Literature.

TIM'S INITIATIVE.

"I don't think we shall need you after tonight, Timothy."

The blow had fallen at last. Tim had expected it for weeks. In fact, from the moment Lawyer Dodd had remarked to his partner, "Well, we'll try him anyway," Tim had known he would not suit; and time had only confirmed him in this conviction.

The lawyers were so sharp and quick their errands full of strange terms, hard to remember, and despatched to strange places, hard to find. And when he was left alone in the office, and other lawyers came in, all quick and sharp, like his own employers, how confused he grew!

How he blundered at the telephone! How he always failed to say the right thing to clients! How he hit upon the utterly wrong thing to say to the judge one day, and saw Mr. Dodd slap his long yellow envelope on the desk and swing his chair around and look at him, as much as to say, "You born dunce!"

"You don't seem to take hold as we would like to have you," explained Mr. Dodd, counting out two two-dollar bills, a dollar over Tim's usual week's pay, but the last that he was to receive from his employer—the last perhaps, he was to receive from anybody, he thought, as he shuffled disconsolately down the stairs.

It was a sad story to tell his mother; though, of course, being his mother, she would be easier than anyone else.

"Well, it's too bad, Timmie, losing your very first place, but I suppose you can look about for another one."

"Oh, yes," replied Tim, choking up at her sympathy. But when he went to his own room and looked out of the window, it really did not seem any use. It was the recommendation from his grammar school that had got him this place; but now he hadn't any recommendation. And who would take a discharged office boy?

However, next morning he faithfully copied out all the 'Boy Wanted' advertisements in the Saturday paper, and on Monday started out early to try his luck. At noon he came home discouraged; at supper he had no appetite at all.

Sometimes the place had just been taken by another boy. The 'Help Wanted' column had many readers, it seemed. Sometimes a bigger boy than Tim was wanted, and how Tim wished he was tall! Sometimes it was a smaller boy, and Tim regretted his long trousers.

Sometimes the faces of the women clerks, looking sideways from their desks at the candidate for Harry or Charlie's position, froze his courage completely. His voice sank low, and he grew in his own esteem twice as shabby and humble as he really was. Then he saw clouds of doubt gathering on the face of the manager or floor-walker, and heard him conclude the examination with a blunt 'You won't do'; or, perhaps the more evasive, "Well, I think we'll make other arrangements; or, gentlest of all, but knelling with no less certainty the doom of his modest application, "Leave me your address, so that if we should need you we shall know where to send."

Two weeks of constant rejection sapped Tim's hopes most lamentably. He dreaded to turn an office door-knob. He began to look upon employers as a class apart from other men, of stern, inquisitorial temper and disposition that could not be pleased.

"It's too bad we haven't some friend who could get you a place, Timmie," said his mother. That was just what Tim had been thinking, himself. Naturally, he and his mother had certain traits in common. "But I can't think of any; so you keep on trying, like a good boy, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, replied Tim, "I'll keep trying."

But two months went by, and he had not energy left for a real hearty try. To be sure he dreamed every night of golden strokes of fortune, and usually started toward town in the morning determined to "do something, anyway." But even this vague determination oozed away after he had crossed his threshold; and the upshot of every journey was a random saunter through the streets with his hands in his pockets, and a far-away, desolate look in his eyes.

Now and then he would stop at a store window with a sudden jerk, then turn aside after a short survey, move to the next corner and halt a minute before he decided whether to proceed to the right or to the left. He ran to all the fires. He stood in line with the crowd on the curbstone to watch the procession. He idled into the reading-room of the public library; everywhere an easily recognized picture of irresolution and failure.

One evening, as Tim came home, tired, despondent and a little sulky, he met Nellie at the gate. This was no unusual occurrence, as Nellie lived next door, and their families used the same passage-way.

Now Nellie was as brisk a girl as ever swung a broom, which was just her occupation this evening. She had the gift of making things and people go her way. The babies, no matter how many, could not override, for a minute; and arm akimbo, with a stamp of her foot, she could scare the surliest prowler from her yard. Moreover, unlike Tim, she liked to talk to people, to push out into the world and expand her knowledge and experience.

With these qualities, she made an excellent housekeeper for her father, and although barely sixteen assumed capably the place of the mother who was gone.

Her sleeves were rolled up to the elbows; her eyes were on Mamie and Eddie, straying a little too far up the street; and the open house door showed that she had left some unfinished task behind her.

"Hello," she said, as the wanderer shambled in.

"Hello, Nelly."

He saw that her eyes were fixed on him critically, and felt that he was not altogether fit for inspection.

"Aren't you working yet, Tim?"

