TRUE STORIES OF THE NEWS.

"PUT ME ON MY LEGS."

A Poor Printer's Plea from the Charity Hospital, on Blackwell's Island, for an Artificial Limb.

Ten Years Ago "Aleck" Ferguson Was Young, Ambitious and Light-Hearted, Earning $18 a Week, but in a Night He Was Run Over and Maimed and His Hopes Were Dashed to Earth—Several Operations Necessarily Performed and Since Recovering from Them He Has Waited in Vain for Assistance.

In the almshouse on Blackwell's Island there is a poor unfortunate who for ten long weary years has been compelled against his will to eat the bread of charity, simply because he could not get together $125 to buy himself an artificial leg. His name is Alexander Ferguson.

Ten years ago next Autumn, while he was crossing Third avenue at the junction of Twenty-eighth street, he was knocked down by a surface car and seriously injured. The car ran over his right leg, crushing it like a straw, and his right wrist and hand were also badly injured.

From that moment till now Ferguson has been unable to make his living. Ten years of eating of the bread of charity, when for the greater portion of that time he would be only too glad and willing to work and sweat for his maintenance, is a sad, disheartening experience. But that has been poor Ferguson's.

Ten years ago he was a printer earning $18 a week. He had just been married, and he was in a fair way to make advancement in the trade he had chosen; he was young, ambitious and light-hearted, and the future lay smiling before him like a prairie. In a night all his future was desolated—just as the prairie is desolated by fire. He was young then—he was barely twenty-nine years of age. To-day he is gray, worn and old before his time. Sorrow, disappointment and six years in an almshouse have aged him as twenty years of existence would not have done in the ordinary, happy course of things.

But even yet, with almost every cause to make him spiritless, hopeless, indifferent, his courage has not been downed. A WORLD reporter had a long walk with him about the paths of Blackwell's Island yesterday. To the reporter he told his story simply, sadly, but in every word he uttered there was to be distinguished, in spite of the hard lot that had befallen him, a hope that long years of misfortune had not been able to quell.

"Put me on my legs again," he said, with an attempt at good-natured humor, "and I will be able to look out for myself. I am willing and ready to work at anything I can get," he added with a dogged expression of determination on his lips, "but it must be that I was born under an unlucky star."

Then he went on to tell the reporter the story of his life before and since the accident which stopped him in his career, like a flood which has washed out a path that a traveller is following. He had tried, so he said, ever since the doctors had got through with him, eight years ago, to pick up the thread of his work-a-day existence, which he had been compelled to drop when his misfortune overtook him. But the sum of all his efforts was a negative. He said that his mother and the first wife of the late Secretary of the Treasury, Daniel Manning, were sisters. He once had written a letter to Mayor Manning, of Albany, the ex-Secretary's son. The missive was intrusted to a member of the Legislature whom Ferguson had known in his happier days, and who had grown into a man of some prominence during the intervening years. But no answer ever came to the appeal.

"Even if I am a ward in a charity asylum," Ferguson remarked, "I have, I suppose, a little pride left. I never attempted a second letter."

He said also that Alexander D. Corson, the produce dealer at No. 2 Stone street, in this city, was a near relative of his on his father's side.

"But you see," Ferguson went on, "my own parents died when I was very young. I was adopted by a man named William Francis Trask, who brought me up, and I suppose my own kin have forgotten that I was ever born."

Once, he explained, while walking with a comrade at "alms" along the paths on Blackwell's Island, he met a woman who told them, while speaking by chance of the new church on the grounds, that she had founded the chapel at Bellevue Hospital. She was evidently from her appearance a person who went about seeking to do good in the world. She kindly addressed a few words to Ferguson's companion, whose misfortune had manifestly enlisted her sympathy. Poor Ferguson's heart beat high. Perhaps, after a patient waiting for several years, the chance was opening by which he could leave the hated alms-house to which fate had bound him as if by a rope.

His companion of the moment, however, happened to be a ne'er-do-well, and to the woman's questions he replied in a flippant manner that disconcerted her. Then the conversation turned upon the new house of worship.

"Yes, it is the best thing in the place," remarked Ferguson's companion.

"I am glad to hear you say that," replied the strange Lady Bountiful.

But she had mistaken the tenor of the fellow's meaning entirely, and when she learned by another remark of his that he was referring irreverently to the mere brick and plaster which had been erected by the munificence of Vice-President Morton's partner, Banker Bliss, the good woman was very much shocked, and her glad smile turned quickly to one of pained displeasure. She turned to walk away, and Ferguson, who had not the courage to retain her and explain, saw that possible chance for his betterment slide away.

At another time some visitor who was connected with Dr. MacArthur's church in this city interested herself in Ferguson's pathetic case. She promised him that she would call the attention of the church committee which helps the poor to his case. Whether she promised more than she could perform or whether she forgot the poor fellow he does not know, but no assistance from that quarter ever reached him. Dr. Robert T. Morris, son of the Governor-elect of Connecticut, had also interested himself in Ferguson's behalf.

And so he had been waiting, hoping, dreaming that some day one would come along who would put him "on his feet" again, so to speak. Six years he has been waiting—hoping almost against hope. He is brave and expectant in spite of all odds. He has never given over to despair. But no attempt out of the many he has made to free himself from the unhappy life he is now leading has ever met with any result. He is still waiting.

Ferguson, before he was injured, worked as a printer at the forms in the *Jewish Messenger* office, and had also been employed by the firm of Griffith & Byrne at the time that firm, now dissolved, was doing business in Leonard street. When he was picked up unconscious after he had been run over he was taken in an ambulance to Bellevue Hospital. His accident occurred in the Autumn, and first an operation was performed on his leg, by which it was hoped that it would be necessary only to cut away a little above his foot. A few months passed, and then it was found that a second operation was imperative. That and the weeks of convalescence that followed took up what was left of the Winter and the Spring.

