

THE EMANCIPATION OF WILLIAM SNECK.

By J. S. O'Higgins.

Old Sneck was a railway clerk in the employ of the W. & R., attached to that road from his boyhood. His stewardship had been an eventful one; from an office boy he had worked his way steadily upwards to the post of General Freight Agent, but on account of various changes of management, and of his own advancing age, had been forced down again, in long spasmodic lapses, to the position of an abstract clerk in the audit department of the New York offices.

In his earlier years he had always been looked upon as a proud and avaricious man. He had a large salary then, but now his pay was very meagre and his miserly deeds were in keeping with it. He had never married, but lived all alone in the very top of a rickety old tenement house, paying an ancient individual who prowled around the premises some trifle to tidy his two rooms, but doing all the other domestic work himself. He had not bought a new suit of clothes nor a new hat in twenty years. In fact his life had been that of the simplest of simple old misers, and people were right when they argued that he was very wealthy, for he had saved money all his life, and it was carefully deposited, not in the traditional iron box, but under his own name in several up town banks.

Sneck was not miserable only because he didn't know what it was to be happy. He was not well

liked by the clerks with whom he had worked shoulder to shoulder for four years or more. He always held aloof from them, rarely answering their salutes or questions, and when he did condescend to do so it was for the most part briefly and with a superior air which evoked from most of his fellow slaves a humorous regard, tinged with sympathy.

On Christmas eve this William Sneck was seated on a very high stool at a very high and very black desk in a row with ten other clerks, writing with nervous hand in a large book, consulting from time to time the huge bundle of way-bills before him. His sharp, beardless face, furrowed deep with age, displayed no inward feeling. His snow white hair, brushed back from a high forehead, tumbled in a silky bunch on his shoulders. His frock coat, shiny from much wear and brushing, was buttoned closely about his tall, bent, and thin figure, while his trousers, seeming to disdain the contaminating association of his rough boots, held aloof fully three inches.

Sneck was generally the last to leave the office and this day was no exception, for it was quite half-past six when he donned his wondrously tall and wonderfully shaped old top hat, and gave the final brush to his clothes. The night was particularly cold, and Sneck's face became a little paler and his teeth chattered together, when the