TRUE STORIES OF THE NEWS.

XXI.

A PROFESSIONAL BEGGAR.

How Charlie Burkowitz, the Blind Beggar, Has Amassed Several Thousand Dollars in This City.

At Blackwell's Island Yesterday He Gave an Account of His Life and Methods.

He Is Now Looking Forward to a Matrimonial Alliance.

Young Charles Burkowitz sat in the "blind shed" on Blackwell's Island yesterday and told the story of four years of his life as a professional beggar.

That he has made a success of the busine is attested by his bank account, said amount to about $3,000.

The young man was arrested a day or tw ago by an officer of the Charity Organization Society and sentenced to the Island for two months by the Court. The Society is now making a thorough investigation of his case with a view to sending him back to Russia.

The young man, blind and dilapidated as he appeared yesterday, certainly did not look like a person with a bank account that reached the thousands. He is nearly twenty-one years of age and of medium height. He wore a pair of gray pantaloons with a light stripe, a coat and waistcoat of dark material and a brown overcoat buttoned at the top. On his head was an old cloth cap. Although his clothing was good for a beggar it fitted him so badly that he presented a very shabby spectacle. His face is smooth and expressionless. His right eye, with which he can see a little, is kept wide open, but his left one is almost closed. He carries a long stick about the thickness of a broom-handle, which he uses to feel his way about.

AND HE IS REALLY BLIND.

This blind beggar, unlike some alleged "blind beggars," is really blind. He was born in a little town in Russia. There was always something the matter with his eyes. When a child he could not distinguish an object unless it was very close to him. He was sent to school, however, and learned to read and write German. His eyes were very weak and he couldn't read much at a time. When he was about ten years old some foreign substance lodged in his left eye and he went to a doctor, who put some medicine in it that produced a burning sensation. The boy rubbed his eye with his hand to relieve the pain, but as the days passed the sight grew dimmer and dimmer, and in a few weeks he was totally blind in that eye. Then the right eye was affected and in a short time the little fellow found himself in a world of almost complete darkness.

In the meantime his parents had died and he went to live with his uncle. H. Burkowitz, the uncle, was a poor man, but he managed to get enough money together about five years ago to come to this country. He stopped in this city and began his life in the new world as a peddler. By the time the next Spring rolled around he had saved enough money to send for his wife and family.

When he wrote home to his wife he told her to bring Charlie with her. He was blind and helpless in the little country home in Russia, but here in New York there might be a chance for him to help himself. The uncle knew of several blind people here who were able to make or beg a good living.

CHARLIE BURKOWITZ, THE ENTERPRISING PROFESSIONAL BEGGAR.

Charlie was sixteen years old when he landed here. City life was something entirely new to him. He could at that time see a very little bit with his right eye. He couldn't speak a word of English, but it wasn't long until he had learned one sentence.

That sentence was, "Please pity the poor blind boy."

In a couple of months after Charlie arrived here his uncle's family began to realize that Charlie's blindness was a blessing in disguise, so far as money-making was concerned. It was then that they decided to let him get a living for himself and perhaps something extra as a suppliant for charity.

The uncle lives at No. 168 Ludlow street and has frequently represented himself to be Charlie's father, especially since the young man has become so successful in getting money. The blind boy buys his own clothes and pays his share of the family expenses.

A person would naturally think that it would not require much to keep a beggar in clothes, and it doesn't, so far as the everyday apparel goes. But Charlie Burkowitz has plenty of better clothes in his trunk at home.

A BEGGAR'S SUNDAY SUIT OF CLOTHES.

He goes to church on Friday evening and Saturday morning, and he doesn't look anything like a poor beggar-boy then. He wears a black suit of clothes, as good as the ordinary young man's Sunday suit. He wears a white shirt, standing collar and a neat necktie. On his head is a black derby hat. Few persons would recognize the young man as he comes out of the Norfolk Street Church at noon Saturday as the same person who asks their charity at Fourteenth street and Third avenue a few hours later.

