

THE G. B.

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Illustrated by RAYMOND POTTER.



WE thought of all sorts of ways to restore the fallen fortunes of our house. You see, we had been rich once. Oswald and Dora can remember when father was always bringing

nice things home from London, and there used to be game and wine and cigars sent as Christmas presents, and boxes of candied fruit, and French plums in boxes with silk and velvet and gilt on them. They were called prunes; but the prunes you buy at the grocer's are quite different. But now there is very seldom anything nice at Christmas or any other time. I suppose the people have forgotten father's address; so we used to look at the advertisements in the *Daily Chronicle*, and one day Dickie read out this:—

£100 secures partnership in lucrative business for sale of useful patent. £10 weekly. No personal attendance necessary. Jepson, 106, Old Street Road.

"I wish we could secure that partnership," said Oswald. He is twelve, and a very thoughtful boy for his age.

"I wish we could secure that partnership."

Alice looked up from her painting. She was trying to paint a fairy queen's frock with green bice, and it wouldn't rub. There is something funny about green bice; it will never rub off, no matter how expensive your paint box is, and even boiling water is very little use.

She said, "Bother the bice; and, Oswald, it's no use thinking about that. Where are we to get a hundred pounds?"

"Ten pounds a week is five pounds to us," Oswald went on—he had done the sum in his head while Alice was talking—"because partnership means halves. It would be A I."

Noel sat sucking his pencil. He had been writing poetry, as usual. I saw the first two lines:—

I wonder why green bice
Is never very nice.

Suddenly he said, "I wish a fairy would come down the chimney and drop a jewel on the table—a jewel worth just a hundred pounds."

"She might as well give you the hundred pounds while she was about it," said Dora.

"Or, while she was about it, she might as well give us five pounds a week," said Alice.

"Or fifty," said I.

"Or five hundred," said Dickie.

I saw H. O. open his mouth—his name is Horace Octavius, but the other is shorter—and I knew he was going to say, "Or five thousand"; so I said, "Well, she won't give us five pence;



but if you would only do as I am always saying, and rescue a wealthy old gentleman from deadly peril, he would give us a pot of money, and we could have the partnership and five pounds a week. Five pounds a week would buy a great many things."

Then Dickie said, "Why shouldn't we borrow it?" So we said, "Who from?" And then he read this out of the paper:—

Money privately, without fees. The Bond Street Bank (manager, Z. Rosenbaum) advances cash from £20 to £10,000 on ladies' or gentlemen's note of hand alone, without security. No fees. No inquiries. Absolute privacy guaranteed.

"What does it all mean?" asked H. O.

"It means that there is a kind gentleman who has a lot of money, and he doesn't know enough poor people to help, so he puts it in the paper that he will help them by lending them his money; that's it, isn't it, Dickie?"

Dora explained this, and Dickie said, "Yes," and H. O. said he was a Generous Benefactor, like in Miss Edgeworth. Then Noel wanted to know what a note of hand was, and Dickie knew that, because he had read it in a book,

and it was just a letter saying you will pay the money when you can, and signed with your name.

"No inquiries," said Alice. "Oh, Dickie, do you think he would?"

"Yes, I think so," said Dickie. "I wonder father doesn't go to this kind gentleman. I've seen his name before on a circular in father's study."

"Perhaps he has," said Dora; but the rest of us were sure he hadn't, because, of course, if he had there would have been more money to buy nice things.

Just then Pincher jumped up and knocked over the painting water. He is a very careless dog. I wonder why painting water is

always such an ugly colour. Dora ran for a duster to wipe it up, and H. O. dropped drops of the water on his hands and said he had got the plague. So we played at the plague a bit, and I was an Arab physician and cured the plague with magic acid drops.

After that it was time for dinner, and after dinner we talked it all over and settled that we would go and see the Generous Benefactor the very next day. Of course we all wanted to go, but we thought perhaps the G. B.—it is short for Generous Benefactor—would not like it if there were so many of us. I have often noticed that it is the worst of our being six—people think six a great many when it's children. That sentence

looks wrong somehow. I mean they don't mind six pairs of boots, or six pounds of apples, or six oranges, especially in equations, but they seem to think you ought not to have five brothers and sisters. Of course Dickie was to go, because it was his idea. Dora had to go to Blackheath to see an old lady, a friend of father's, so she couldn't go. Alice said she ought to go, because it said "ladies and gentlemen," and perhaps the G. B. wouldn't let us

have the money unless there were both kinds of us.

H. O. said Alice wasn't a lady, and she said he wasn't going, any way. Then he called her a disagreeable cat, and she began to cry.

But Oswald always tries to make up quarrels, so he said, "You're little sillies, both of you."

And Dora said, "Don't cry, Alice; he only meant you weren't a grown-up lady."

Then H. O. said, "What else did you think I meant, disagreeable?"

So Dickie said, "Don't be disagreeable yourself, H. O. Let her alone and say you're sorry, or I'll jolly well make you."



"Then he called her a disagreeable cat, and she began to cry."

So H. O. said he was sorry. Then Alice kissed him and said she was sorry, too, and after that H. O. gave her a hug, and said, "Now I'm really and truly sorry"; so it was all right.

