

would call by no less sonorous words than a "growing ability" and the fact that my great toe persisted in crowding its passage through the leather, brought me frequently to my "Old Curiosity Shop." Thus it was that I became intimate with a person, of whom at the best, I shall sketch in a bungling manner a mere outline, for this man was in the truest sense, a character.

The room that the old man occupied was not very large, nor was it fastidiously clean. It faced the west on the main street of my native town. Large cases, extending on two sides and almost reaching the ceiling had out-swinging glass doors, whose knobs were spools. Within I might gaze provided I took the pains to rub these dusty doors, seemingly as little used as the gun of immortal Rip after his sleep of a score of years. Often I stood before them with natural boyish curiosity while boot-jacks, boxes of pegs, lasts, old shoes, new shoes which the owners had failed to call for, balls of thread, and large chunks of wax smiled down upon me, and laughed to each other at the hole in my socks which I vainly tried to hide. Hanging without on one of the spool-knobs was a large sombre documentary-looking paper with a gilt seal in the lower left-hand corner, standing out in strong antithesis to the rest of the room's embellishment. As soon as I could read, with great difficulty I figured out these words: "This certifies that James McMahon is hereby given first award for hand-made boots and shoes at the Dodge County fair of 1879." Upon congratulating my old friend he said with considerable bitterness, his voice, always uneven, now cracking worse than a fiddle in the hands of a novice, "Yis, they gave me that pace of piper but niver a cint."

The large, old-fashioned stove stood a little east of the center of the room, the sewing machine was in the northeast corner. A little in front of the stove appeared the friendly bench very low and very much worn. And on this bench, raised so

slightly, the cobbler hammered away his life—stitched and pounded into the unconscious leather the thoughts of the present, the considerations of the future, and the memories of the past. On all sides boots and shoes, shoes and boots—, his subject—and so great was their obedience to his dexterous fingers that he might have exclaimed, "I too am monarch of all I survey."

He that sat upon that bench is not so easily described. He usually wore a rusty pair of boots, coarse pants, tied up with straps, fixed for their office by his own hands, a rough flannel shirt, and the regulation shoe maker's apron. His shoulders were somewhat bent, indeed, how could they be otherwise? The short neck and wrinkled face would have been a fit study for an artist. His eyebrows were heavy, his eyes bright and searching. Every part seemed to proclaim, "Here is a man" and gave an earnest of honesty contained within that never went unfulfilled. Yet words fail to carry my meaning. Oh that countenance; deep, thoughtful, intense, only to be likened to the pictures of Savonarola.

Between the man and his wife there existed one similarity and many contrasts. The likeness may be seen in the fact that both were Irish and hence their dialect was the same. The cobbler's hair was in places streaked with white, his worthy spouse was covered with gold, his nose was strongly builded as though to resist a cavalry charge, and tipped with red, giving the impression that the sun was just about to rise, (no doubt this redness was absorbed from the glowing stove), hers was dwarfed and freckled; and according to an unwritten law of matrimony, since he was very small, she went to the other extreme.

Back of the shoe shop was the bed-room, kitchen and dining room—combined in one—and south of it was a partly-covered pen, in which two pigs grunted and squealed as contented as two pigs that any have ever trod this earth. Many a time,