JAMIE THE KID.

BY JOSIAH FLYNT.

IT was my last night in San Francisco, and I could not leave without saying good-by to Old Slim. His place was almost empty when I strolled in, and he was standing behind his greasy bar counting the day's winnings. The *adios* was soon said, and I started for the street again. I had hardly left the bar when the door suddenly squeaked on its rickety hinges, and a one-armed man came in with a handsome "kid." He was evidently dying of consumption, and as he shuffled clumsily across the floor, with the boy following solemnly at his heels, I fancied that he wanted Slim to help him into a hospital. He called for his drinks, and asked Slim if he knew of any one "bound East" the next day.

"W'y, yes," Slim replied; "that young feller right back o' ye leaves ter-morrer: ain't that right, Cigarette?"

The man turned and looked at me. Grabbing my hand, he exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Where d'yu' come from? Don't remember me, eh? W'y, ye little beggar, have yu' forgotten the time we nearly croaked in that box-car jus' out of Austin—have yu' forgotten that?" and he pinched my fingers as if to punish me. I scrutinized him closely, trying to trace in his withered and sickened face the familiar countenance of my old friend Denver Red.

"Yes, that's right, guy me!" he retorted, nervously. "I've changed a little, I know. But look at this arm"—pushing back his sleeve from the emaciated hand—"that crucifix ain't changed, is it? Now d'yu' know me?"

There was no longer any reason for doubt, for down in Texas I had seen New Orleans Fatty put that same piece on his lonely arm. But how changed he was! The last time we met he was one of the healthiest hoboes on the "Santa Fe," and now he could just barely move about.

"Why, Red," I asked, "how did this happen? You're nearly dead."

"Sleepin' out done it, I guess," he answered, hoarsely. "Anyhow the crocus* says so, 'n' I s'pose he knows. Can't get well, neither. Ben all over—Hot Springs, Yellarstone, Yosem'ty, 'n' jus' the other day come up from Mex'co. Cough like a horse jus' the same. But say, Cig, drink out, 'n' we'll go up to Jake's—'s too public here. I've got a lot to tell yu', 'n' a big job fer yu', too: 'll yu' come? A' right. So long, Slim; I'll be in agen ter-morrer."

* Doctor.

We were soon seated in a back room at Jake's. The boy stretched himself on a bench, and in a moment was asleep.

"Purty kid, ain't he?" Red said, looking proudly at the little fellow.

"An' he's a perfect bank, too, 'f yu' train 'im right. Yu' oughto seen 'im over in Sac* the other day. He drove some o' them Eastern stiffs nearly wild with the way he throws his feet. Give 'im good weather an' a lot o' women, 'n' he'll batter his tenner ev'ry day. They get sort o' stuck on 'im somehow, 'n' 'fore they know it they're shellin' out. Quarters ev'ry time, too. He don't take no nickels—seems to hate 'em. A Los Angeles woman tried him once, 'n' what d'yu' think he did? Told 'er to put it in an orphan 'sylum. Oh, he's cute, bet cher life. But, Cig," and his voice dropped to a lower pitch, "he's homesick. Think of it, will yu', a hobo kid homesick! Bawls like the devil sometimes. Wants to see his ma—he's only twelve 'n' a half, see? If 'e was a homely kid, I'd kick 'im. If there's en'thing I can't stand, it's homely bawlin' kids. They make me sick. But yu' can't kick *him*—he's too purty—ain't he?" and he glanced at the slumberer.

"Yu' pull out at seven, do yu'?" he asked, after a pause.

"Well, Cig, I'm mighty glad it's you I found at Slim's. I was hopin' I'd meet some bloke I knew, but I feared I wouldn't. They're mos' all dead, I guess. Bummin' does seem to kill us lads, don't it? Ev'ry day I hear o' some stiff croakin' or gettin' ditched. It's a holy fright. Yer bound fer York, ain't yu', Cig? Well, now, see here; I've got an errand fer yu'. What d'yu' think 't is? Give it up, I s'pose? Well, yu' see that kid over there; purty, ain't he?" and he walked over to the bench and looked into the lad's face.

