

un, but Mike, he'd skin him if he told. You reckon Willie Marks 'll take keer of hisself anyways, don't you?"

"O," I replied, "you don't think they'll do anything. 'Well, I dunno, Miss,' and he shook his head in grave doubt, 'them's mean chaps and when they git ter figurin' out to make a poor little feller feel bad, they has ways. You rekilleet the other time. You see Willie Marks slapped Mike yisterday, and I'm glad on't. But if they does a thing to Willie Marks I'll fix 'em warm now.'"

With this favorite threat, he pulled his old fur cap down around his head and went down the stairs as slowly and painfully as he had come up.

We had never heard a complaint from Uncle Bob about rheumatism, hard times or personal griefs except the death of his little Annie, which almost broke his old heart. Only a few things could disturb his cheery good humor or make the twinkle in his grey eyes turn to a flash. We never forgot how roused he was over the "first war" when the boys drove Tommie Jordan over to Hardwick's to work.

I remember "the scribbler" had said, calmly sticking his pen behind his ear and glancing around at Uncle Bob:

"Why, Uncle Bob, you're unduly excited to make a commotion over such a trifling matter. Let them eat each other if they desire to, we can secure plenty of young bipeds to take their situations."

Whereat Uncle Bob snorted:

"And you don't care. Well now I do, and I'll fix 'em warm too, fur it. One little feller against a hull parcel of big lanky boys"—some of them were smaller than Tommie, but Uncle Bob didn't think of that—"You see, young feller, you aint got much creature sympathies."

But that time all of Uncle's efforts were useless, though the boys were fond of him. In the store they could only plague Tommie by taking his time, leaving him to answer several calls at once and receive the usual

scolding. He stood it only a week and then went to work at Hardwick's.

And now we were in for a second war it seemed. "The scribbler" announced he was on the winning side; whichever that was.

The trouble began almost imperceptibly. Big Mike never passed Dingus' counter without some sign of hostility. Robbie, the boy with the yellow hair, was Dingus' only defender among the boys, and he was too small to fight. Dingus was sly; he could win in a game of cunning. We noticed he never called proudly for "cash" again, but beckoned to Robbie, or sent the customer to another counter. But one morning Dingus came in with his head bandaged, and Uncle Bob was furious—"Why the big lanky devils," he cried. "And they won't do that again I'll tell you."

But Uncle Bob was old and slow and good tempered, and the boys were quick and hot; so he could do little with them. Mike was leader, and Mike hated Uncle Bob, because once the old man had summarily stopped him when he was catching Tabby's tail in the cellar door.

As the winter days went on, we noticed that Dingus grew quieter and less active and walked just a little lame. The clerks did not like to ask him to bring blankets for it seemed to hurt him.

There were snow-ball fights, trippings on the icy street corners, we were told, but were too busy to think much of it. Only we paid more attention to Dingus and came to like him thoroughly for his gentle, though nervous, half-scared ways. We called him up as often as we could to tie packages or to eat his lunch with us, but the boys left in charge of his cases spoiled his neat work then.

"Stoker Bros." as the "the scribbler" called the fat, silent partner who came up once a week regularly, said once, as he thrust his chubby hands deep in his pockets:

"I tell you, I'd put a stop to such doings in a jiffy, I'd fire Dingus and be done with