Now this question, when put by anybody else than, of course, his mother, was in Tim's sensitive ears a thrust, a veiled innuendo, an unfavorable verdict. But he and Nelly had for a long time made friendly eyes at each other and exchanged intimate confidences. For, if Tim was unfortunate, he was also, according to the standard of that neighborhood, distinctly 'nice.' So Nelly's voice had a ring of sympathy in it, which relieved the harshness of the most embarrassing question.

"No," said Tim," "not yet."

"Why can't you get a place, Tim?"

"I don't know," he answered, with a sickly little smile. "I wish I could."

"I guess you try hard enough."

"Oh, yes, I've tried." Tim was truthful. He put his statement in the present perfect tense. "But it's pretty hard."

"Other fellows get jobs. There's Jack White, only graduated with you, and now he's clerk in a dry goods store."

"Yes, but Jack White's a fine writer, and I'm no good at writing."

"Well, there's Walter Craig works in a meat shop."

"Yes, I know. He got the place I was going to get. His big brother goes with the man that started the store and—"

"Oh, well, there lots of other places. Don't you ever see any chances?"

"Ye-es," replied Tim, slowly. "Yesterday I went in to get a place, but the man asked me if I could make change, and I never made change—"

"But you could! Of course you could! And you've got to make them think so. Spunk up to anybody. That's the way to get along. Why don't you try selling papers?"

"Oh, I'm too old to sell papers?"

"You aren't as old as the Martin boy."

"Oh, well, he always sold papers."

Nelly flicked some dust off the wooden gate. "I know what I'd do. I'd get a waggon and peddle."

"Oh, people wouldn't buy anything of a boy like me."

"Nonsense! You went round with Dineen last summer, and everybody said you hollered fine."

Determined as he was to deny himself every imaginable virtue, Tim could not contradict Nelly's last assertion. His voice was famous, both for power and quality, althoug curiously enough, when he tried to say the simple words, 'I saw in the papers this morning that you w-wanted a b-b-boy,' it would sink to the feeblest, huskiest whisper that any employer ever heard from an applicant.

"Anyway, I haven't any waggon or anything," protested Tim, more fertile in imagining obstacles than expedients.

"That wouldn't cost much," said Nelly, a little doubtedly, because the price of waggons was beyond her range. "How much do you have to pay for a horse?"

"Ten dollars. That's what Dineen paid for his."

"And a waggon—a second-hand one, I mean?"

"Oh, I don't know anybody that has one to sell."

"Well, if I was a boy, I'd make one," said Nelly, sharply, and when Tim looked in her eyes this time, he saw that they were not quite like his mother's, after all. They were sympathetic, but they also seemed to be examining him, probing him, just like the eyes of those terrible managers and floor walkers and employers.

"Where's Dineen's wagon! He isn't peddling this year," said Nelly.

"Oh, I forgot that. But that's all—old and—kinder—"

"Couldn't you paint it up?"

"Oh, I'm no good at painting."

"You're too—too bashful to live, Timmie Tighe. You just want somebody to plant you in a chair, and put a pen in your hand and tell you what to write, and you'll write it. But they never will; and you'll go to the bad, if you don't look out. That's what you'll do."

"Oh, no, I won't do that, Nellie.

"I wish I was a boy."

"Besides,"—the idea of the peddler's wagon haunted him strangely—"I'd have to have a license, anyway."

"What of it?"

"Where'd I get the money?"

"Your mother has some. She could set you up. You could get a license easily enough, and a waggon, too, and a horse, and stock, and everything, if you weren't—such a great big baby."

Tim looked once more in Nelly's eyes. Now Nelly was not a queen nor a heroine of any sort. But the fire which she flashed forth at that moment was the very inspiration which has urged kings and conquerers to their greatest achievements—some of them no more adventurous in the beginning than our halting friend, Tim Tighe. Tim read it correctly. He saw fate in those eyes; he saw initiative. They said 'Must'; they said 'Will'; they refused with scorn to accept any paltering negative like 'Can't.'

A week later he announced casually to Nelly that he had bought Dineen's old horse and waggon; and the look in her eyes was friendly once more. It had been hard work to persuade his mother to advance so much money; but if a boy cannot persuade his mother, what hope has he of moving the world outside?

Tim's first investment was a stock of blueberries. Columbus journeying westward, in momentary peril of falling over the brink of the world; Nansen, pushing north, nearer and nearer to the pole, but farther and farther from kin and succor,—neither of these heroes could have felt more venturesome than Tim Tighe, daring to drive his newly-painted waggon through the strange city streets, and to send into the cold ears of residents and passing pedestrians that loud clamor of his:

"Blueberries—all ripe—three quarts for a quarter."