"Pounds his ear† like a baby, don't he?"

* Sacramento. † Sleeps.

and he passed his hand delicately over the boy's brow.

"Now, Cig," he continued, returning to his seat, "I want—you—to—take—this—kid—back—to—the—Horn.* That's where he lives. What d'yu' say?"

There was only one thing I could say. A few months more at the outside and Red would be gone, and it was probably the last favor I could do him in payment for the many kindnesses he had shown me in the early days.

"If en'thing happens to 'im, Cig, w'y, it's got to happen, I s'pose; but he's so dead stuck on seein' his ma that I guess he'll be purty foxy. I'd take 'im myself, but I'm 'fraid I can't pull through. It's a tough trip 'tween here 'n' Omaha, 'n' I guess he'll be safer with you. I hate to let 'im go at all, but the devil of it is I 'ain't got the nerve to hang on to him. Yu' see, I'm goin' to croak 'fore long—oh, you don't need to snicker; 't's a fact. A few more months 'n' there'll be one less hobo lookin' fer set-downs. Yes, Cig, that's straight. But that ain't the only reason I'm sendin' the kid home. I oughto sent 'im home 'bout a year ago, 'n' I said I would, too, 'f I found 'im. I lied, didn't I? Ye-es, sir, 'bout twelve months ago I told his mother I'd fetch 'im back 'f I collared 'im. How's that fer a ghost-story, eh? Wouldn't the blokes laugh, though, if they'd hear it? Denver Red takin' a kid home! Sounds funny, don't it? But that's jus' what I said I'd do, 'n' I wasn't drunk nuther. Fill up yer schooner, Cig, 'n' I'll tell yu' 'bout it."

He braced himself against the wall, hugged his knees, and told me what follows.

"Yu' know where the Horn is right 'nough, don't yu'? Well, 'bout a year 'n' a half ago I got ditched there one night in a little town not far from the main line. 'Twas rainin' like the devil, 'n' I couldn't find an 'empty' anywheres. Then I tried the barns, but ev'ry one of 'em was locked tighter'n a penitentiary. That made me horstile, 'n' I went into the main street an' tackled a bloke fer a quarter. He wouldn't give me none, but 'e told me 'f I wanted a lodgin' that a woman called College Jane 'ud take me in. Says he: 'Go up this street till yu' strike the academy; then cross the field, 'n' purty soon yu'll find a little row o' brown houses, 'n' in No. 3 is where Jane lives. Yu' can't miss the house, 'cause there's a queer sign hangin' over the front door, with a ball o' yarn 'n' a big needle painted on it. She does mendin'. I guess she'll take yu' in. She always does, anyhow.' Course I didn't know whether he was lyin' or not—yu' can never trust them Hoosiers—but I went up jus' the same, 'n' purty soon, sure 'nough, I struck the house. I knocked, 'n' in a minnit I heerd some one sayin', 'Is that you, Jamie?' Course that wasn't my name, but I thought like lightnin', 'n' made up my mind that 'twas my name in the rain, anyhow. So I says, in a kid's voice, 'Yes, it's Jamie.' The door opened, 'n' there was one o' the peartest little women y'ever see.

"'Oh, I thought yu' wasn't Jamie,' she says. 'Come in—come in. Yu' must be wet.'