He hobbled out of the hospital after his second term of ward imprisonment a cripple, maimed for life and unable to follow the trade for which his kind benefactor who had brought him up, had paid his indentures. But that was not the only misfortune that awaited him. A third, worse than all the others, lurked behind his back, like Polonius behind the arras, but which unfortunately he could not turn upon and stab. A third amputation made itself necessary, and a third long, stagnant incarceration in Bellevue forced itself upon the poor fellow.

When he went out of the gates of Bellevue for the last time, almost a year from the ill-fated night when he was first carried through them, he was a well man so far as his health was concerned. But he was mutilated, lopped as a tree is of a branch by an adverse wind. The first operation had taken away his foot and ankle. The second had taken away a portion of his leg. The third had deprived him of his leg entirely below the knee.

During his trial, he says, his wife deserted him.

"I don't know that I can blame her," he exclaimed yesterday, as he and the reporter stood together before the chapel steps and looked over across the silent flowing water to the city, where the unfortunate printer had passed the happiest as well as the first of the most unhappy days in his life. "I was all out of shape when she saw me in the hospital. I was a very poor subject for any one to claim as a husband while I lay in my cot all bruised and battered.

"I haven't seen her in eight years now," he added, looking vacantly across the water to the city, bathed in its mist. "I have never heard from her in all that time. She may be dead for all I know. No. I never had any children, thank God."

Just what he could do if he were given a chance, "Aleck" Ferguson doesn't know.

"It is so long now since I have been in the race I feel almost dazed when I begin to think seriously of going out into the world again. But I don't think it would take me long to get my bearings. I am young yet, though I am gray and wrinkled. This place," he remarked, turning his back on the city, folded in the haze as if in a lace curtain, and glancing towards the almshouse, "would bring the wrinkles and gray hairs to a boy if he had slept under that roof as long as I have. And yet I am only thirty-nine. That is not too old to begin again, is it?"

What do you say about that, you who may chance to hear this story of poor "Aleck" Ferguson's broken life?

Now he hobbles about on a pair of crutches. He has had them ever since his foot was cut away. He bought them with the last money he had. He has expended as much care upon them as a mother would upon her children, for once they are gone, he has no money to get any more. Then he will be crippled indeed.

The wood of which the crutches are made is as highly polished as the day when they were first taken out of the shop where Ferguson got them. The brass rings which bind them their owner keeps as shining as the brass about an engine. He is as choice of them as he would be of a priceless treasure.

Once a day came when the leather upon which the crippled printer rests his arm-pits was completely worn away. He had no money—he hasn't had a penny in the world for many years now—to repair them. A kindly disposed officer on the island procured some leather from the shop where the prisoners work in that material; a boy, handy with his fingers, was pressed into service, and a fresh, new leather crescent was sewed over the props which the disabled printer leans himself upon when he hobbles about. His clothes are poor and heavy. The only tobacco that he can get to smoke is the stems of the plant which he buys with the chance pennies given him by visitors to the island. The food that he has lived upon for half a dozen years the humblest denizen of the east side would spurn if it was set before him. But his crutches—they are as bright and polished as if they had just been picked from the shop of their manufacturer, instead of having been in use for almost a decade.

"If they go back on me," said Ferguson to the reporter, "I am done for completely. I have to look out for them and preserve them. If I didn't, where should I be? Crawling about on one leg between the cots in Ward 3 up in the almshouse yonder and sitting day in and day out on the settees on the flagging in front of it."

Well might the poor fellow care for his props. They were the rod and the staff—and the only one—that he had to comfort him.

It will require $100, possibly $125, to pay for an artificial leg for the crippled printer. If he has that, he says he thinks that he will have no trouble in obtaining honest work of some kind. He can't go back to his old trade, for it is impossible for him with his one leg to hop about nimbly enough. Moreover, one of his hands is so disabled that he couldn't set his "take." He has to grasp his left crutch between the ends of his first finger and his thumb. He has learned to do that adroitly. But to set type, that is a different matter.

But there must be honest work of some sort that he could do, and would do willingly, if the road was open to him. He suggested, when questioned about his possibilities, that he could canvass for books, do certain kinds of clerical work, or perform simple labors that did not require the cunning of a right hand nor the dexterity of a quick leg. True, the field was limited, he knew that. But there were maimed employees about Bellevue Hospital, were there not, and in other places about New York, who managed to earn the salt they ate?

Ferguson, on his crutches, used to visit the city when he first went up to the island, but he could never manage to find anybody who could avail himself of the poor cripple's services. His story of his quest for work was a pitiable one. People, as soon as they caught a glimpse of him steadying himself on the sill while he was trying to open the door, took him for a beggar at once and shut him off before he had a chance to explain himself. Perhaps this wounded the self-pride in the man a little. But after a while he gave up the endeavor to do anything for himself in that way, and has been hoping for years now that somebody would appear at the almshouse who would interest himself in the unfortunate case and show him a path that he could follow.

If Ferguson had an artificial leg he thinks that all the peculiar difficulties he used to encounter in his tours from place to place seeking a position would vanish. His leg amputated only below the knee and with a prop like the one he desires he could get over the ground right briskly. But to get that long-desired artificial leg he must have something like $125. But how is a poor forlorn fellow ever to get even that?

Perhaps some big-hearted person who may chance to read this story may see his way to play the good fairy for whom Ferguson [illegible] for so long to walk down the gang plank of the [illegible].