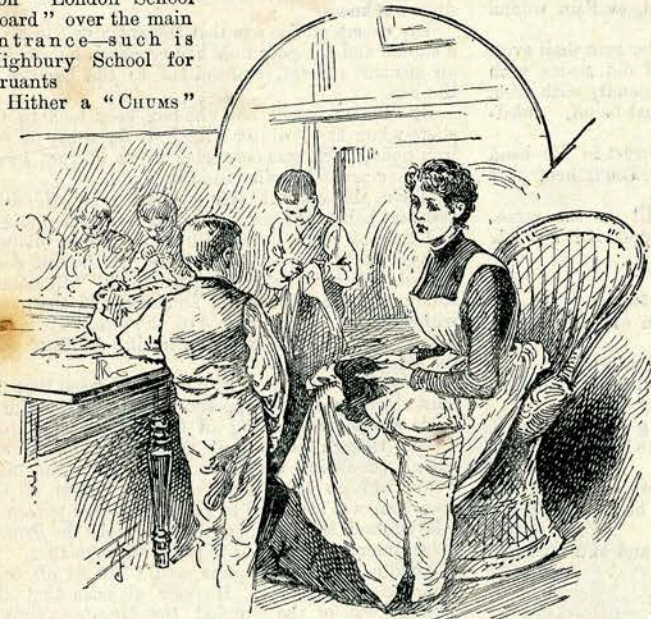


WHERE SHIRKERS FROM SCHOOL ARE SENT.

Life at an Institution for Truants.

A LONG, lofty building, grey-fronted, many-windowed, with a fringe of trees before it, and looking like an old-fashioned boarding-school, save for the inscription "London School Board" over the main entrance—such is Highbury School for Truants

Hither a "CHUMS"



IN THE TAILORS' WORKSHOP.

commissioner made his way one day not long back, armed with an editorial mandate to see all that was to be seen of the life led by the two hundred boy-inmates of the building.

These boys, it should be explained, are not there of their own free will. They go there, like the darkey to the court-house, because they are "brung dere."

A spell at the Truant School is a lesson in discipline and obedience, imposed only on confirmed truants from school—boys who hate "schooling," and can't be made to attend by any other means.

Let me give you an idea of the sort of boys sent there. One young gentleman, aged eight, was found begging during school hours, clad only in a greatcoat, a world too big for him; and, when caught, he actually wriggled out of even that!

Another, a boy of twelve, preferred sleeping out at night and picking up a living in the streets to attending school, and was at last captured one night on a piece of waste land behind a hoarding, where he lay curled up asleep, like a puppy, in an empty barrel. And a third got out of a workhouse by slipping through a lofty window and climbing down the rainwater pipe to the ground.

But to return to our muttuns, as the French say.

One of the masters met me at the entrance, and, when my mission was explained, courteously offered to show me round the place.

"I shall begin as if you were a new boy," he said, "and take you first to the receiving-ward."

Accordingly, we proceeded upstairs to a room with a sort of big tray on the floor.

"That's where new arrivals stand to have their hair cut," he explained. "Then they strip, and are given a uniform for the time they are here."

I was relieved to find that this part of the programme was not expected of me, and examined the truant-garb—a polo cap, a serge tunic and vest, and corduroy trousers, which are replaced on Sundays by blue cloth ones.

"The discarded clothes," continued the master, "are placed in a bag with the boy's number on it, and kept here all ready to be put on when the boy leaves."

He opened a door, to show me rows of fat little bundles ranged on shelves all round the room.

"How long do the boys generally stay in the school?" I asked.

"From six weeks to four months, or so—generally about nine or ten weeks. Then they are let out on licence, and, if they still play truant, they are sent back here for another spell."

"Now for the school," he continued. "You must

understand that the boys' day is divided into halves, one of which is spent at lessons, and the other at actual work of some sort. These boys, for instance"—we had entered a long room, where about fifty boys stood at their desks—"have been working this morning, and the boys at work now were then in school."

I looked round at the sturdy youngsters, all rigidly at "attention," and asked my guide how old they were.

