

## OUT OF WORK.

(CONTINUED.)

"Why no, sir, I did belong to the 'Blue Lion,' in—street, for a good many years, but you know, sir, they smashed up, and all I got out of that was about two pounds, though I'd paid in a main deal more, and never had any out for illness or nothing."

"Have you applied to the parish?"

John's face flushed all over, and he looked up suddenly. "I can't do that, sir. He seemed almost angry that I had asked the question. 'Something here to work on,' I thought, 'honest pride and independent spirit. But I must probe him a little deeper yet.'"

"Haven't you laid up anything against a rainy day, John; anything in the savings bank, now, or building society?"

John winced and said, almost surlily, "I shouldn't have told you if I had, sir." Then, as if he felt he hadn't been quite polite, he added: "Praps I ought to have done, but a growing family is very expensive, sir."

"It is," I replied. "I know that myself; still, it's for their sakes after that we save. Suppose now, John, that you had five, ten or even twenty pounds in the bank?"

"Well, sir, I only wish I had; but how's the like of me to lay by? What with rent being so high and meat and bread and everything else, and clothes and darning, a man's wages is gone afore he knows what he's about."

He was beginning to talk more freely now, and I tried to encourage his doing so. "I know it is so, John, I said. The times have been hard for most of us. I know it's been tight work for me, anyhow, this last year. But there will be bad times as well as good times, and we must make hay while it rains."

"Come, now, times haven't always been so bad, have they?"

"Well, no, sir, I've no call to say they have; I've had regular work, and been able to pay my way, mostly, somehow or other, but there wasn't so many in family then."

"But I suppose you had something laid by, or how could you have lived this last month?"

"I know pretty well how it was, and how he had never laid anything by; but, for his own sake, I wanted him to tell me."

He sat silent, with a frown on his forehead, and a half-sullen look about his mouth, for a short time; but he said at last: "Well, sir, there, the truth must out. Most of the money he got up, sir, and there ain't no more to go. I'm ashamed on it, sir, and it's hard to me to say it, but there's the truth."

Thirty shillings a week—a month out of work—no bread in the house—and everything of value pawned! We both sat silent for a time. Then I got up, and, telling him to wait, went out of the room, and sent a basket to his house. When I came back—there was no mistake about it—John had been crying, but he tried not to let me see it, and taking my pocket-book dived off the library table, I pretended to be looking at the almanac. I was really trying to think how I could best put John in the way of helping himself. I knew pretty well how it was with him, and a good many others like him. Honest, hard-working, good fellows, but neither thinking nor caring about the future, so long as they can meet the demands of the day, and have a few shillings burning holes in their pockets. But I wanted to bring the fact home to him.

"John," I said, putting my hand on his arm, "I want to say a word or two to you very plainly, and I want you to listen to me."

"Certainly, sir, if you please."

"Well, then, I want you to tell me how you have spent your money."

"I don't ask from mere curiosity, but in order to help you. You are free to tell or not to tell; but you come to me to help you in your difficulties, and I want to do so in the most effectual way."

"Well, I don't know as I've spent any money, or where, for things to have come to this pass. So I said, as kindly as I could:

"This is a serious matter, John. When a trader uses other people's money to speculate with, loses it and pays no account in the pound, you workmen are very free with your comments; and when a nobleman's opulence the constable you take him to pieces pretty sharply, don't you?"

"I can't deny it, sir."

"Well, what's wrong with a hundred thousand pounds to waste with a few pounds. You have not been honest, John."

He started and looked really angry, and his face flushed indignantly. "Day," I said, "I told you that if, instead of two months' rent for a small tenement, you owed it for a mansion in Regent's Park, and if, instead of a bill at the shop, you owed a thousand for the maintenance of an expensive establishment and for luxuries, and had no means of paying, because you had already spent all your income, would that be honest?"

"I can't say as it would, sir."

"Well, it's as clear as day that you have been living beyond your income, somehow or other, or else where's the money gone to? And so you are not only in difficulty because you are out of work, but because you are in debt too. It's clear if hasn't been sending your children to school has ruined you. There are only three of them old enough to go, and sixpence a week for them can't make a man poor that earns thirty shillings a week. How much do you spend in beer, John?"

"I'm not a drinking man, sir, as you know, though I am a socializer. A man must have something to work upon, I say."

"I won't dispute that point with you now," I replied, "for I know that to do so would be to lose the hold I had, by attempting too much. 'But how much, about?'"

He looked ashamed now, and said, "Well, for the matter of that, I might do with less, I don't doubt."

"Two pence a day, perhaps?"

"Yes, that's when I'm in work."

"Three sometimes, and an extra one, or a glass of gin and water on Saturday night, perhaps?" I said.

To be continued.

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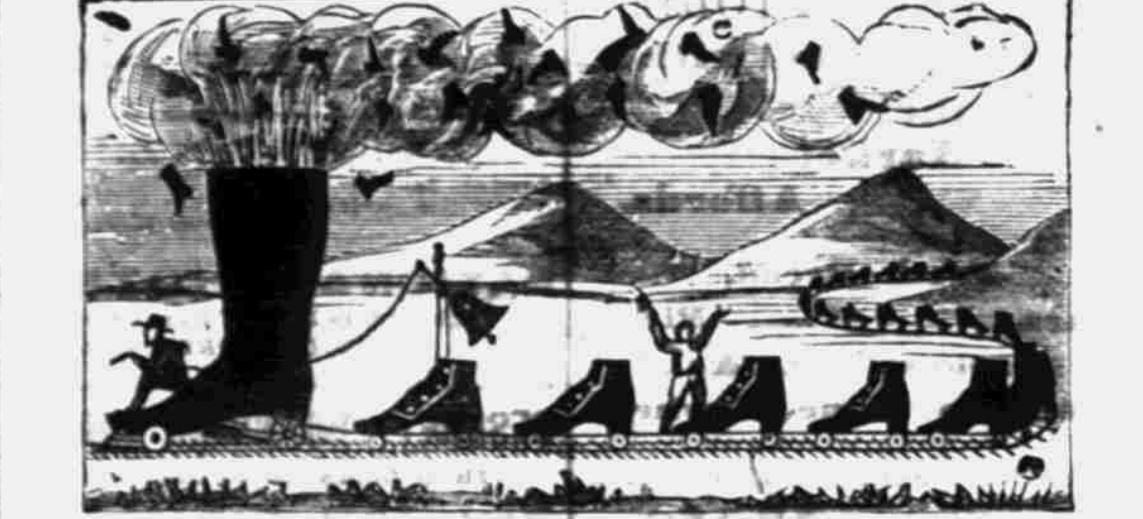
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