J. ROGERS, COBBLER.

BY HELEN DAWES BROWN.

"I'll make Your Shoe
As good As New
& Better to
J. Rogers Cobbler"

I read it once, twice, three times, till it began to chase itself round in my head, like a cat after her own tail. I was fascinated by its faultless rhythm, by the subtle charm of its rhyme, by the lawless abandon of its capitals. I think it would soon have set itself to music in my whirling little brain, if a voice had not cried out:

"Wal, little girl, how do you like my new sign? Don't you call that first-class poetry?"

"Yes, it's very nice poetry," I answered. And then I went on boldly: "But I see a word in it that isn't spelled right."

"Not spelled right? How's that? How's that? I shall have to hobble out and take a look at it. You're a pretty noticin' little critter, ain't ye?"

I hinted that this sort of "too" was usually spelled with two o's; but Mr. Rogers looked hard at the word over his spectacles and did not seem to think favorably of the change.

"I tell yer what," said he, finally, "I've got a way, and no spellin' about it. What's spellin' as long as folks catch yer idee? The idee's what yer can't get along without."

With which Mr. Rogers took his fist to the objectionable "to" and wrote triumphantly in its place a huge figure 2.

I felt baffled and helpless, and went home with a vague sense that I had left Mr. Rogers' sign much worse than I found it. It still pursued me, however, and at dinner I said, suddenly:

"Mamma, don't you want my shoes as good as new and better too?"

"Bless me!" said my grandmother, "what ails the child? She isn't beginning so early to be a postess?"

"Oh, no!" cried my father. "I guess you've been reading old John Rogers' sign. Wife, it is a curiosity. You must go by there. We must send him down some old shoes. You know he broke his leg last Winter, and he's trying to work again. We must give him a lift."

So it was that next morning I found myself again before the distracting sign, this time with a bundle of old shoes in my arms. I lifted the latch and stepped into the little shop.

"I declare for't, if here ain't a rush o' business," said Mr. Rogers, as he opened my bundle. "One pair o' copper-toes. Them your little brother's? Congress, with the 'larstic give out. Guess that's yer grandmother's. And here's some o' yer pa's boots, with a nice, handsome hole in 't."

"And I'd like to buy some shoe-strings, too," I put in, feeling myself a patron of some importance.

"Now, them copper-toes wouldn't take more'n half an hour. Can't you sit down and wait? I ain't such a great talker, but I like somebody to speak to once in a while. There's the cat. I talk to her. She'll look very knowing, but the minute my back is turned she's fast asleep. That ain't flatterin', yer see, and I stop."

I sat down, and while I listened, used my eyes as well. The sunlight fought its way through the dusty window-frames and diffused itself impartially over the walls and over the floor, with its wide, dirt-filled cracks. The decoration of these walls was of a humble order, though by no means uninteresting. In the first place, there were huge auction bills, in every stage of yellowness and dirt. My grandmother kept an obituary scrap-book; but, as I afterward found out, it was Mr. Rogers' practice to cherish the auction bills of his departed friends. Amos Belden had peacefully slept with his fathers for thirteen years or more, but in J. Rogers' shop it was still proclaimed, in giant type, that he wished to sell ten milch cows and six healthy yearlings.

Nor was this all. Ten years before a misguided showman had to come to our little town, and had mournfully retreated the next day, with more experience than profits; but his advent still lived in the handbills on Mr. Rogers' walls. Behind the old man, as he patiently bent over his work, an interesting family of lions were sporting, while on the door were set forth, in vivid pictures, the accomplishments of "The Fairy of the Ring," a young woman in very scanty petticoats.

The ceiling, too, had its share of decoration. From it hung, among festoons of cobwebs, a broken bird-cage; a battered Chinese lantern, whose light had long ago gone out; odd boots, which had parted with their mates; baskets with no bottoms, and numberless straps, chains and bits of rope, that had long outlived their usefulness.

But Mr. Rogers' work-bench baffles all enumeration. It was covered with a deposit of from six to ten inches in depth, from whose lower stratum Mr. Rogers would, from time to time, bring up an awl or a bit of wax. It was the old cobbler himself on whom my eyes at last rested. In his most upright days he could not have been a large man, but now the years had settled heavily upon him, and he had lost several inches of his youthful hight. His face was framed with a thin white fringe of beard, while cheek and chin were rough with a granite-colored stubble. There were fine, netted wrinkles, but no deep furrows, in the old man's face, and on each cheek a wintry bloom still lingered. His voice had the roughness of a nutmeg-grater, but now and then glanced off from its usual key and ended in a chirp.

