital. Well, I gave 'em away to another little feller when I left. But my! ain't them nurses nice to a chap? Guess I must go now, or I'll be too late to get in. Good night, sir!" and the little wadd disappeared towards the street-car stables. Sick, crippled, abused by his mates, exposed to all kinds of weather in all kinds of unsuitable clothing, yet making a living and saving money at fifteen! Seems to me there's a lesson to learn from the little humped-backed boot-black merchant.—Advance.

ATONING FOR SIN IN CHINA.

We have heard of a Chinaman who went to a medical missionary at a hospital at Shanghai, and begged to have his finger cut off. There was nothing whatever the matter with it, so he was asked what he meant. He replied: "I must lose this finger. If I burn it off with a candle, it will be far more painful than if you cut it off skillfully with your knife." "But why do you want it cut off?" "Oh, I have been a great sinner, and I must atone for my sins in this way."

He explained that, along with a foreigner at Ningpo, in making a road he had removed a grave—an awful desecration in Chinese eyes. He had been troubled ever since by the sense of his sin and the fear punishment. He said the foreigner had been punished severely; for, some time after, he was riding over a small bridge which gave way, so that he and his horse were pitched below, and he was killed. As for himself, trouble had followed him ever since; and he was now old, and dreaded worse evil after death. He was anxious to become a Buddhist priest, but his work of his sin by gaining merit; but this was a necessary condition—that he must first part with his finger.

Another Chinaman who was in trouble because of his sin, went to a missionary with a stick, and asked the missionary to take the stick and beat him, believing that if this were done he would be relieved of the burden of sin.

Both of these men were told of a Saviour who could take away sin, and we hope they found peace in believing in Jesus.

THE LIFE OF A TORONTO STREET ARAB.

TALK OF A SHOE-POLISHING MERCHANT.

HANDICAPPED at fifteen with an injured spine, a humped back and an abcess. Father, mother, sisters and brothers dead! Not a friend in the world, but many a youthful persecutor. I met him late one night when walking hurriedly along Front Street, and thought I was alone until a shrill, childish voice drew my attention to the little overbent figure trudging eastward with an old fiddle protruding from beneath an arm and a boot-black's kit slung over the other shoulder.

"Black yer boots, sur!" My name? Higgin. Aleck Higgin. Been a workin' the wharfs to-day. Hard work? Yo' bet it is, 'cause my back hurts mo when I gets tired, and I've got a sore on my side too. No, I hain't got no father or mother. They both died in Muskoka, where we used ter live. Yes, I've got a broken back. Tumbled off some steps when I was a little feller about ten years ago. I came to Toronto three or four years ago and made some money by singing in the saloons. Can I fiddle? Yes, sir, and I sings too. Like to hear mo sing "The British Cavalier"? I used to sell papers too, but a feller gets stuck on 'em sometimes and loses money, but a chap can't

Everybody started for Silver Creek, but when they reached it, there it lay, a beautiful sheet of silver, its thin film of ice unbroken. Silver was certainly not drowned, but where was he? Seeing a log cabin among the trees, Mrs. Benson went to it, thinking perhaps some one might have seen her missing boy. But as she drew near, she heard his voice reading; and, peeping in, there sat Ernest, with a Bible on his knee, reading to an old coloured woman; and after every verso he would stop to explain its meaning. So intent was the child upon his "Father's business," that he had actually forgotten his dinner.

My Kingdom

BY LOUISA M. ALCOCK.

A little kingdom I possess, Where thoughts and feelings dwell, And every day the task I find Of governing it well. For passion tempts and troubles me, A wayward will misleads, And selfishness its shadow casts On all my words and deeds.

How can I learn to rule myself, To be the child I should— Honest and brave, and never true Of trying to be good? How can I keep a sunny soul, To shine along life's way? How can I tune my little heart To sweetly sing all day?

Dear Father, help me with the love That casteth out my fear; Teach me to lean on thee, and feel That thou art very near: That no temptation be unseen, No childish grief too small, Since thou, with patience infinite, Dost soothe and comfort all.

ERNEST.

BY M. JEANIE MALLARY.