"Generally from nine to thirteen," he replied. "Come here, B—!"

A tiny little fellow, with close-cropped hair of flaming hue, shambled sheepishly forward, and saluted. Such a salute! A vigorous round-arm swing that brought the hand, palm outward, to the forehead—it would have put a policeman to the blush!

The master smiled. "He thinks a lot of his salute—don't you, B—? What standard are you in?"

"Nought, sir," returned the youngster, proudly, with another salute. It was the lowest standard in the school; but he seemed delighted with the dignity of being in any at all.

"Do you like being here?" I asked him.

The little arm swung, semaphore fashion, as B— promptly replied, "No, sir." His unexpected reply, and the odd salute that accompanied it, were irresistibly funny.

"We get some queer answers at times," said the master. "I remember one visitor asking a sharp little lad the invariable

question—"Why didn't you go to school?" Instead of the usual reply that he didn't like it, the boy quite startled this visitor by rapping out—"Cos I was a fool, sir!"

Passing through the next room, where the fourth-standard boys were reading aloud a story from a monthly magazine, we entered the laundry, which was in full swing.

About a dozen boys, bare-armed and aproned, were vigorously scrubbing and soaping, each at a separate little tub, under the superintendence of a laundress. Our illustration gives some idea of the scene.

Others were wringing out the washed articles, and carrying them into the drying-room, where they were ironed and folded—the garments, that is, not the boys!

"We'll visit the workshops next," said my escort; and we passed along a passage to the tailors' shop which is here pictured.

Here we found a batch of shoeless youngsters perched cross-legged upon a board like veritable miniature tailors, busily at work on trousers and tunics—sewing, basting, and doing other mysterious tailor-work upon them which I was too ignorant to appreciate.

"Not bad work, that, for a young lad, is it?" remarked the master, handing me a tunic and pair of blue trousers to examine. I turned them inside out, and looked at the seams, as if I understood all about them—which was hardly the case. Still, even I could see that the workmanship—or should I say workboyship?—was neat and strong: the clothes looked perfectly "tailor-made."

Next to the bootshops, where a dozen or more rather grimy little boys were seated at work in a very leisurely, comfortable fashion. Some were practising sewing on waste leather, others were stitching uppers and hammering in hobnails.

The fruits of their toil were shown me in the shape of good, sound, useful "kickers." The small cobblers placidly watched me inspecting their handiwork—probably with some inward contempt for my evident ignorance of the mysteries of welts and double stitching.

"We make our own outfits, you see," my escort said, "and mend them, too. Even after a boy has left us, if he goes regularly to school, we will always mend his boots for nothing if he brings them to us."

From the bootmakers' we went to the lavatory, where every boy has a little tap and soap tray of his own. Half-a-dozen young truants, finishing up their afternoon's work, were in the throes of a copious wash that extended to arms, neck, and even head.

On one side of the lavatory are shower baths in a row, and another side is taken up by three huge baths that look almost like young swimming baths.

"Yes, they are a fair size," my guide said, noticing my amusement at their size; "the boys have a hot bath every Friday, and we generally put them in eighteen at a time, half-a-dozen in each bath."

Outside we could hear the shuffling and stamping of many small hobnailed boots, and the order to "Fall in, fall in there! Close up, rear rank! Dress by your right!"

"The boys are just beginning their afternoon drill," explained the teacher.