"You never come to see me before, did you? I'm the J. Rogers out there on the sign. You've heard o' John Rogers that was burnt at the stake? Well, I'm another John Rogers; not that one. I warn't never quite so bad off as that. So you like my shop, eh? I've got everything handy, yer see. I haven't always been so well off as this," he went on, in a tremulous chirp. "When my wife was alive—now, my wife was a fine woman, harnsome and pretty high-steppin', when I merried her, but trouble brung her down. She never took kindly to it. Her folks called me shif'less. I dunno. If shif'less means workin' hard and gettin' little, I s'pose I was. I warn't one o' the kind ter worry, and she was. Eight children there were, and every one that come she was sorry it come; and then, when one after another they died, all but one, that was what killed her at last. They was my children, too, and—well, I—it's given me somethin' to look forward to, seein' 'em there, yer see; but my wife, she wasn't right exactly in her mind, it's my belief, after our troubles come. I dunno 's anybody was to blame for 'em. There's more trouble in this world than I'm able to account for, I'm free ter admit. My wife, she took ter her bed two years before she died; and then I had ter learn a new trade or two besides shoe-making. I was hired gal and 'most everything else. I made a pretty bad mess of it. I don't deny it. Poor Jim (he's our boy) run off. He couldn't stan' it. She died after awhile. She was one o' the Budsons. A harnsome set o' gals they were. It was a heavy day for me when I buried her in the grave. I've been alone since, but I've had a great many mercies."

"I thought you broke your leg last Winter, Mr. Rogers," I said.

"So I did; but I dunno but, on the whole, I ruther enjoyed it. I dunno when I ever lived so high or had so many visits from my friends."

And so Mr. Rogers talked on, looking sharply up at me now and then, to assure himself that I was a better listener than the cat.

Two days after I went for the rest of the shoes, and Mr. Rogers seemed so glad to see me that I was again flattered into staying.

"Come, now, if you'll set down and stay awhile, I'll tell yer a story. Perhaps you'd like ter know how I come by them lions? Wal, I'll tell yer how 'twas."

With a child's greed of stories, I was only too eager to listen.

"I told him his show'd find it pretty poor pickin's in this town," said Mr. Rogers, in conclusion. "I'd done its cobblin' for twenty years and more; but he wasn't for listenin' to me, and so they went off, he and his menagerie all a-growlin' together."

Somehow, it appeared that, after all, Mr. Rogers was the hero of this story; and again it seemed that Mr. Rogers had played a prominent part in the decline and fall of Amos Belden's fortunes; and again, that Jonathan Wilder would have done much better to listen to Mr. Rogers' advice, and thus have averted ruin and consequent auction bills. It was a very artless egotism, not hard to account for. For years the old man had lived alone, his own chief counselor and friend. I do not wonder that he grew a little larger to his own eyes than to other men's; that his imagination, having nothing else to do, built up the past till his memory held fiction as dear as fact. I am quite ready to forgive him his retrospective castle-building, though I was its credulous victim. Then there were marvelous tales of "my son Jim's" adventures in that far-off wonderland, "Out West." I believe three scanty letters furnished these romances their foundation of fact; but I asked no questions and believed with as honest a faith in the gold-paved streets of San Francisco as in those of the New Jerusalem.

"He was a good boy, Jim was," the old man would say. "I never thought hard o' him for goin' off. Ef he only comes back to bury me, that's all I ask. He'll be comin' back one o' these days, rich and harnsome. I hain't a doubt, I shouldn't wonder if he'd be lookin' round for a wife. Let's see. How old are you? I shouldn't wonder if you was just about right for him by that time. You'd make a pretty little pair."

Though Time had stood as still with Jim as his father seemed to think, the idea of my marrying him would have lost none of its uncomfortable grotesqueness.

"Don't, Mr. Rogers," I said.

"Bashful, are you?" he answered, trying to look roguish. "Don't you be for not gettin' merried, though, like the Miss Bucklands, and the Jewbury girls, and the Bassett girls, and all the rest. There's too many on 'em. I used to tell my wife that I was better'n nothin', anyway. It's kind o' shabby in the men to go off and leave the women to die off here up-country all alone. I ain't afraid but Jim'll find somebody easy enough."

"Oh! yes," I said; for I was afraid I had hurt the old man's feelings. "I'm sure he must be very nice."

