

But the countenance of the bootblack of the "Best Home"
was even more noticeable than his form. A narrow, almost
pinched face, growing broad across the eyes with a high
forehead and a straight nose with that peculiar flexi-
bility, or rather mobility of nostril which the is claimed to
be indication of ^{the} Emancipation, thin lips and a peculiar
blue gray complexion that seemed singularly peculiar
of his whole being, were the things which first struck the
attention of a stranger. Closer observation showed that
the same blue-gray tint seemed to have been even inten-
sified upon the lips which lacked all trace of redness so
that the rows of ^{closest} even teeth shined with startling
whiteness between them. After a time one became con-
scious, as he studied the physiognomy of the man,
that a part of its strange effect was due to the entire ab-
sence of hair. His head was bald - not partially
but absolutely. The black knitted cap he wore could
not conceal that fact; there was no trace of
beard, and even the great round silver mounted
spectacles could not hide the ^{total} ^{absence of} ~~fact that~~ of
eyebrows on the ^{somewhat} prominent forehead. These glasses
effectually concealed his eyes except when the light was
very dim as it seldom was in the wash-room of the great hotel.

Such as near as words, one feature him was the man who came down the stairs, ~~into~~ turned up the lights in the wash-room and began to undo the package he had received from the clerk. When he had taken off the cover of the box and a light paper wrapping he took out of ~~the box~~ an overcoat made of rich material with a fur lining collar and furred sleeves.

"That's a nice coat" he said after examining it carefully "and it was kind of Ben to get it for me. He ought not to have done it though; he don't get as big wages as not to have plenty to do with because for them without buying such a coat as that for me. I had about made up my mind to offer him a better chance and I reckon this opens the way to do it."

There was not hardly a trace of the negro dialect which had been noticeable in his conversation a little while before, but on the contrary a smoothness and accuracy which evidently showed that the boot-lick of the "Beet House" had not associated with the basest men of the nation without learning the refinements of speech that precluded among them. He took up a card which he found in one of the pockets and read

Petrolus Prime Eye
"Christmas Gift"

"What does he want to stick to the 'Esquire' for? The idea of calling one of any complexion 'Esquire'. No one but a colored man would think of doing so. It doesn't mean anything as between white men but no white man would ever use it in addressing a negro. If it ~~doesn't~~ does not mean rank, it means equality. 'Christmas gift' too! Well, I'm glad he's a nigger. I should hate to get a present that really meant consideration from a white man. There's no danger though," he added with a quick laugh, "I suppose I'll get the worth of that coat dog in extra fees, perhaps more, but it will all be flung to me like a ^{business} ~~frank~~ bone to a dog after a good dog's sport. That's always the white man's notion of a Christmas gift to a nigger."

The white teeth made the man's sneer horribly sardonic. He laid the coat on one of the chairs, took out a bunch of keys opened a drawer in the desk and spread out on the platform the instruments of his vocation - a half dozen brushes a sponge, a scraper and a ^{bunch of cotton rags} ~~bunch or two of cotton~~ cloth. Then he ^{lifted} took out a flat marble slab, took

it over to one of the washstands, sponged it off and
bringing it back wiped it dry with the cloths. After
that he put on it a small quantity of blacking
with a ~~wooden~~ spatula, moistened it with liquid
from two or three bottles - ejecting it with a quick &
jerk from through quills in the corks - worked it
evenly and carefully with the spatula, testing its
consistency until he seemed satisfied with the result.

"Never nobody ever found out the secret of
this mixture" he said as he watched it drop from
the edge of the spatula. "Ben mixes it as well as I
but I don't think he has any idea what it's made
of. I've made a good thing by it and there's a
fortune in it yet. Everybody thinks it's the way the work
is done - and there's a good deal in that too,
but all the pains in the world would not do it with
any other blacking ever invented. I've thought some-
times I'd patent it, but if I did I'd have to reveal
the secret of it and then every rigger in the country
would be making it. The only way is to hang on to
the secret. I'm going out of business, ^{pretty soon} but I'll give
it to Ben and he - well may he hell ~~know~~
how to find as good a man to give it to when he
comes to retire to - retire. Think of it; a bottle

retiring — as if he was a hunkor! A nigger
boot black too!"

The man laughed at his strange comment,
looked at his watch then at the window and
continued. They

"They'll be a little slow this morning. I
hope Ben won't forget to come early for
there'll be a jam when it does begin and
every one wanting to be served first."

As he spoke a young man came down the stairs
and said:

~~I'm here Mistah Prince. Are you afraid
I'll miss.~~ "Good morning Mistah Prince.
Christmas Gift! I'm here you see. Did you
think I'd miss. Get up into the chair and
let me shine your boots before any one
gets down. How are you feeling this morn-
ing? Frank you must have found it
pretty cold. You ought to have a better
coat in that old one."

The young man was bustling about taking off his gloves, ^{and} removing his coat and cuffs. He was Prime's assistant though it was hard to find a trace of color in his fair face and blue eyes.

"What's this?" he asked taking up the new coat. "Oh, I see Santa Claus has remembered you? Well, now isn't that a Christ' mas 'gift' to be proud of. Just for the very thing you needed."

~~Then there~~

"Then, there Ben" said the older man relapsing naturally into the dialect. "You needn't go ter makin' strange over that ar' coat. I'm sure I'm obliged to you an' I may as well tell you I've got a present for you too."

"Thank ye, sir," said the young man respectfully as he began to brush the boot upon the foot rest. "You know anything

you might give me would be doubly appreciated."

"You've been a good boy, Ben, and I want to see you do well. I've decided to take you into partnership this year and if everything goes on satisfactory ~~next year~~ I'll get out a year from now and you can take the business yourself. There's money in it Ben and I'll teach you how to run it and manage."

The young man worked on in silence.

"What do you say, Ben?"

The journeyman finished the work at which he was engaged, tugged it with his brush from face of habit and straightening up looked into his patron's face as he replied:

"It's very kind of you Mistah Prime. You've always been kind to me - more like a father than an employer, but I can't do it, sir -"