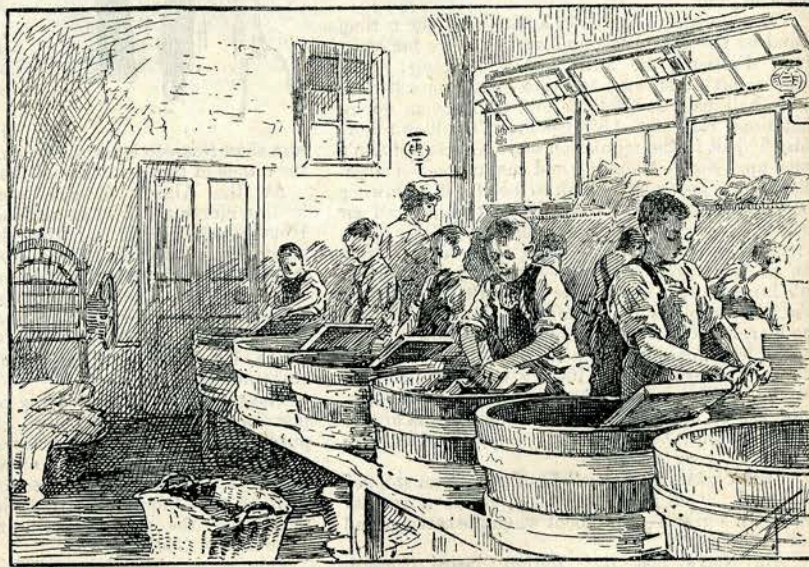
We made our way out *via* the large and lofty dining-hall, where an army of small scrubbers were cleaning the floor, in the manner depicted in our illustration, as briskly as if they were playing at the children's game of "A cold and frosty morning."

On the asphalt of the drill-ground, outside the winter play-shed, we found the small army of boys assembled, and watched them perform, with evident relish, the usual exercises—marching, trotting, doubling, hopping, extension motions, and the rest—with capital harmony and precision.

"One of our old boys," my companion remarked, "who was extra fond of his drilling lessons, took to drilling the boys of his neighbourhood every night. He charged them so much—or so little—for a week's drill; and when they had learnt his exercises thoroughly, he started giving performances to the public, in a street off the Walworth Road. It proved quite a success, and not long ago he came here for some new exercises. To his great delight, the drill-master showed him plenty, and I've no doubt his public shows are improved in consequence."

"That boy has some 'go' in him," I said, as we left the youngsters at drill, and wended our way upstairs to the sleeping quarters. "The boys look happy and contented enough here; do many of them try to escape?"

The master stopped by a first-floor window, and



AT THE WASH-TUBS.

threw it up; it opened for about five inches, and then stuck.

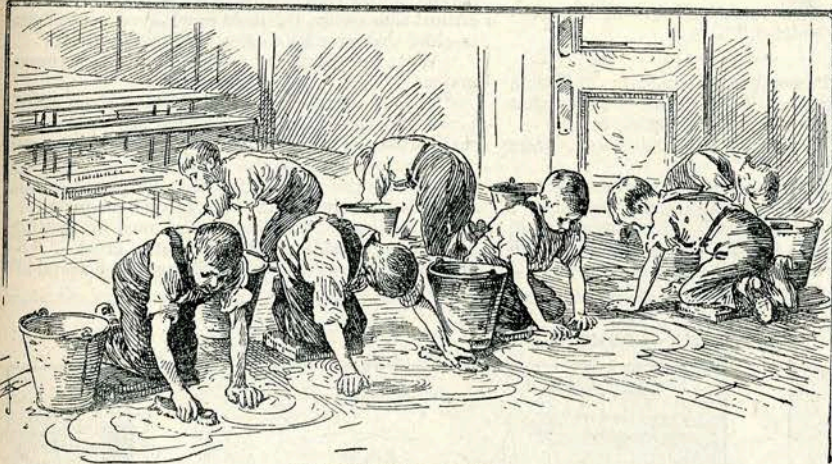
"These windows won't open more than that, without using a key," he said. "Would you believe that a boy could slip through that narrow space? Yet we had one who got up at night, squeezed out of this

window on to the roof below, got into the room where the clothes bags are kept, helped himself to a suit, and escaped. When he was re-caught a month later, we could not believe he had got through the window till he did it again to convince us.

"Then when we first opened, three years ago, several boys escaped over the playground wall, though it is ten feet high. You noticed those tall black poplars against the wall? They have no branches for twelve feet or so above the ground, yet these boys managed, somehow, to climb up the smooth trunks, and so reach the top of the wall; it is an easier drop on the other side. Now we have no trouble in that way, however."