Ten years of little Ernest Benson's life had been years of suffering. He knew nothing of the joys of playful, healthy childhood, as his chief pleasure was derived from books, and his mind was fast outgrowing his body. Late one summer, he was seized with pneumonia, and for a time there was a terrible fight for life, but at length it ended, and he began slowly to grow better. Then the physician said he must spend the fall and winter South. And Major Benson went at once to a pleasant Southern village and engaged board for his wife, two children, and servant. Determined to leave nothing undone that would promote their comfort and hasten little Ernest's recovery, immediately upon his return home he sent the carriage, horses, and their trusty driver, Williams, for their use during their stay in the South. New life seemed to be infused into the sick child as soon as he began to drink in the invigorating air of the glorious Indian summer, and a rosy hue began to creep into his cheeks. It was his delight to roam over the green fields and gather buds, wild flowers, and fill his bag with nuts, under the leafy trees. His mother gave him full liberty, and no child ever enjoyed it more. Ernest kept up these excursions until Christmas, but when the new year began, a cold wave swept over the country, and even the sunny South was locked in its icy embrace.

"Silver Creek is frozen over" was the startling announcement one morning at the breakfast table.

Now the one great desire of Ernest's heart had always been to learn to skate, and when his mother told him he could pack a box of his toys, to be put in the bottom of his trunk, what did he do but slip in a pair of his father's old skates, that had been lying in the garret for long years. Now that he was strong and rosy, now that Silver Creek was frozen over, without a word to any one, he gathered up the old skates and ran for the frozen water. When moon dinner hour arrived he was not to be found, and this was strange, for in these days of returning health, Ernest was always eager for his dinner. Mrs. Benson sent the driver out to call him, but he returned with the skates in his hand, saying, "I found these, Mrs. Benson, by the side of Silver Creek. Have you ever seen them before?"

"Seen them?" Hadn't she seen them hundreds of times in her home garret? Almost fainting from fear, she called out: "Oh, run, run! It may not be too late!"

I do not ask for any crown But that which all may win, Nor try to conquer any world Except the one within. Be thou my guide until I find, Led by a tender hand, Thy happy kingdom in myself And dare to take command.

SCHOOL-BOY HEROISM.

Two boys were in a school-room alone together, when some fireworks, contrary to the master's prohibition, exploded. The one boy denied it; the other, Bennie Christie, would neither admit nor deny it, and was severely flogged for his obstinacy. When the boys got alone again, "Why didn't you deny it?" asked the delinquent. "Because there were only we two, and one of us must have told a falsehood," said Bennie.

"Then why did you not say that I did it?" "Because you said you didn't, and I would share the falsehood." The boy's heart melted; Bennie's moral gallantry subdued him.

When the school resumed, the young rogue marched up to the master's desk, and said, "Please, sir, I can't bear to be a liar—I let off the squibs," and burst into tears.

The master's eyes glistened on the self-accuser, and the unmerited punishment he had inflicted on his school-mate smote his conscience. Before the whole school, hand in hand with the culprit, as if the two were grieved in the confession, the master walked down to where young Christie sat, and said aloud:

"Bennie, Bennie, lad, he and I both beg your pardon—we are both to blame." The school was hushed and still, as older scholars are apt to be when something true and noble is being done—so still, they might have heard Bennie's big boy tears drop proudly on his book as he sat enjoying the moral triumph which subdued himself, as well as filled all the rest; and then, for want of something else to say, he gently cried:

"Master, forgive me!" The glorious shout of the scholars filled the old man's eyes with something behind his spectacles which made him wipe them before he resumed the chair.

Pleasant Hours:

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

Rev. W. H. WITHROW, D.D., Editor.

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ON PLAIN ENGLISH.

Nor very long since one of my boy friends dropped in, as he is apt to do in vacation, to spend an hour or so with me. I have known him ever since he was a little fellow, but since he has been away at school I have not seen so much of him. On the afternoon of which I speak he began to talk to me about his school life, and I should have been very glad to listen if I had been able to understand him; but two years of school, while it may have improved his Latin and Greek, seemed to have quite bereft him of the power of using plain English. His father and mother are people of cultivation and refinement, and during his childhood he had been used to hearing the English language spoken with great purity, but his conversation on this occasion was so corrupted with slang that I was obliged to interrupt him frequently to ask him what certain expressions meant, and I noticed that he had some difficulty in telling me. The only synonyms which occurred to his mind were other slang words or phrases which were quite as un-intelligible to me as the first. He seemed rather embarrassed by his difficulties and said he "never could talk, anyhow, unless he was with a lot of fellows. He didn't know how to talk to other people."

When a lad "enriches" his mother tongue to such an extent that middle-aged people cannot understand him, when he uses slang without knowing it and makes slang words and phrases the chief part of his vocabulary, he makes a mistake, for he defiles the wells of pure English from which he might draw to suit his needs, and which are a rich inheritance to him from the great storehouse of the past; and