and nearer, and at length, stumbling over an old stump, she fell to the ground. In another instant the creature had reached her; his hot breath was upon her cheek and she felt his nose touch her forehead. She was much too frightened to stir, and she lay there cold and trembling; it seemed as if all power had left her. Then the animal licked her hands, and she felt his tail brush against her. And she lay expecting to be devoured. How long she stayed there she did not know, but she thought it must be for hours and hours, when suddenly a cheery voice called out—

"Why, what's the matter, Hetty? are you asleep, child?"

Then she half opened her eyes, for it was Uncle John who spoke; she gave a timid startled glance around her, and her first words were—

"Have you killed the panther?"

"Panther!" exclaimed Uncle John; "what is the child dreaming of?"

"Of the one from the menagerie; it came after me; it was going to eat me."

And Hetty, still trembling, made an effort to raise herself.

"Nonsense, child! there's no panther here. There's only good old Carlo wondering why it is that you take no notice of him," replied her uncle.

"Carlo, Carlo!" exclaimed Hetty. And at his name the dog was beside her in an instant, and Hetty, flinging her arms round his neck, began sobbing.

"They told me the panther was coming," she sobbed.

"Who told you?" asked Uncle John.

"Two boys who wanted to catch a squirrel, but I made a noise and frightened it away."

"And so they frightened you in return, by telling you only half the story. The panther escaped from his cage yesterday, but was caught almost immediately by the keeper, and no harm was done."

"Oh!" said Hetty, drawing a long sigh of relief.

Then Uncle John, seeing how tired out she was, lifted Hetty up in his strong arms, and on the way home she told him by bits all the story.

"You were a brave little girl to help the squirrel," said Uncle John.

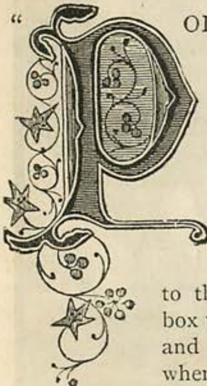
And Hetty smiled. All the sunshine had come back to her; the tears ceased, and suddenly she exclaimed—

"'Tears and laughter
Come close together,
Like rain and sunshine
In April weather.'

"Uncle John, in spite of my fright, this has been a beautiful April day." J. G.

SOME LITTLE ONES OF THE STREET.

IV.—THE SHOEBLACK.



"POL-ISH yar boots-ar!—Clean yar boo-oots!" This is the cry of a sturdy little soldier in the Battle of Life—a soldier in uniform, too, for you may see his red coat a long way off as you walk along Cornhill, or past the Bank of England towards the front of the Royal Exchange. He belongs to the Shoeblack Brigade, and the box that he carries holds his brushes and a mat for him to kneel upon when he puts the box itself down to serve as a stand on which his customers place their feet, while their shoes are polished till they shine like jet.

In almost every part of London you may see the boys of the red or the blue brigades—some of them big fellows, and some little ones. At the chief railway stations, and here, close to the statue at the Royal Exchange, there are four or five of them together, but you don't see red and blue at the same post. They have their regular stands, and some are at the corners of large streets, or by gateways of public buildings. When they know their duties well, and have been some time in the service, they are promoted to the better positions, where more money is to be earned.

"Here yar, sar! 'ave a polish! Make 'em shine, sar!" You can hear his voice over the roar of the cabs, omnibuses, and waggons in the streets, as he kneels on his mat and taps the wooden box with the brush that he holds in his hand ready to seize the first comer by the leg and go vigorously to work, first wiping the wet mud from round the sole of the boot with an old cloth, and then with a pair of hard brushes removing the splashes from the upper part of the leather. Next comes the blacking, and then, with another pair of brushes, the vigorous polishing.

There is a secret in our little shoeblack's trade, as there is in most others. On the side of his box he has a thick smear of some particular kind of

blacking, and to give the front part of the boot the last brilliant polish, he rubs in a tiny bit of this blacking with his fingers, and then plies the two shining-brushes more vigorously than ever, till he finishes off with an artistic flourish, and you can almost see his earnest little face reflected from the splendid leather as he holds out his hand to catch the coppers that he hopes will be more than a single penny.

The burly man doesn't go away directly, but stands looking down at the boy and feeling in his pocket, as though he expected to find a threepenny piece that was right down in the corner of it.

If ever a pair of boots want cleaning his do. They are great, thick, laced boots, with soles that come out nearly half an inch all round, and they have such a crust of country mud and clay upon them that they look like a pair of enormous baked apple dumplings that have got out of shape in the oven. It isn't all London mud, and the man isn't a London man, either. His grey trousers, tight all round the leg; his heavy drab coat; his gloves, with thick leather sewed between the fingers; the short whip under his arm; his big shoulders; his broad face with iron-grey whiskers; his slow way of moving; his quiet, serious smile as he looks down at the lad as though he were some amusing curiosity—all show that he has come from the country.

"What's to pay, younker?" he says, still staring down at the boy.

"Boots was very dirty, sir," says the lad.

"Nobody says they weren't. Precious stiff mud, too, eh? Came off a clay farm, my lad? Did you ever see a clay farm?"

"No, sir, never see no farm 'cept Chalk Farm," says the young rascal, grinning and touching his cap. "Never been out o' London, I haven't, 'cept once a year, when we goes for our 'scursion, and plays at cricket, an' high-spy-high, an' egg-'at, an' sech like."

"Chalk Farm, eh!" says the burly gentleman. "Not much to be got off the chalk near London, I should say. Where's this Chalk Farm you go to?"

"Why, on the railway. Don't you know Chalk Farm station on the North London, down by Camding Town? not a real farm, you know."

"Perhaps there was a farm there once, eh?"