"I felt sort o' sheepish, but went in, 'n' she set me down in the dinin'-room. Then I told 'er a story. One o' the best I ever told, I guess—made 'er eyes run, anyhow. An' she fed me with more pie 'n' cake than I ever had in my life. Reminded me o' the time we thought we was drunk on apple pie in New England. Well, then she told me her story. 'Twa'n't much, but somehow I 'ain't forgotten it yet. Yu' see, she come from the soil, 'n' her man was a carpenter. After they'd ben West 'bout six years he up 'n' died, leavin' her a little house 'n' a kid. She called 'im Jamie. Course she had to live somehow, 'n' purty soon she got a job mendin' fer the 'cademy lads, 'n' she boarded some of 'em. That's the way she got her monikey.* See? Well, things went along purty well, 'n' she was spectin' to put the kid in the 'cademy 'fore long. He-e-e didn't like books very well—hung around the station mos' the time. Sort o' stuck on the trains, I s'pose. Lots o' kids like that, yu' know. Well, to wind up the business, one night when he was 'bout 'leven year old he sloped. Some bloke snared 'im, prob'ly, an' ever since she's ben waitin' 'n' waitin' fer 'im to come back. An' ev'ry night she fixes up his bed, 'n' 'f anybody knocks she always asks, 'Is that you, Jamie?' Funny, ain't it? Well, somehow the bums got on to 'er, 'n' ever since the kid mooched she's

* The Horn is a triangular extension of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railway. It begins at Red Oak, Iowa, and runs southwest from there for about twenty miles, and then northwest to Pacific Junction for about twenty more.

* Nickname.

ben entertainin' 'em. Gives them his room ev'ry time. An' she always asks 'em 'f they know where he is. She asked me too, 'n' made me promise 'f I found 'im that I'd send 'im home. Course I never expected to see 'im, but I had to say somethin'.

"Well, sir, six months afterward I was sittin' in Sal's place in K. C.* when who should come in but New York Barcas. He called me out, 'n' says, 'Red, wanto buy a kid?' As it happened, I did want one, so I asked 'im how much 'e wanted. He took me over to a joint 'n' showed me that kid over there on that bench. 'Give yu' a sinker,' I said. He was satisfied, 'n' I took the kid.

"Well, sir, as luck would have it, 'bout a week later the kid got so stuck on me that he told me his story. I didn't know what to do. He didn't wanto go home, 'n' I didn't want 'im to. Course I didn't tell 'im nothin' 'bout seein' his ma—that 'ud 'a' spoiled ev'rything. Well, I didn't say nothin' more about it, 'n' we come out here. I've had 'im now fer 'bout a year, 'n' I've trained 'im dead fine. W'y, Cig, he's the best kid on the coast. Yes, he is—but, as I've ben tellin' yu', he's homesick, 'n' I've got to get 'im back to the Horn. I'm 'fraid he won't stay there. He's seen too much o' the road; but I'll croak jus' a little bit easier from knowin' that I sent 'im back. I'd like it if he'd stay, too; 'cause, to 'fess up, Cig, I ain't very proud o' this bummin', 'n' 'f 'e keeps at it he'll be jus' like me 'fore long. So when he wakes up I'm goin' to lecture 'im, 'n' I don't want you to laugh. May help, you know; can't tell."

Two hours later we were in the railway yards waiting for my train to be made up. There were still about fifteen minutes left, and Red was lecturing the kid.

"See here, kid," I heard him saying, "what's yu' learnt since I've had yu'—en'thing?"

"Bet cher life I has," the little fellow returned, with an assumed dignity that made even Red smile.

"Well, how much? Rattle it off now, quick!"

The boy began to count on his fingers:

"Batterin', one; sloppin' up, two; three-card trick, three; an'—an'—that song 'n' dance, four—four; an'—an' enhalin' cig'-rettes, five—five—" Here he stopped and asked if he should take the next hand.

"Yes, go on; let's have the hull of it."

"Well, then, I knows that cuss-word you taught me—that long one, you know—that's six, ain't it? Oh yes, 'n' I knows that other cuss-word that that parson told us was never forgiven—remember, don't you? Well, that's seven—seven. I guess that's about all—jus' an even seven."

"Ye sure that's all, kid?"

"Well, darn it, Red, ain't that enough fer a prushun? You don't know much more yerself—no, you don't, 'n' you 's three times old 's I am." And he began to pout.