One accomplishment of Mr. Rogers' I shall never forget. He not only told me stories as he worked, but he professed to be able to read them from his hands, which he held before him like the open passages of a book.

"See! You can look at 'em," he would say. "There's nothin' hid in 'em. No cheatin' about it. Hard and tough. Don't look much like a book, do they? But just hear me read to you out of 'em."

I was completely mystified, especially when the reader stopped to spell out a word, and when he held his hard hands up to the light and complained that it was rather fine print for such old eyes; but still the story went on without a break, and in spite of myself I was brought to the belief that Mr. Rogers possessed some supernatural reading powers, perhaps akin to the mystery of my parsing lesson, which told of "sermons in stones and books in the running brooks."

The Summer and Fall went by, and the Winter came, with sleigh-bells, Santa Claus, and frolics without number; but alas! to the poor and old it brought only a chill that crept into their bones and took up its abode there. Poor old John Rogers! I lifted his latch one day, but the awl lay idle on the bench. It was only the rheumatism that had taken a mean advantage of the infirm knee; but week after week he lay on his bed, and the dust gathered thicker in the little shop. The neighbors were kind, but the best people find a sameness in the constant repetition of good deeds, and by degrees it grew plain that the old man's friends would feel a sense of relief if he got well. It was about this time that my grandmother declared, with a sigh, that she had great respect for Mr. Rogers.

"He's borne up under affliction like a true Christian; but rather shiftless—rather shiftless. I don't know how to reconcile his virtues with the dirt and disorder he lives in. I don't wonder his wife took to her bed."

"They say she was a perfect shrew," said my mother, placidly threading her needle. "Half crazy—so I've heard. Mr. Appleton thinks there's no use in Mr. Rogers' trying to stay by himself this Winter. He'd much better go to the poor-house and be taken good care of. Mrs. Simons, the woman over his shop, says he's hardly a cent left, and she can't be expected to provide for him. I suppose the thought of it will be rather hard for him at first; but he'll be much better off. Lucy, dear, won't you hand me my scissors?"

I gave my mother her scissors, but felt that by the act I became a conspirator in this plot for the final degradation of my poor old friend. I sat by his bed next day, when who should appear at the door but my father. I felt that the plot was thickening.

"Well, how are you, Mr. Rogers?" said my father, in his hearty voice. "Feeling pretty smart to-day?"

"Yes, I'm pretty smart, thank ye. I hain't got them boots o' yourn quite ready yet, though. I'll try and take hold o' 'em to-morrow. I'm sorry you had the trouble o' comin' after 'em for nothin'. I can send 'em by your little gal. I dunno's you know what a good little gal she is to come and see me."

"I like to come," I said.

My father seemed in no hurry to go, and said, at length:

"Rather lonely here by yourself, isn't it, Mr. Rogers?"

"Well, I dunno's I've much to complain of. Mrs. Simons, up-stairs, looks after things, and I tell her to spend the money in the little black tea-pot. There's other folks worse off."

My father looked puzzled.

"I declare, Mr. Rogers, you've known what trouble was, haven't you? See! how many years was your wife laid up? And you've lost about all your children, and now here you are yourself."

"Yes, yes," said the old man; "but these ain't the sort o' things I try to let my mind dwell on while I'm a-lyin' here. I try to count up my mercies."

My father looked desperate.

"Well, now, Mr. Rogers, I think and my wife thinks that you ought to go somewhere else."

"I ain't got anywhere to go, sir. I'm all alone in the world. It's true what you say."

"But, Mr. Rogers, to be plain, you know I'm one of the selectmen, and I'd see that the town took good care of you—better care than Mrs. Simons does."

"I dunno's I quite catch your meaning, sir. Does anybody find fault with Mrs. Simons?"

"No, no. I don't mean that. I mean we think you'd better go down to Mr. Miles' to spend the Winter. He keeps the town farm, you know."

"You mean to the poor-house, sir? I warn't very bright ter see."

The old man turned his faded eyes imploringly up to my father's face.

"Well, yes; that's what they call it, though I must say I never quite liked the name."

The old cobbler's face seemed to grow white and aged before our very eyes. The tears rolled slowly down his cheeks. With the instinct to decently hide his trouble, he drew up the old bed-quilt with a tremulous hand and turned his face to the wall.

"I dunno but I've asked too much," he said in a broken voice. "I've sort o' hung onto the idee that I should die before I come ter that. If the Lord 'ud only give me somethin' I could die of!"