"Shouldn't wonder, sir. Maybe it was what they call a dairy farm, you know, sir, an' that's where the chalk come in to make up the London milk with, don't you see, sir?"

"You young rascal!" says the farmer, laughing heartily; "what do you know about milk or eggs, or anything of that sort?"

"Well, I had a egg for my breakfus this mornin', sir—a penny one. They charges a penny at our place—new laid, too. We're close to the market, don't you know."

"What do you call your place?"

"Why, Saffron Hill, sir; close to where the organ-grinders lives, and what used to be Field Lane. That's where our red brigade has our head-quarters. Some of us live there, and some don't. I'm one that does. Mother's away helpin' to clean down a big house. Since father died she's mostly out cleanin' or else washin', so that though I'm better off than them that hasn't got a mother, I don't see her much, and I live at the Home, don't you know. What did father die of? Well, sir, he worked at the docks down by the water-side, becos once, you see, he'd been a sailor, and when he couldn't get work at the rope-yard where he used to have a job sometimes, he was obliged to go to the docks. I was quite a little 'un then, sir; and I never quite knew how it was, but father was drownded—fell into the dock, I think, and they couldn't get him out; or else it was night, and he couldn't be seen. Mother never will talk about it."

Here the poor boy's head is bowed down over his box, and he begins to tap upon it with his brush; but presently he rubs his little grimy hand across his eyes, and leaves a broad smear of blacking on his forehead.

"Poor lad!" says the farmer. "So mother's obliged to be away, and you're all alone, eh?"

"No, not alone," says the boy, brightening up; "there's a lot of us at the home, don't you see—a reg'lar long ward full o' beds, all alike, and a lav'tory where we washes when we goes back at night; and then there's evening school, and sometimes we have meetin's and magic-lanterns and singin'."

"And do they keep you there for what you earn? How's it all paid for?" asks the farmer.

"Well, it's like this, sir. The boys that live there they pay so much out of every shillin' they earn if they're on a good stand. Eightpence out of the first shillin', and fourpence out of every one afterwards, and that partly keeps 'em; or, at all events, finds 'em in lodgin' and clothes; and then we can earn enough to get our dinner outside or to pay for something to take with us; and when we go home we can have things that's ready, such as a penny soup, or a rasher, or cold meat, or such; or a pint o' tea and bread an' butter. So that you may say we keep ourselves partly, if we does well; but if its fine weather, when there ain't so much work for us, they don't leave us to starve nor yet turn us out. There's a good many little 'uns at our place; but at Mansell Street they're big fellows mostly, and they pay the Society so much

for their stand—eighteen pence or two shillings a day, and that goes to find the Home and things, don't you see; and they can pay for their vittles as well. How long do they keep us—did you say? Well, most of the boys is on the look-out for something better; and some goes emigratin' to Canada, but when they have to pay their own passage, and get out there to such a cold place, some don't like it, and say they'd sooner ha' stopped here, for the pay ain't over much, and they ain't used to farm-work. That's what they write to the other boys, I hear; but I don't know as I wouldn't sooner go abroad if mother could go too, unless I could get enough work to keep us both here."

"And what's your mother's name?" says the farmer, taking off his glove to make sure he'd found the three-penny bit at last.

"Mrs. Stokes, leastway that's *our* name; but mother's name before she was married was Barshull—that's a rum name, ain't it, sir? Sounds as though it ought to be Marshall, and some one was sayin' it with a cold in his head."

The farmer is staring at the boy now harder than ever. "Did your mother come from Ham'-shire, boy?" he asks.

A LONDON SHOEBLACK.

"Yes, I b'lieve she did—becos she's told me about where she lived, not far from the New Forest, where the cove shot William Rufus; that's in Am'shire, ain't it?"

"Look here, my boy," says the farmer. "I meant to give you a shillin', but if I can do better than that I will. You must knock off work at four o'clock to-day, and take me to these quarters of yours at Saffron Hill. Here's the shilling to get your dinner with, and I shall be back for you at four. Now mind you let me find you here, for I mean to do you good if I can."

So saying, the big man looks at a big silver watch, taps it, listens to see that it is going all right, and then with a nod tramps away, making a great clumping on the pavement with his boots.

"All right, sir?" says little Bill Stokes, touching his cap. "You're very good. We mostly gets two-pence now instead of a penny, becos of the change of climate in this country that makes more mud, but a shillin's a rare lot and no mistake. *Polish* yer boots, sar! Have a shine. All right, I'll be here at four, sir. I ain't likely to forget, sir. No fear!"

Now Bill doesn't know that the farmer is going off at once to ask the way to Saffron Hill, that he may see for himself what sort of place the little Shoeblacks' Homè is.

Saffron Hill is not at all a nice neighbourhood, Most of the houses are old and the rooms are dirty and ill furnished. The courts and alleys are the abode of Italian "organ-grinders." But near these old dingy houses is one great brick building that is newer than the others. It is a castle of industry and honest work, where a thousand boys and girls can attend the schools in the evening, and where servants who want situations can find a home. There is a nursery for poor babies who are too small to go to the infant-schools, there are sewing-classes and clothing-clubs, and there are Bible-classes, and baths, and wash-houses, and Sunday evening services, and a free library and reading-room for working boys. Among these working boys are the companions of Bill Stokes—the boys of the Central London Shoeblack Brigade, who have their quarters close by; but some of them live at their own homes, and only go to head quarters in the morning, before the day's work, and to school in the evening. These are the red jackets. Their comrades at Islington wear brown uniform, and those in East London a blue one. It was to this institution the good farmer went, and when he had found out that what Bill Stokes had told him was all true, he made up his mind to assist him to rise to something better than a shoeblack. And I am glad to say that after a while the lad did so.

THOMAS ARCHER.