

A VOLUNTARY PRISONER.

Why Old Allen Dodge Asked to Be Committed to the Workhouse Yesterday.

A Runaway, a Whaler, a Gold Hunter, a Gambler, a Drunkard, a Tramp, a Beggar for the Shelter of a Prison.

A man walked into Jefferson Market Police Court yesterday and asked to be committed to the workhouse on Blackwell's Island for six months.

His name, he said, was Allan Dodge, his age was sixty, and he was without a home or a place to lay his head.

Justice O'Reilly complied with his request, and he was led to the cells below, and later in the afternoon taken to the foot of East twenty-sixth street, put on board the steamer Thomas F. Brennan and on his arrival at Blackwell's Island given over to the authorities.

As his tall, gaunt form cled in rags that

seemed scarcely able to keep their pieces together, vanished through the iron door of the prison one of the officers who had heard him relate his sad story to the court officers said:

"There goes a victim of himself—a wreck of humanity. A man of education, family and brains gone to rags because of a woman's faithlessness and his own weakness. We see such cases every day."

Seated in the prison on a board bench, with the sun shining on his gray head, and tremblingly fingering the tatters enveloping his meagre form, the old man told the story of his life. His voice quavered and shook at

parts of his narrative, and tears rolled down his bronzed and wrinkled cheeks as the memory of days he had almost forgotten was recalled by the effort he made to tell the successive events of his life. The facts of his story, as told by himself in excellent English, were substantially as follows:

THE BOYHOOD OF A TRAMP.

Born in a village on the Hudson, of a family which was in more than prosperous circumstances, his boyhood was remarkable for nothing in particular except that the young man had everything he wanted. He had loving parents; two brothers and a sister. His father was a mill-owner who deprived his children of nothing in reason, and the Dodge residence was one of the finest in the town.

No one was better liked than Allan Dodge, and his genial ways and good looks made him much sought after. At the academy where he went to school he was considered a promising youth, and his father thought that in after years Allan would lead the other boys of the village, and that when he became a lawyer he would arrive eventually at eminence and be an honor to the parents who bore him.

Things were destined to be different, however, for the hot-headed boy began to want to get free from the restraint of home life; to stay out nights and drive faster horses than the other boys and to have a place of his own, where he could come and go at his pleasure without being chided by his father, who, although a just man, was a strict disciplinarian.

HE RAN AWAY TO SEA.

One day his father had been unusually

severe to him for some boyish prank, and he vowed that he would run away to sea. His mother pleaded with him, urged him with tears in her eyes not to leave her, but, boylike, he was stubborn, and although there was a lump in his throat he kept back the breaking down, and that evening, when the little village was silent, he slipped out of the window of his room, jumped to the ground, and, stuffing the little bundle he carried under his arm, set out on his journey. This was forty-one years ago.

The whaling industry of New England at that time was in its prime. The little town of New Bedford knew scarcely anything else. Ship-chandlery stores and boat yards had more work than they could attend to, and everybody who had any money was either buying an interest in a whaler or setting up a store where all sorts of ship's goods were sold. The profits of both were large, especially those of the whalers. Blubber and bone, oil and stearine were talked about at every corner. Even the village loafers, who had never done a stroke of work, wore sea-coats and rolled across the street with a gait so very like that of Capt. Perkins, of the Sally Ann, that the selectmen actually thought these fellows had signed for a cruise to Hudson Bay or the Southern seas, and even condescended to nod to them. Rum from Medford was plenty, and cheap, too, and a man could get the best for a shilling a quart.

YOUNG ALLAN GOES A WHALING.

One fine day, as a red-faced captain stood on the strip of one of the docks, smoking his pipe and watching two sailors

pushing a heavy boat towards him, he was accosted by a bright-looking boy, who asked him if he was short of hands.

"I've got two," answered the captain, squinting under his hat, "and if that isn't enough I've got fifty aboard yonder schooner."

"My name is Dodge," went on the boy, "and I want to ship with you."

The captain looked at him sharply. "Have you no friends?" he asked.

"None," answered the boy. "You look a likely lad," went on the captain, "and we sail at three. You won't need a chest," and as the boat, pulled by the two sailors, hove in sight he said:

"Are you ready to go now?" The boy nodded his head.

"We shall be gone a year or so," continued the captain, "no backing out."