"Lucy," said my father, "didn't I hear somebody in the shop? Go and see."

Two strangers had just entered the door—a tall young man, dressed in a suit of lively plaid, and accompanied by a pleasant-faced young woman, in a white bonnet.

"Mr. Rogers is sick," I said. "He can't mend shoes now."

"Sick, did you say he was? Where is he?"

"He's in there. I don't believe he wants anybody to come in."

The young man gave me a queer look.

"I guess you don't know who I am. I guess he'll be willing to see me."

By this time he stood in the door between the two rooms. Mr. Rogers' face was turned away, and my father was looking intently into the back yard. The stranger glanced uneasily about and said not a word. I am sure it must have been a relief to him, as well as to me, when, at last, my father turned suddenly round and said:

"Why, who's this?"

"It's somebody come to see Mr. Rogers," I answered, faintly.

"Don't you know me? Don't you know me, father?" the stranger burst out. "It's me. It's Jim come back. And out there's my wife."

I laugh now to think of the absurd sense of relief this last revelation caused me.

"Jimmy? Come home?" the old man murmured, in a dazed, scared way. "I ain't out o' my head. I'm awake. I know what you're goin' ter do with me. You're going ter take me ter the poor-house."

"Take you to the poor-house, father? What are you talking about? You're going to my house. You're going to live in style, I tell you. No poor-house about that. Ain't you glad to see me? Say, Mame, come in here and see my poor old dad!"

There was a moment's silence. Slowly, very slowly the old man understood; slowly he raised himself in bed, and, holding up his trembling hand, said, solemnly:

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform."

INFANT OUTLAWS.

CHILDREN INCARCERATED IN THE SAN FRANCISCO INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL AND FORGOTTEN—INORDINATE SENTENCES.

A lady who lately visited the San Francisco Industrial School has written up for the *Chronicle* some scenes and incidents that came under her observation. She finds a large proportion of the boys under restraint to be shrewd and hardened criminals, reared in the vilest surroundings, and possessing criminal instincts as a heritage from degraded parents, and every boy who enters the school is inevitably subjected to the most corrupting and contaminating influences. Add to this the fact that, except in rare instances, commitment to the school means to remain there until a boy's twenty-first year is completed, and some conception may be formed of the effect; while it is a matter of little wonder that a large proportion of those discharged after serving a six months' term promptly put into execution the results of the superior knowledge acquired during the period of their incarceration, and are very sure to return speedily within its precincts on more serious charges than the first.

In the latter class it is safe to include Henry Wolf, who, in October, 1873, was eight years old, with a boyish mania for lighting matches, and who, when a neighboring out-house was discovered to be in flames, was hauled up to the Police Court and charged with the crime of arson, convicted, and sentenced to the Industrial School until he was of age. He remained a year and was then returned to his parents. There is nothing to indicate that Henry was otherwise than a good little boy during the next twelve months, but at the expiration of that time a straw stack in the neighborhood was discovered on fire, his boy comrades accused him of lighting it, and strenuously asserting his innocence, the child was carried off again to remain four years, during which time he made his escape once, but was speedily recaptured. At the expiration of that time he was granted an indefinite leave of absence, but the effect of five years' bad association had effectually molded the forming character, and but a short period elapsed before he was convicted of petty larceny, and the child, whom a sound spanking, judiciously administered, might have redeemed in the first instance, is now regarded as one of the most hardened cases in the school.

George Henry Williams, a little mulatto boy, was committed to the institution in April, 1880, charged by his aunt with misdemeanor in running away from home. He was consigned to the school for thirteen years. When the child took his introductory bath at the institution, the officers were shocked to find his body a mass of the most cruel bruises. The child has been well-behaved and tractable during his stay in the school, and is always horror-stricken if anything is said about sending him back to his aunt.

John Healey, a good-looking lad of eight years, prior to his arrest for house-breaking, lived with his parents at No. 4 Jessie street. The child realizes that he has done wrong, but has been too familiar with crime to feel any great contrition. An interview drew forth some striking revelations in the life of this youthful Arab.

"Did you ever go to school?"

"No, ma'am."

"Don't you know your letters?"

The boy shook his head, shamefacedly.

"What does your father do?"

"Gets drunk all the time and beats mother."

"How does he make a living?"

"He works on boats and my mother washes."

"What does your mother do when your father beats her? Does she fight, too?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; she takes the little baby and runs over to Miss Finnigan's."

