

Sunday Reading.

KNOWN BY A NUMBER.

The Story of a Shoemaker Who Helped His Fellow-men to do Better.

In a blind lane at the back of a large block of buildings off Tooley street, London, two men were stripped ready for a fight. I walked up towards them with the intention of acting the peacemaker.

'Better not interfere, sir,' said a woman, gently thumping her arm, 'they're brothers—more the pity—and wouldn't stand it from a stranger; but we've sent for "37," and he'll be here afore they can hurt themselves.'

'You should not have sent for the police in a case like this,' said I, 'they will only make a bad matter worse.'

'Oh, "37" ain't a policeman,' was the reply, 'but he'll settle that fight quicker nor half a dozen bobbies.'

Before I could speak another word the two brothers had rushed at each other, and were savagely struggling together. Almost at the same time a little man quietly pushed his way through the crowd of people that had assembled, and, slipping between the combatants, lifted both arms, saying:

'I say—no!'

Never shall I forget the scene. The fighting was immediately stopped, and the two men slunk away to some iron railings hard by, against which they sullenly leaned. No one in the little crowd stirred or made the slightest sound, and nothing could be heard save the quick breathing of the men who had just been fighting. It seemed like the stilling of the storm on the lake of Galilee.

The man who had thus exercised his almost supernatural power over the storm of human passions was not more than five feet in height, and had a thin, withered appearance. He was clean shaven, and his close-cropped hair was as white as snow. Dressed in shabby grey clothes and wearing a leather apron, he had the appearance of a shoemaker.

At the first glance he seemed to me a very old man, but, observing him more closely, I could see that he was aged in looks more than in years. As he turned away from the crowd, followed sheepishly by the two brothers, I said to the women who had before spoken to me:

'What a strange being!'

'He is that, sir,' she replied, almost in a whisper, as if struck with awe.

'Where does he live?'

'37, Brunswick Buildings.'

'Do you know his name?'

'Nobody knows it, sir. We call him

'37,' 'cos that's his number in the build-

ings; and he's never called by anything

else, at least about here.'

'What can be the secret of his strange

power over these men, and others around

here? You, for example, are under the

spell.'

'I expect we're all of us in his debt,

sir,' she replied, 'and I don't see as we

shall ever be out of it. Me and my man

never will, I knows that.'

'Does he lend the people money?'

I asked.

'What! A money lender! Do'e look

like it?'

'I cannot say that he does. Neither

does he look like a creditor of any de-

scription people need be afraid of.'

But as yet 'art, sir, there ain't a soul in

th' buildin's afraid o' "37," but everybody

loves 'im.'

'Humph! Debtors don't very often love

their creditors.' And then our Lord's

parable came to my mind, and I repeated

it to her: 'There was a certain creditor

which had two debtors; the one owed five

hundred pence, and the other fifty, and

when they had nothing to pay he frankly

forgave them both. Tell me, therefore,

which of them will love him most.'

'Is it like that?'

'No, sir, it ain't; but come along and

ask my man.'

She led the way up to the third flat and

into her own sitting-room, where the hus-

band, evidently a docker, was sitting be-

fore the fire, reading an evening paper.

'Here Jack,' she said, almost laughing,

'this gen'lman is curious to know what it

is we owe "37," perhaps he thinks to pay

it off and get us out o' debt.'

'Then he must be wonderful rich, Polly,

said Jack, entering into the humor of the

thing. 'It ain't very often we gets such

wealthy men in these buildings. Please

take a seat, sir.'

'You puzzle me, said I. 'What is it you

are indebted to "37" for?'

'Kindness, sir, God bless him!' he ex-

claimed.

'Amen!' responded the wife, and tear

stood in her eyes.

'May I ask you to explain?'

'I'll tell you what we mean, sir, in a

few words as possible. Two years ago I

was one o' the biggest drunkards about

the place, and he meets me one day, an

says he, in a short, sudden way as knock-

ed the wind out o' me, "Jack, if you don't

pull up you are a lost man." He said

nothin' more at that time, but a few days

arter tackled me again as I was comin' up

these steps, not to say drunk, but just as

little bit fresh, "You haven't pulled up

yet, Jack," and he stood lookin' at me for

a minute or so. As soon as I'd got back

my breath, I says, "Can't do it, "37,"

upon my word." Before that little

man, sir, I felt like an infant. "So,

so, do you want to?" says he. "I do, "37,"

says I, for there came over me a feelin'

all at once as I'd like to be a different man.

"So, so, come up to my room." I foller'd

'in up all of a tremble. "Sit down, Jack,"

pointin' to a chair, while he sat down on

his bench an' begun waxin' a piece o'

thread. Lookin' me straight in th' face,

says he, "Jack, you are a fool." "You

never spoke a truer word, "37," says I.

He didn't speak for a minute, but went on

patchin' an old shoe. Presently he says,

"Been to church lately Jack?" I laughed

at that. "Not since I war a boy." He draw'd

th' wax-end through th' leather agen, an'

says he, "So, so, mother took you, eh?"

Let us both thank th' Lord for good

mothers," and puttin' down th' old shoe he

says a short prayer. I was beginnin' to

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