"Now, kid, d'yu' know what I wants y'u to do?"

"Bet cher life I do! 'Ain' cher ben tellin' me fer the las' year? You wants me to be a blowed-in-the-glass stiff. Ain't them the words?"

"No, kid. I've changed my mind. Ye goin' home now, ain' cher?"

"Jus' fer a little while. I'm comin' back to you, ain't I?"

"No, yu' ain't, kid. Yer goin' home fer good. Cigarette's goin' to take yu', 'n' yu' mustn't come back. Listenin'?"

"Say, Red, has you gone bughouse? I never heerd you talk like that in my life."

"See here, kid," and there was a firmer tone in his voice, "we ain't foolin' now—understan'? An' in about five minutes ye'll be gone. Now I wants yu' to promise that ye'll ferget ev'ry darn thing I've taught yu'. Listenin'?"

The kid was gazing down the track.

"Listenin'?" Red cried again.

The kid turned and looked at him. "Can't I enhale cig'rettes any more? Has I got to ferget them too?"

"Well, kid, yu' *kin* tell yer mother that I says yu' kin do that—but that's all. Now 'll yu' promise?"

"Gosh, Red, it 'll be hard work!"

"Can't help it—*yu' got to do it.* Yu' don't wanto be like me. Yu' wanto be somethin' dead fine—'spectable."

"Ain' chew somethin' dead fine? I heerd Frisco Shorty say oncet you was the fliest bloke in yer line west o' Denver."

"Yu' don't understan', kid," and he stamped his foot. "I mean like yer mother. Listenin'? Well, 'll yu' promise?"

The kid nodded his head, but there was

* Kansas City.

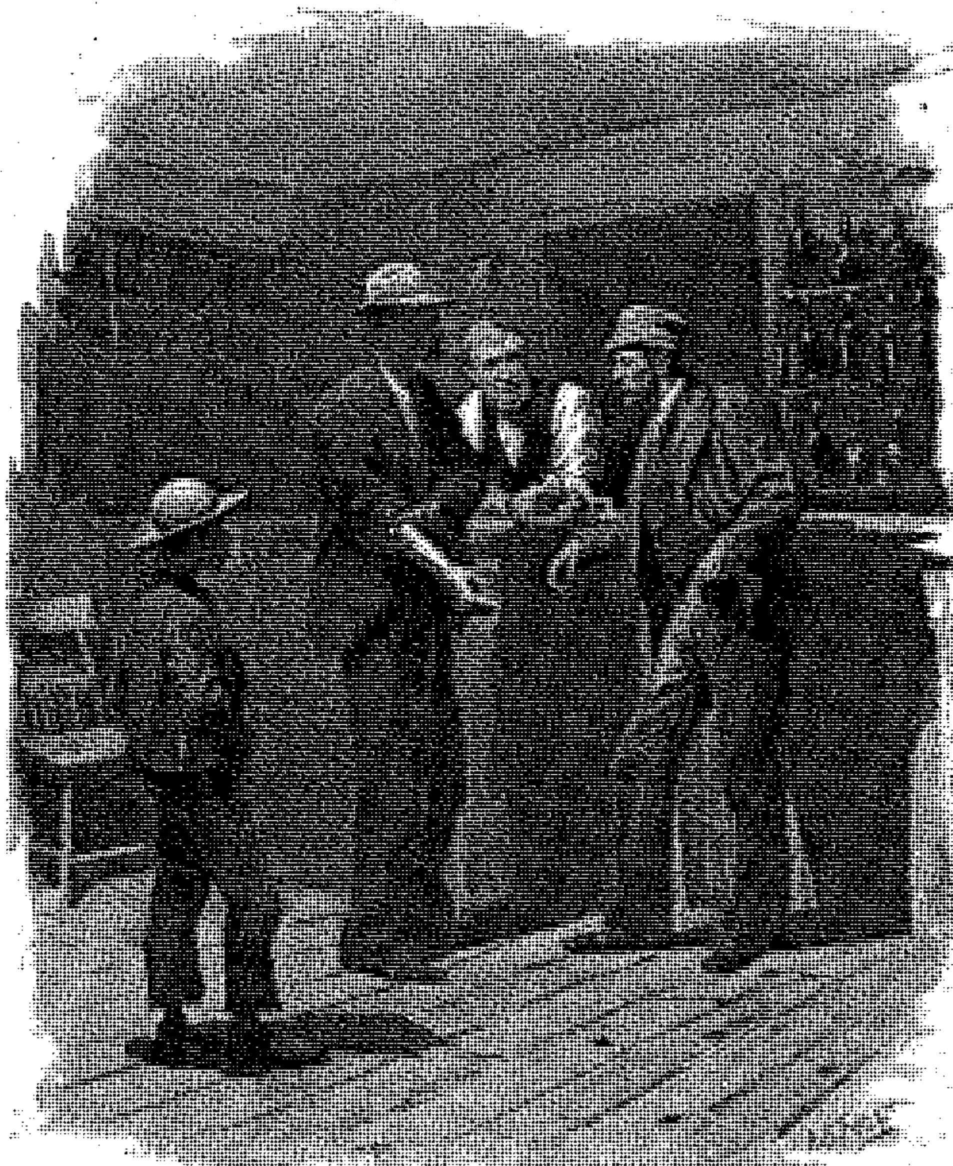
a surprise in his eyes which he could not conceal.