"What do you do?"

"I go and get the pleeceman to 'rest him. I've got him 'rested four times."

This lad's accessory in crime, Richard Bowles, a boy of nine, was perceived at once to be of a very different type from the former. A slight boy, with light-brown hair and gentle eyes, he came in and stood timidly at the visitor's side, evidently braced up for a painful ordeal, and answering all the questions in a clear, manly voice.

"What are you here for, Richard?"

"For stealing some brass. John Healey told me to come with him and get some brass to sell. I asked him 'was he a-going to steal it?' and he said 'no.' He took me to an alley, near Market and Fremont, and I didn't know we had no right to take it until I was arrested."

"Where do your parents live, and what do they do?"

"We live at No. 61 Jessie street. My father used to be foreman in the Union Foundry, but he's dead. My mother takes in washing."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"Just one little sister [a gulp]. My brother is a big boy and works in the boiler foundry."

"Is your mother good to you?"

"Oh, yes ma'am, always. I went to the Tehama-street school."

"Did she want you sent here?"

The child's lip quivered painfully, and he answered brokenly:

"No, ma'am. She didn't want me sent away—from her—at all; she felt awfully. She never wanted me to talk bad, or anything."

The boy's teeth were firmly set together, but the long-repressed tears flooded his cheeks, while his whole frame shook with stifled sobs.

Superintendent McLaughlin, who had heard the history of the case and closely observed the boy for the first time, gave assurance that he would warmly second any application for the child's release.

Louis Farraro, a somewhat obstinate-featured little Italian, seven years old, brought up on a charge of petty larceny, related, with modest pride, that he had been arrested six times previous to September 6th, which sealed his fate.

Willie Phillips, commonly called by the boys "Sunshine," because of his perpetually sunny temper and sunny smiles, was placed in the institution in 1876, when 9 years of age, by his aunt, Mrs. Harmon, the boy being accused of no crime or offense. There he has remained for five years, the associate of juvenile criminals, but seemingly uncontaminated by his playmates. When asked if he would like to go away, he answered that he would like to go into the country somewhere and be earning his way in the world.

Straight as an arrow, lithe and graceful, with noble face, ink-black hair and bright dark eyes, a little Modoc Indian is presented to view. The child was adopted by a soldier named William Murphy, and at the time of the latter's death, in 1877, the boy, eight years old, was placed in the Industrial School, for protection, by Mayor Bryant, and has remained there ever since, forgotten save by those in whose charge he was placed. He is reputed to be honest, polite and exceedingly bright, though a very quiet child. He, too, would like to go away somewhere and labor in an honorable occupation.

Francis Mahoney, a bunchy little fellow with a freckled, intelligent face, eleven years old, is sentenced for 10 years for battery on a policeman.

Such instances as the foregoing may be multiplied. It is evident that the law should be more intelligent and discreet in its operation, and there is great need of some ordinance or provision by which the boys taken from bad homes, who give hope of leading good lives if removed from their bad associations, could be bound out into good homes in the country and given encouragement and opportunity for reform, instead of being sent to the Industrial School, where all the influences are of the opposite tendency.

THE ANGEL OF DEATH NOT WANTED.—To people who in rash moments wish themselves dead, comes this parable, to show them if taken at their word they would soon retract and plead for life: "A certain feeble old man had gathered a load of sticks, and was carrying it home. He became very tired on the road, and flinging down his burden, he cried out: 'O Angel of Death, deliver me from this misery!' At that instant the Angel of Death, in obedience to his summons, appeared before him, and asked him what he wanted. On seeing the frightful figure the old man, trembling, replied: 'O friend, be pleased to assist me, that I may lift once more this burden upon my shoulder; for this purpose only have I called you!'"—*Chambers' Journal.*

Ladies looking for sons-in-law rarely make their approaches so openly as the Canadian dame who wrote to a newly-settled eligible: "Dear Mr. B——: I, Mrs. Wigton, wish you would call on my daughter Amelia; she is very amusing, and a regular young flirt. She can sing like a humming bird, and her papa can play on the fiddle nicely; and we might have a rare old ho-down, and then we will have an oyster supper. Amelia is highly educated; she can dance like a grasshopper looking for grubs, and she can make beautiful bread, and for pumpkin pies she can't be beat. In fact, she is ahead of all the F—— girls, and will make a good wife for any man. Yours truly, Mrs. Wigton. Bring your brother."