

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SCAVENGER BOY.

By J. D. SYMON.

AMONG all the active little officials who enliven the London streets, the most mercurial is surely the "Street Orderly-Boy." The thickest traffic has no terrors for him: he threads it as if it were a needle, diving, ducking, scrambling, gliding, and all the time plying his calling and making, as his name implies, the streets orderly. The news-boy's activity is proverbial, so is his voice, but for nimbleness the street orderly-boy fairly eclipses him, and his voice is never heard. He takes, too, his life in his hand in a way that the news-boy is not called upon to do.

Temple Bar, though no longer visible, is still a great dividing line, and among other separations, it separates two distinct classes of street orderly-boy. East and west there is a different uniform and a different type of boy. Westward they seem less active, and if you come to talk to them you will find them heavier in wit. No doubt this is due to their weapons and method of work. For westward they are encumbered with a long, heavy shovel; eastward they use a short hand-brush and

scoop, which necessitate such agility and readiness if the work is to be properly done.*

The Strand boy is no sluggard, but for my part, I confess that my liking is all for his brother of the City. His short brush and scoop have made him the creature he

is. Watch him as he forms himself, as it were, into a quadruped, on all fours, pushing his scoop, plying his brush, and all the time getting his locomotive power from his twinkling legs; mark, too, how alive he is to every eddy and swirl and current of the huge river of traffic which is his element, and you must



AN IDLE MOMENT.

perforce confess that here is a very remarkable and very useful member of the community.

The City boy begins work at eight o'clock in the morning. You will know him not only by his tools, but by his cap with its brass badge and number. His western colleague's headgear is more like the fireman's, but both wear the little white fatigue-jacket and corduroys.

To Fleet Street five boys are detailed, and they are as lively a lot as one would



Photo by H. C. Shelley.

AN ORDERLY.

expect in that arena of wits. The street is divided into five districts, for one of which each youngster is responsible. So from eight o'clock onwards our street orderly-boy threads the labyrinth of vehicles, scurrying under horses' noses, evading wheels and shafts, and leaving, as every good man should do, his little corner of the world better than he found it. At half-past eleven there is a lull in the mad game, and the gentleman of the brush goes home if he can, more usually to the nearest "corfee-shop," for his mid-day refection. Half an hour is the time allowed, but he does not take it for his meal. Afterwards you may see him curled up in a quiet corner for a rest, and perhaps a little nap, for the war of the streets cannot disturb one who holds its cause so cheap. Then at it again, twisting, turning, sweeping, shovelling until about three o'clock. At that hour, if it is hot weather, you may see

the boys seated, some of them, on their scoops, and grouped picturesquely round one of the "shoots" where they deposit their rubbish, taking their ease in what shade is to be found. But it is only for a few minutes. Duty calls, and off they go again, the bright brass badges of their caps twinkling in the sunlight as the boys flash in and out among the wheels.

Five o'clock brings release to a section; but every one week out of three one boy, if he is of the "City Company," works later; "night-work," he calls it. Then he is not free till eight, but the trouble is worth his while, for he has three shillings extra for his pains. His usual weekly wage is nine shillings. That he calls his "standing money"; the rest is "overtime." This wage, for a boy of fourteen or so, is really much better than in many more "genteel" occupations.

They are a healthy, happy-looking lot of boys, and enjoy the adventurous part of their life. Sometimes, though not often, there are accidents. One boy told me how he was run over and spent three months in hospital. Another, a brown-eyed rascal, chimed in to tell with gusto



ONE OF THE BOY SCAVENGERS.

of the nearest shave he ever had. It was on Holborn Viaduct. A bus was racing two heavy carts, one on each side, and our young official so misjudged his distance

as to get between one of the carts and the omnibus. The shafts of the cart just grazed him, and he thought when the

of professional scoops attuned to scale and struck with the professional brush. The method was very much like that of the hand-bell ringers, and the musical effect pretty nearly as good. So, you see, even the humble calling of a scavenger-boy is not antagonistic to the cultivation of the fine arts.

There are two hundred boys in the employ of the City. For the Strand district the number is forty. Some of the Strand boys belong to a home; the City boy, however, is, to quote his elliptical slang, "on his own." This is perhaps another reason why he is so smart. But then there is always that cumbrous scraper to handicap the young knight of order whose province is west of Temple Bar, and that, it must be confessed, makes a difference.



Photo by H. C. Shelley.

A PAVEMENT SCRUBBER.

body of the vehicle came along he would be crushed; but fortunately the driver of one of the carts saw him, and contrived to swerve aside in time.

"Only my scoop was run over," grinned the boy in conclusion.

"And how long was it in hospital?"

"Oh, no time; it was easier mended than Billy."

They have pleasant memories, those bright little lads, of a Christmas entertainment which was given them by a leading newspaper. As might be expected, the boys themselves contributed largely to the evening's entertainment. The most amusing part of the programme was the performance by a band whose only instruments consisted

But both classes, like healthy boys, are keen on one thing.

"And after work?" I asked them. "What then?"

"Why," said the urchins, eagerly anticipating the welcome stroke of five, "Why then, Sir, we *play*."



A BUSY CORNER.