The first time he shouted, the sound of his own voice startled him; he seemed to hear the words thrown back in derision. But Willy, Nelly's ten-year-old brother, who sat on the waggon seat to 'mind the team,' seconded his effort with such a shrill, cheery chirp, "Yeer they are—blueberries—all ripe!" that Tim felt ashamed of his timidity.

They had resolved to experiment in a distant quarter of the city. For fully fifteen minutes their cries were unanswered; but at last a neat old lady called Tim to her doorstep, inspected his berries, and ordered three quarts.

That three quart order was the making of a man. Tim did not sweep the berries off level with the top of his measure. Far from it! They rose in a great mound from the middle of the box, and when he turned them into the lady's brown earthenware dish, they actually spilled over at the sides.

He counted out the change with his left hand with a new feeling of importance; and the very horse started with excitement when he tossed the measure back into the wagon and sang out boldly, with florid variations of his tune:

"Nice ripe blueberries yeer—three quarts for a quarter!"

At dusk one great box of berries was empty and another well hollowed in the middle; Willy was hoarse, and Tim, who did the walking, was tired; but his pockets were heavy with silver, which he jingled for Nelly's satisfaction—she happened to be at the gate again—and counted out on the table for his delighted mother.

Next evening the return was larger. Gradually customers began to watch for him and he for them. His cry was a warning signal which in quiet quarters could be heard a block away. It distinguished itself sharply from other peddler's cries. Really it was like a song compared with theirs. Perhaps that was why the nice old ladies called him so often to their door steps. His being a boy did not deter them in the least.

For a week he did not venture to peddle in his own neighborhood. But one evening as he was driving home, a stray customer tempted him, and his call was heard by some schoolboy acquaintances, whose curiosity was aroused.

"Hello, Tim! Where's Dineen?"

"This isn't Dineen's team."

"Whose is it?"

Mine."

The others raised their elbows before their faces, which, being interpreted, meant "Get out."

"It is, too!" said Willie, on the waggon-seat.

"Where did you get it?"

"His mother bought it," said Willie.

"Did she? Aw, you can't jolly us!"

"I ain't trying to."

"Gee! You've got the cheek!"

A week before Tim would have wilted this contempt. Now his views had changed; he knew it was a compliment. It was their way of saying he was enterprising.

The period of his awakening was vacation time one year ago. This summer Tim's stock includes all kinds of fruit and vegetables in their season. If you should see him reaching over the tail-board to fill a peck measure with tomatoes, you would hardly recognize the desolate saunderer who used to stop so often at the store windows. Watching him expand the 'orble flex' of his mouth to emit the full fortissimo of his splendid lungs, you would not believe that he could ever say, "I s-saw your advertisement for a b-boy," in such a half-inaudible whisper that the employer quite mechanically doubled the volume of his stentorian 'What?'

His whole air is fearless and prosperous. The very horse realizes a change. The mere way in which Tim shouts, "Get up!" or snuggles down a loose end of the blanket, or pulls Dobbin's ears under the strap of the feed-bag, or hops up on the seat and stands there, shaking the reins, his eyes alert in all direction for a customer, stamps him as an independent proprietor.

To be sure, all he owns is a peddler's waggon; but it is well-painted, not lopsided like some, and as tidy on top as any fruiterer's stall. And although Tim gives good measure, and knows that it "pays," he has learned that such wasteful generosity as that which he heaped the measure for his first sale depresses his bank account.

The other day he met Mr. Dodd, the lawyer, on the street, and the two had a chat of several minutes, at the end of which Tim politely but firmly dismissed his old employer in order to serve a customer.

Of course there is nothing he would not do for Nelly Gray. There good understanding continues. In fact they meet every morning and evening. But Nelly has grown singularly shy lately. If anything happens between them, it will have to be Tim who takes the initiative.

"Are you willing to work for your dinner?" asked the woman.

"Dat depends on wot you wants done," replied the tramp.

"I want you to beat that carpet hanging on the line over there," she said.

"Lady," answered the wanderer, "I'm poor and I'm hungry, but I'm honest, and I'm not goin to begin beatin me way t'rough de world at dis late day."—Chicago news.

Wheels. "I feel as if I had wheels in my head!" groaned the man.

"It must be the truck you ate for dinner, rejoined his wife, innocently enough."

"Did you hear what Aunt Hetty says?"

"No. What now?"

"She says she wonders why they don't build cities in the country, where there's more room."—Philadelphia Bulletin.

Ikey—"Please, farder, gif me a dime for ice cream. I vas so hot!"

Father—"Ikey, mein shon, dot is a vaist of money. I vill tell you a fine ghost story dot vill make your blood run cold."