"Tell me of some more escapes," I asked, as we entered a dormitory containing about eighteen comfortable little iron cots, each with its bed-clothes neatly folded and strapped, army-fashion, into a tidy bundle.

"Well, one boy broke a front window, got out through the hole he had made, and ran off. Another chose Sunday morning for his attempt. As the boys were marching in regular military form to church, he suddenly pitched his prayer-book into the muddy road, and darted off down a side turning. But he was not quite fleet enough, and I soon



SCRUBBING THE FLOORS.

ran him down, and brought him back. Happily, however, attempted escapes are now very rare."

I noticed a pile of rope and canvas on the bedroom floor, and asked what it meant. "That is a fire escape," was the answer. "We have a vertical ladder running down inside the house, through every floor, and as an additional safeguard we have this apparatus. Sometimes we have fire drill; the boys practise getting down the escape to the ground, and rare fun they think it is, I can assure you!

"There is one department you haven't seen yet; that is a small one—the needleroom, where the socks and shirts are sent every week for repairs. The smallest boys, and those who are too delicate for harder work, are put to this employment."

We passed downstairs again to a little room where some seven or eight little fellows sat gravely at work with needle and wool over socks with good big "potatoes" in the toes and heels, under the supervision of a pleasant-looking needle-mistress, who threaded the needles of the younger darners, and suggested various treatment for socks of damaged constitution.

The faces of the little workers were comical to see: baby lips were set, cropped heads bent, and scarcely perceptible eyebrows wrinkled, in the effort made to darn a particularly big hole, or strengthen a weak spot.

"You must see our Slojd room, too," remarked the master, "although the instructor is away on leave just now."

He led the way to a room, capably fitted with carpenters' benches, vices, and tools, and showed me the beautifully-made wooden models some of the boys had turned out—noticeable among which were a lot of splendid paper-knives, with blades curved like scimitars.

"Now you have seen everything," said my guide, as I took my leave; "and what do you think of our system?"

"Capital!" I answered, heartily. "I shouldn't mind being sent here myself. It seems odd to me, though, that—except for their loss of liberty—truant school is better off than many boys who go regularly to school!"

ERNEST A. CARR.

They Guard the Forests.

THERE OCCURRED, not very long back, on the frontier between France and Germany, near a place called Raon-sur-Plaine, an incident which, for a moment, threatened to produce fresh unpleasant relations between those two countries.

A German forest-guard, finding his demand for the countersign disregarded by several armed men, fired upon them, killing one of their number and wounding another. The men turned out to be a French hunting party, who were on the French side of the frontier when they were fired upon.

French sentiment was much excited by the incident, but the German Government formally expressed its regret, and made reparation to the relatives of the man who was killed, and the affair was peaceably arranged.

The forest-guards, both of France and Germany, are a sort of half-military body of public servants, of a description unknown in this country, where the public forests have no system of protection.

The European forest-guards are mostly old soldiers, who are likely to be recalled to military service in case of war. They do not take care of the trees; that work is performed by the foresters, who belong to the civil, not the military, service. They

simply act as a sort of police for the public woods.

The forest-guards of France are a remarkable body of men.

In order to qualify themselves for the service, they have to spend two years in study at the forestry school at Nancy; and

their pay, after they are sent to their posts in the forests, is only about

£35 a year. The foresters

are much better paid, and have, besides, the privilege of cutting the wood they need for fuel and of cultivating about two acres of land.

Each forest-guard has a certain district which he looks after, and it is said that, so familiar do they become with the ground, and so accurately do they know the aspect of trees, that they at once miss a limb that has been cut away.

"This love of the forest," said an old guard, "is a sort of fever; it comes over you little by little, but it comes fast, and when it has once obtained a hold on you, there is no getting over it. It doesn't make any difference about the wages or the hard life—you have got to endure it."

Several old forest-guards in the French service have declined promotions which would take them away from the frontier, so eager are they to do good service as scouts and guides if a war should break out. They are, for the most part, the bravest of men.