The train was at last ready, and we had to be quick.

"Well, Cig, so long; take care o' yerself. Be good to the kid."

the door while the engine puffed slowly out of the yards, he was standing on a pile of ties waving his hat. Six months afterward I was told in the Bowery that he was dead.

The journey to the Horn was full of



"NOW D'YU' KNOW ME?"

Then he turned to the boy. It was the tenderest good-by I have ever seen 'tween a "prushun" and his "jocker." A kiss—a gentle stroke on his shoulder—and he helped him climb into the box-car.

The last we saw of Red, as we stood at

incident. For six long days and nights we railroaded and railroaded, sometimes on the trucks and the blind baggage, and again lying flat on top, dodging the cinders as they whizzed about our heads, and the brakeman as he came skipping over

the cars to tax us for the ride. It was hard work, and dangerous too, at times, but the kid never whimpered. Once he wanted to, I thought, when a conductor kicked him off the caboose, but he faked a professional little laugh in place of it. And he also looked rather frightened one night when he nearly lost his grip climbing up the ladder of a cattle-car, but he was afterward so ashamed that it was almost pitiful. He was the "nerviest" child I ever travelled with. Even on the trucks, where old natives sometimes feel squeamish, he disguised his fear. But he was at his best at meal-time. Regularly he would plant himself before me in waiter fashion, and say:

"Well, Cig'rette, what's it to be? Beefsteak 'n' 'taters 'n' a little pie—'ll that do?"

Or if he thought I was not having enough variety he would suggest a more delicate dish.

"How'll a piece o' chicken taste, eh?" And the least eagerness on my part sent him off to find it. It was not, however, an entirely one-sided affair, for I was in his service also. I had to protect him from all the hoboes we met, and sometimes it was not so easy as one might think. He was so handsome and clever that it was a temptation to any tramp to "snare" him if he could, and several wanted to buy him outright.

"I'll give ye five balls fer 'im," one old fellow told me, and others offered smaller sums. A Southern roadster tried to get him free of cost, and the tales he told him and the way he told them would have done honor to a professional story-teller. Luckily for me, the kid was considerably smarter than the average boy on the road, and he had also had much experience.

"They's got to tell better short stories than them 'fore they get me!" he exclaimed, proudly, after several men had tried their influence on him. "I'm jus' as cute as they is, ain't I? I know what they wants—they think I'm a purty good moocher, 'n' they'll make sinkers out o' me. Ain't that it?"