Young Burkowitz starts to business every morning by 8 o'clock. Sometimes he pays a boy 25 or 30 cents to go with him and watch for policemen, but usually he goes alone.

He is so well acquainted with the city now that he can go to almost any place without assistance. And then he has a very lively tongue in his mouth and he isn't the least backward about speaking out.

Almost any morning before his arrest the blind boy could have been seen slowly making his way on Second street towards Avenue A, his stick clicking on the pavement in front of him. The sound could be heard a block away. He knows by the number of blocks he has travelled when he comes to Avenue A, and there he stops until some one comes up, whom he requests to put him on the green car.

Nearly all the conductors on the green cars know who the blind boy is, and they usually put him off at his destination, Fourteenth street and Third avenue, without being told.

ALL READY FOR BUSINESS.

He is then ready to begin the day's business and he produces from the pockets of his overcoat his stock in trade, a few lead pencils and a tin cup.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he says in a pathetic voice, "please pity the poor blind boy."

One of the principal words in the professional beggar's vocabulary is "please," and the young man could hardly speak a sentence yesterday that did not contain it."

The bane of young Burkowitz's career has been the policeman, and there is one in particular who seems to have annoyed him more than any other. He knows him only by the name of "McGinty." The young man is usually unmolested until 12 o'clock, and then "McGinty" puts in his appearance.

But by that time Jack, who has a newsstand at the corner of Fourteenth street and Third avenue, is there too. Jack and Charlie are friends, and, as the former has two good eyes he keeps them open for the latter's benefit.

A WARNING FOR THE BEGGAR.

"There comes the cop," says Jack to the blind boy, and he runs around and hides beneath the steps until the bluecoat passes.

"But when McGinty slips up and catches me," said the blind boy, "he chases me out of there in a hurry."

Ninth street and Third avenue is a good place for the blind boy's business, but he never was allowed to remain there longer than an hour.

"What does the policeman say to you?"

"He yells out, 'Go on—go on; don't stop here!' and sometimes he punches me with his club."

"How much money do you make each day?"

"Oh, I make two or three dollars."

"What is the most you ever made in one day."

"I've made as much as $6."

WOMEN GIVE HIM THE MOST MONEY.

"Saturday is the best day," he continued: "the people all have money then. I think I get more money from women than I do from men. They nearly always put something in the cup and they very seldom take a pencil. There are several people who know me and give me money every week, and ask me how I am getting along. I don't know them only by their voices."

No matter how successful this professional beggar has been, a person will seldom see anything in the tin cup except two or three pennies. As fast as the nickles and dimes are dropped in he slips them into his pocket. When he was arrested the tin cup was empty, but over $5 in change was found in his pocket.

A BEGGAR'S MATRIMONIAL PROSPECTS.

"What are you going to do with the money you have saved?" he was asked.

"I want to get married as soon as I get a little more money."

"Have you picked out the girl?"

"Oh, yes; she's my cousin and she lives in Russia. She is sixteen years old and her name is Rachel. My uncle writes to her mother and I send word to her that way."

"Do you want to go back to Russia?"

"No, I don't want to go there. I can't do anything to make a living there. I want to have Rachel come here and then she could help me. I could start a little store and stay in it, and wouldn't have to go out."

The blind boy was arrested once before and sent to the Island for six months, but his teacher, who has taught him to read by means of raised letters, interceded in his behalf and he was discharged.

The prospect of two months on the Island made the young man feel very much cast down yesterday. Although he is a beggar he doesn't like his quarters there. Before the reporter left he wrote a letter for the blind boy to his uncle.

"Tell him," he said, "to come over and see me and bring me something to eat, a towel and my dominoes. And tell him to try and get me out."

"I don't know," he continued, "what they put me over here for. I have a righ to make my living. I think they are getting fresh."

For a young man and a beggar Burkowitz is certainly pretty well fixed, and there are very few persons of his age with two good eyes who have $3,000 or so of their own earnings in bank.