An old guard was attacked one day by a poacher, who, setting traps in the woods, heard the guard coming, lay in wait for him, tripped him up, and leaped upon him. The poacher was of gigantic stature, and succeeded in overpowering the guard. Seizing him firmly, the poacher put his knife to the old guard's throat.

"Swear to me," said the poacher, "that you will not inform against me, or you are a dead man."

"If I am a dead man," said the guard, "I shall not inform against you. But if you do not kill me, I shall certainly bring you to trial."

The poacher, taken aback by the man's extraordinary coolness, and ashamed of his threat, let his knife drop to the ground and took to flight.

The guard was as good as his word. He informed against the poacher, who afterwards, however, settled down to an honest life, and told the story of the guard's brave response to his threat. The guard himself had never related his own defiant speech.

AUNTY: "I was pleased to see you so kind to your little visitor. Is he one of your dear friends?"

Robbie: "No, but he can lick me any day."

Five Minutes with the Famous.

THE Queen of Holland occasionally rides a bicycle.

HALL CAINE'S first book, "The Shadow of a Crime," was based on a story which was told to him in boyhood by his grandfather.

SIR ALFRED STEPHEN, who is just ninety-two, was made Solicitor-General of Tasmania when he was only twenty-two years of age.

MANY years ago Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone started a refuge for destitute boys, in which they still continue to take a great deal of interest.

A WELL-KNOWN peer, who is fond of breaking records in shooting game, practises firing positions with his gun in front of a mirror every day.

OTTO POHLERT, the son of a Brunswick butcher, can read fluently either from German or Latin characters, though he is only two years of age.

THE late Hon. Ion Keith-Falconer, son of the Earl of Kintore, used to be fond of visiting the cottages of the poor near Eton when he was at the College.

THE German Emperor has a cold bath every morning. There is one enormous bath at the Palace that will easily accommodate all the little Princes together on their tub-night.

A BLIND boy named Stewart, who rescued a companion from drowning, being guided to the spot by his cries, is the holder of the Royal Humane Society's medal for his gallant action.

MR. JOHN HERRSHOFF, one of the best-known shipbuilders in the United States, has to design his vessels from memory of his boyhood, as he has been quite blind since he was fifteen.

THE Emperor Alexander of Russia was not long back discovered by his attendants on all-fours, growling vigorously, and playing the part of a huge Russian bear for the amusement of the Imperial children.

IN his youth Mr. G. A. Henty, who was then an invalid, was a great reader; and he was also fond of getting his schoolfellows at Westminster together, and spinning yarns for their benefit.

THE sons of the Duke de Serolaes and General Polavieja are in the infant regiment raised by their playmate, the little King of Spain, and are said to look exceedingly well in their uniform.

PRINCE BISMARCK'S two sons, who were then barely out of their teens served as volunteer troopers in the Queen of England's Own Regiment of Prussian Guards during the Franco-German War.

MR. HERBERT GLADSTONE is very fond of his violin, and devotes an hour to it every morning, whether he is in town or in the country. But his great hobby is physical recreation for the masses, to promote which he formed the National Physical Recreation Society. At Hawarden the ex-Premier's son started a club where the village boys and girls can indulge in all sorts of games. Personally Mr. Herbert Gladstone usually confines himself to lawn-tennis, which he plays very fairly.

OTTO HEGNER, the musical "prodigy," is now between seventeen and eighteen years of age. His first professional engagement was obtained when he was only six, the fee being twenty francs. Otto's home is in Baden, and it was owing to the generosity of the Grand Duke of Baden in providing the funds for his studies that the boy-pianist was able to make so brilliant a success. Otto Hegner has made the acquaintance of most of the royalties of Europe, and has a book full of their autographs.

KING OSCAR, of Sweden, is a musical monarch who may often be heard for hours improvising on the piano, and more particularly on the organ—an instrument which is almost unknown in private circles abroad. His Majesty is also a great lover of glee singing. His brothers, Charles XV. and Gustavus, were equally gifted musicians and lovers of that noble art. Prince Gustavus Adolphus, the eldest grandson of King Oscar, and future king, already evinces that admirable early love of music which is the heirloom of the gifted house of Bernadotte.