Dodge jumped into the boat and the captain followed. The sailors pulled away and the quaint old town began to recede. The next morning when the boy came on deck land was nowhere in sight.

Six months later Dodge stood in San Francisco. It was only a small town then. Life aboard ship had been anything but what he had fancied it. The captain had proved to be a tyrant and a brute. The food was bad. They had no luck. Not a whale had they seen, and the prospect looked very disheartening.

He thought of his home and his mother, and the awful thought of how she must suffer, not knowing whether he was dead or alive, came upon him.

Gold had been discovered in California

and not a whaler could get away, for every sailor had deserted, and the excitement was so high over the news on shore that the officials had no time to look out for deserters. The streets were filled with a motley crowd, Indians, sailors, Mexicans, half-breeds from the fur country north, traders from the Yukon River, desperate men of all kinds, outcasts from the world and adventurers of all kinds.

ALLAN DODGE BECOMES A GAMBLER.

Truly a nice company for a boy of eighteen, with life just opening ahead of him and possessed of no viciousness or bad habits.

Dodge had only a few dollars that he had brought from home with him. It wasn't enough to support him. What could he do when it was gone? He looked about him. He saw men going in and out of the saloons that lined either side of the street and wandered in. For the first time in his life he saw a gambling hall. Impelled by curiosity he moved forward and watched the men play. Those who had no money bought chips with a yellow sand they shook out of little buckskin bags they carried. He asked one of the men standing near him what the stuff was.

"Gold dust," answered the man, eyeing him curiously as though he thought Dodge was chaffing him.

It looked so easy to win, the boy thought. He put down one of his dollars on a number. The little wheel spun around and dropped into a pocket.

"Thirty-six," yelled the dealer, and before Dodge knew what had occurred the man pushed a lot of coins towards him.

"They're yours," he said; "you win."

Dodge played again and again, and when he left the place he had over a thousand dollars.

The next week saw Dodge installed as part owner in a general store in partnership with a shrewd Yankee. In time their business grew with the town and two years later they were considered well off. A remarkable success for a boy of twenty.

HE MARRIES A VARIETY ACTRESS.

One evil day Dodge went to the variety theatre. He had never been in such a place before and was fascinated. A young woman took his fancy—an introduction was not necessary—and he married her.

For a time all went well. The woman had everything she wanted, but the quiet domesticity of a home life was too monotonous for her.

One day Dodge came home and found his home deserted. His partner had disappeared, too.

Half crazed, he wandered to and fro between the house and the stores, thinking that perhaps he might get a glimpse of one or the other—his wife or his partner.

That night he couldn't sleep and the next day early he was at the place of business. He had let his partner manage the financial end of the business, and when he came to look at his affairs he found himself ruined. The shrewd partner had borrowed large sums of money, forged Dodge's name and even taken the ready cash that was in the safe, amounting to several thousands of dollars.

THE CULMINATION OF MISFORTUNE.

In despair the poor man took to drink to

drown thought in forgetfulness. He went up into the country to the placer diggings, where he lived a lonely life. Sometimes he would strike it rich, but when he went back to San Francisco the sight of his former home, the glances of people and all made him drink, until he spent his last dollar, when he would go back to his claim and stay there for a year or more.

Finally he got a few thousand dollars together and sailed for home. He was ashamed to go to his people, and, passing within a hundred miles of that waiting mother, he went to Iowa, where he engaged in railroad contracting for small sections.

The demon of drink pursued him even here and he lost all.

From this stage the descent was easy, and lower and lower he sank, sometimes getting odd jobs here and there and sleeping where night overtook him.

Tramping from pillar to post, forgetful of his family, his mother and all, he went for years. Sickness and exposure have made him more a candidate for the hospital than the work-house.

He sat yesterday telling his story in an almost rambling way, as though his mind was not as strong as it had been. "I wrote once to my brothers," he said, "when I needed assistance very much. They refused to aid me at all. One of them is a Supervisor of the same old village, another is a Justice of the Peace. They are well off, but I—I am only a drunkard, an outcast, a pariah, with no place to lay my head. I never wronged a man in my life, or harmed even a fly. But I had better be dead. I had better clothes than these, but I was beaten one night on some street near the river, and my coat was torn like this. It's awful to be like this, isn't it. If I could live my life over again—"

The story of Allan Dodge, the voluntary prisoner, is only one of many such.