None the less I almost lost him one night, but it was not his fault. We were nearing Salt Lake City at the time, and a big burly negro was riding in our car. We were both sleepy, and although I realized that it was dangerous to close my eyes with the stranger so near, I could not help it, and erelong the kid and I were dozing. The next thing I knew the train was slowing up, and the kid was screaming wildly, and struggling in the arms of the negro as he jumped to the ground. I followed, and had hardly reached the track when I was greeted with these words: "Shut up, or I'll t'row de kid under de wheels."

The man looked mean enough to do it; but I saw that the kid had grabbed him savagely around the neck, and, feeling sure that he would not dare to risk his own life, I closed with him. It was a fierce tussle, and the trainmen, as they looked down from the cars and flashed their lanterns over the scene, cheered and jeered.

"Sick 'em!" I heard them crying. "Go it, kid—go it!"

Our train had almost passed us, and the conductor was standing on the caboose, taking a last look at the fight. Suddenly he bawled out,

"Look out, lads! the express 's comin'!"

We were standing on the track, and the negro jumped to the ditch. I snatched the kid from the ground and ran for the caboose. As we tumbled on to the steps the "con" laughed.

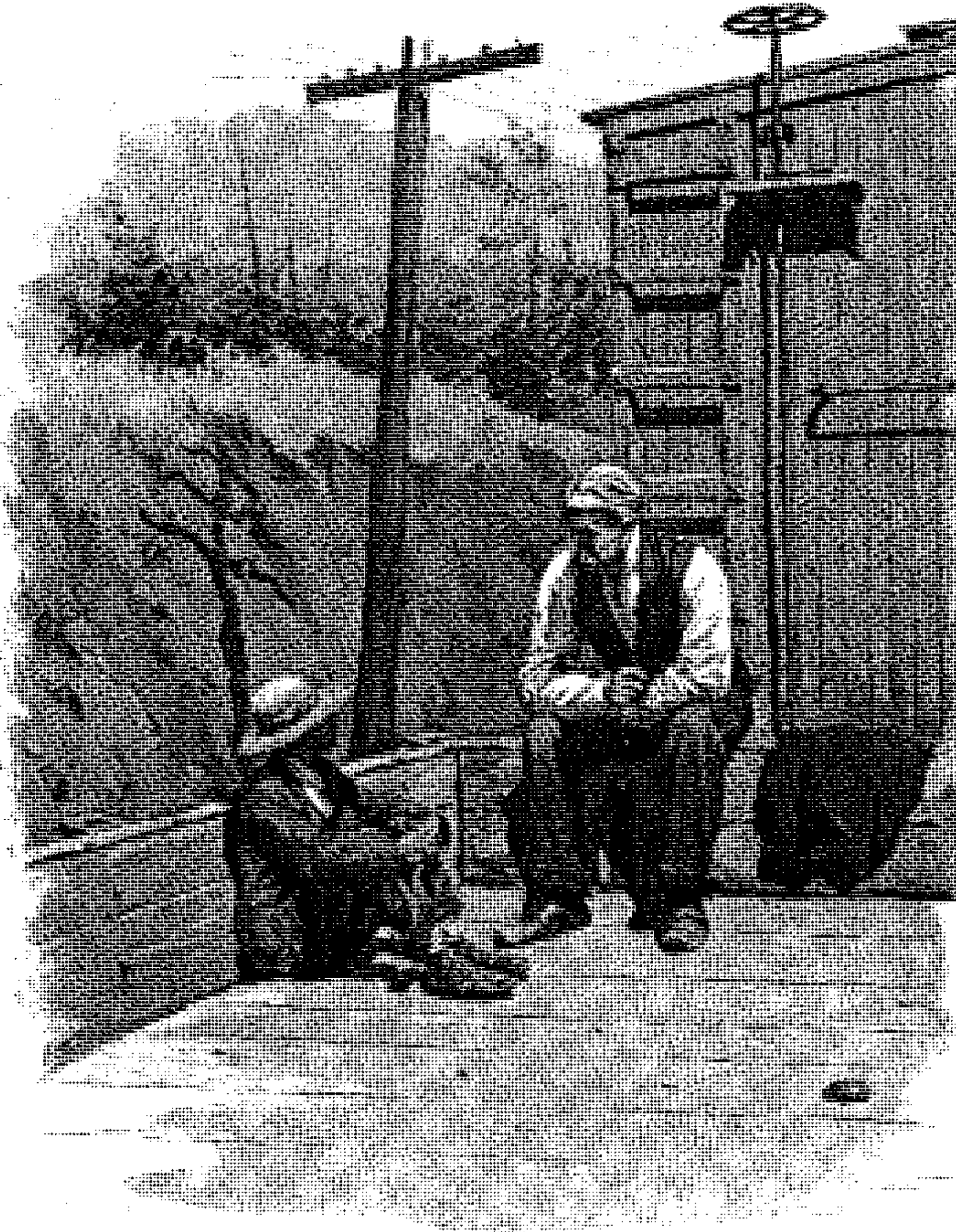
"Didn't I do that well?" he said.

