



Ragged Dick

Horatio Alger Jr.

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Fourteen-year-old Dick Hunter lives on the streets of New York in the 1860s. His parents are dead, and he has been on his own since the age of seven. He shines shoes to earn a living. He sleeps in boxes. He jokes about having a mansion on Fifth Avenue and about owning shares of Erie Railroad stock. But he cannot imagine ever being more than a bootblack who spends every cent he earns and lives hand-to-mouth--until by chance he meets Frank Whitney. *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks* is arguably the best known of Horatio Alger's American rags-to-riches stories. Published in 1867, it promotes the values of hard work, thrift, honesty, integrity, and bravery. Alger paints his story in bright colors: the novel swirls with shops, crowds, and a range of characters, and while it could not be called exciting in any modern sense it nonetheless remains unexpectedly readable to this day. The title character is Richard Hunter, better known as Ragged Dick, an orphan living on the streets of New York and scraping a living as a shoe shine boy. Although he is quick witted and has a basic morality, he lacks direction--but when he is employed to act as a guide to the city to Frank Whitney, a boy of his own age, he is impressed with Frank's manners and education and determines to better himself. Dick later meets Henry Fosdick, an educated youth who has fallen on hard times through no fault of his own, and Fosdick agrees to tutor Dick. They take a room together and, with the aid of kindly Mr. Greyson and a sudden twist of fate, are soon on the road to financial security and social respectability. As a veritable "diamond in the rough," *Ragged Dick* is as innately virtuous as he is streetwise and cocky—and his story still makes a great read.

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