I looked up the track, and, lo and behold, there was no express to be seen. It was one of the kind deeds which railway men are continually doing for knights of the road.

As we approached the Horn the kid became rather serious. The first symptom I noticed was early one morning while he was practising his beloved "song 'n' dance." He had been shaking his feet for some time, and at last broke out lustily into a song I had often heard sung by jolly crowds at the "hang-out":

"Oh, me an' three bums,
Three jolly old bums,
We live like royal Turks.
We have good luck
In bumming our chuck.
To hell with the man that works!"

After each effort, if perchance there had been one "big sound" at all like Red's, he chuckled to himself: "Oh, I'm a-gettin' it, bet cher life! Gosh! I wish Red was here!" And then he would try again. This went on for about half an hour, and he at last struck a note that pleased him immensely. He was just going to repeat it, and had his little mouth perked accordingly, when something stopped him,



"COURSE I DIDN'T KNOW SY THEN."

and he stared at the floor as if he had lost a dime. He stood there silently, and I wondered what the matter could be. I was on the point of speaking to him, when he walked over to the door and looked out at the telegraph poles. Pretty soon he returned to the corner where I was reading, and settled down seriously at my side. In a few moments he was again at the door. He had been standing in a musing way for some time, when I saw him reach into his inside coat pocket and bring out the tattered bits of pasteboard with which he did his three-card trick. Unfolding the packet, he threw the paper on the track, and then fingered over each card separately. Four times he pawed them over, going reluctantly from one to the other. Then, and before I could fancy what he was

up to, he tossed them lightly into the air, and followed them with his eye as the wind sent them flying against the cars. When he turned around, his hands were shaking and his face was pale. I cruelly pretended not to notice, and asked him carelessly what was the matter. He took another look at the world outside, as if to see where the cards had gone, and then came over to the corner again. Putting his hands in his trousers pockets, and taking a long draw at his cigarette, he said, the smoke pouring out of his nostrils, "I'm tryin' to reform."

He looked so solemn that I did not dare to laugh, but it was all I could do to keep from it.

"D'ye think I'll make it go?" he asked, after a pause, during which his feet had tried to tempt him from his good resolution, and had almost led him into the forbidden dance. Almost every hour from that time on he asked that same question, and sometimes the childish pathos that he threw into his voice and manner would have unmanned an old stager.

The last day of our journey we had a long talk. He was still trying to reform, but he had come to certain conclusions, and one of them was that he could not go to school any more; or, what was more to the point, that he did not see the need of it.

"Course I don't know ev'rything," he explained, "but I knows a lot. W'y, I kin beat Red figgerin' a'ready, an' I kin read things he can't, too. Lots o' words he don't know 't I does; an' when he's drunk he can't read at all, but I kin. You oughto seen us in Cheyenne, Cig." And the reminiscence made him chuckle. "We was both jagged, 'n' the copper served a paper on us, *'n' I had to read it to Red.* Ain't that purty good? Red said 'twas, anyhow, 'n' he oughto know, oughtn't he? No, I don't think I need much schoolin'. I don't wanto be President of the country; 'f I did, p'r'aps I oughto know some more words; but seein's I don't, I can't see the use o' diggin' in readers all the while. I wish Red had given me a letter 'bout that, 'cause ma 'n' I'll get to fightin' 'bout it dead sure. You see, she's stuck on puttin' me tru the 'cademy, 'n' I'm stuck on keepin' out of it, 'n' 'f we get to scrappin' agen I'm afraid I won't reform. She'll kick 'bout my smokin', too; but I've got her there, ain't I? Red said I could smoke, didn't 'e—h'm? Tell ye what I guess I'll do, Cig. Jus' after I've kissed 'er I'll tell 'er right on the spot jus' what I kin do. Won't that be a good scheme? Then, you see, she can't jaw 'bout my not bein' square, can she? Yes, sir, that's jus' what I'll do." And he rubbed his tattooed hands as if he had made a good bargain.

The next morning, just as the sun was rising over the prairie-line, our train switched off the main road, and we were at last rolling along over the Horn. The kid stood by the door and pointed out the landmarks that he remembered. Erelong he espied the open belfry of the Academy.

"See that cup'la, Cig?" he cried. "Dad helped to build that, but 'e croaked doin' it. Some people says that he was jagged, 'cause he tumbled. Ma says the sun struck 'im."

A few minutes later the train stopped at the watering-tank, and my errand was done. There was no need to "jocker" the boy any longer. His welfare depended upon his mother and his determination to reform. He kissed me good-by, and then marched manfully up the silent street toward the Academy. I watched him till the train pulled out. Thus ended one of the hardest trips of my life in Hobo-land.

One warm summer evening, about three years after leaving the Horn, I was sitting in a music-hall in the Bowery. I had long since given up my membership in the hobo fraternity, but I liked to stroll about now and then and visit the old resorts. And it was while on such an excursion that I drifted into the variety show. I watched the people as they came and went, hoping to recognize some old acquaintance. I had often had odd experiences and renewal of friendships under similar circumstances, and as I sat there I wondered who it would be that I should meet that night. The thought had hardly recorded itself when some one grabbed my shoulder in policeman style, and said, "Shake!" I looked around, and found one of the burliest rowdies in the room. He turned out to be a pal that I had known on the New York Central, and, as usual, I had to go over my remembrances. He also had yarns to spin, and he brought them so up to date that I learned he was just free of a Virginia jail. Then began a tirade against Southern prisons. As he was finishing it he

happened to remember that he had met a friend of mine in the Virginian limbo. "Said 'e knew ye well, Cig, but I couldn't place 'im. Little feller; somethin' of a kid,

"WELL, CIG'RETTE, WHAT'S IT TO BE?"

I guess; up fer thirty days. One o' the blokes called 'im the Horn kid, 'n' said 'e use ter be a fly prushun out in the coast country. Ole Denver Red trained 'im, he said. Who is he? d'ye know 'im? He was a nice little feller. Why, what's wrong, Cig? Ye look spilled."

I probably did. It was such a disappointment as I had hardly imagined. Poor kid! He probably did so well that his mother tried to put him into the Academy, and then he "sloped" once more. I told the tramp the tale I have just finished. He was too obtuse to see the pathetic side of it, but one of his comments is worth repeating:

"Ye can't do nothin' with them kids, Cig. After they's turfed it a bit they're gone. Better let 'em alone."

But I cannot believe that that kind-hearted little fellow is really gone. Whoever meets him now, policeman or philanthropist, pray send him back to the Horn again.