Noel went the last time we went to London, so he was out of it, and Dora said she would take him to Blackheath if we'd take H. O. So, as there'd been a row, we thought it was better to take him, and we did. At first we thought we'd tear our oldest things a bit more and put some patches of different colours on them to show the G. B. how much we wanted money. But Dora said that it would be a sort of cheating, pretending we were poorer than we were; and Dora is right sometimes, though she is a girl. Then we thought we'd better wear our best things, so that the G. B. might see we weren't so very poor that he couldn't trust us to pay his money back when we had it. But Dora said that would be wrong, too. So it came to our being quite honest, as Dora said, and going just as we were, without even washing our faces and hands; but when I looked at H. O.'s in the train, I wished we had not been quite so particularly honest.

Everyone who reads this knows what it is like to go in the train, so I shall not tell about it, though it was rather fun, especially the part where the guard came for the tickets at Vauxhall, and H. O. was under the seat, and pretended to be a dog without a ticket. We went to Charing Cross, and we just went round by Whitehall to see the soldiers, and then by St. James's Palace for the same reason, and when we'd looked in the shops a little we got to Grafton Street. It was a brass plate on a door next to a shop—a very grand place, where they sold bonnets and hats, all very bright and smart, and no tickets on them to tell you the price. We rang a bell, and a boy opened the door, and we asked for Mr. Rosenbaum. The boy was not polite—he did not ask us in. So then Dickie gave him his visiting card; it was one of father's, really, but the name is the same—Mr. Richard Bastable—and we others wrote our names underneath. I happened to have a piece of pink chalk in my pocket, and we wrote them with that.

Then the boy shut the door in our faces, and we waited on the step. But presently he came down and asked our business. So Dickie said—

"Money advanced, young shaver, and don't be all day about it!"

And then he made us wait again, till I was quite stiff in my legs, but Alice liked it,

because of looking at the hats and bonnets; and at last the door opened and the boy said, "Mr. Rosenbaum will see you."

So we wiped our feet on the mat, which said so, and we went up stairs with soft carpets and into a room. It was a beautiful room. I wished then we had put on our best things, or at least washed a little; but it was too late now.

The room had velvet curtains and a soft, soft carpet, and it was full of the most splendid things—inlaid cabinets, and china, and statues, and pictures. There was a picture of a cabbage and a pheasant and a dead hare that was just like life, and I would have given worlds to have it for my own. The fur was so natural, I should never have got tired of looking at it; but Alice liked the one of the girl with the broken jug best. Then, besides the pictures, there were clocks, and candlesticks, and vases, and gilt looking-glasses, and boxes of cigars and scent and things littered all over the tables and chairs. It was a wonderful place; and in the middle of all the splendour was a little old gentleman with a very long black coat and a very long white beard and a hooky nose like a falcon. And he put on a pair of gold spectacles and looked at us as if he knew exactly how much our clothes were worth; and while we elder ones were thinking how to begin—for we had all said "Good morning" as we came in, of course—H. O. began before we could stop him. He said—

"Are you the G. B.?"

"The *what?*" said the little old gentleman.

"The G. B.," said H. O., and I winked at him to shut up, and he didn't see me, and the G. B. did. He waved his hand at *me* to shut up, so I had to, and H. O. went on—

"It stands for Generous Benefactor."

The old gentleman frowned. Then he said, "Your father sent you here, I suppose?"

"No, he didn't," said Dickie. "Why did you think so?"

The old gentleman held out the card, and I explained that we took that because father's name happens to be the same as Dickie's.

"Doesn't he know you've come?"

"No," said Alice. "We shan't tell him till we've got the partnership, because his own business worries him a good deal, and we don't want to bother him with ours till it's settled, and then we shall give him half our share."

The old gentleman took off his spectacles

and rubbed his hair with his hands; then he said, "Then what did you come for?"

"We saw your advertisement," Dickie said, "and we want a hundred pounds on our note of hand, and my sister came so that there should be both kinds of us, and we want it to buy a partnership in the lucrative business for sale of useful patent—no personal attendance necessary."

"I don't think I quite follow you," said the G. B.; "but one thing I should like settled before entering more fully into the

"Now," he said, "you ought to be at school instead of thinking about money. Why aren't you?"

We told him we should go to school again when father could manage it; but, meantime, we wanted to do something to restore the fallen fortunes of the house of Bastable, and we said we thought the lucrative business would be a very good thing. He asked a lot of questions, and we told him everything we didn't think father would mind our telling, and at last he said, "You



"He shook hands with us all, and asked Alice to give him a kiss."

matter—why did you call me the Generous Benefactor?"

"Well, you see," said Alice, smiling at him to show she wasn't frightened—though I know really she was, awfully—"we thought it was so very kind of you to try to find out the poor people who want money, and to help them, and lend them your money."

"Hum!" said the G. B. "Sit down."

He cleared the clocks and vases and candlesticks off some of the chairs, and we sat down. The chairs were velvet, with gilt legs. It was like a king's palace.

wish to borrow money. When will you repay it?"

"As soon as we've got it, of course." Dickie said.

Then the G. B. said to Oswald, "You seem the eldest." But I explained to him that it was Dickie's idea, so my being the eldest didn't matter.

Then he said to Dickie, "You are a minor, I presume?"

Dickie said he wasn't yet, but he had thought of being a mining engineer and going to Klondyke.

"Minor, not *miner*," said the G. B. "I mean you're not of age?"

"I shall be in ten years, though," Dickie said.

"Then you might repudiate the loan," said the G. B., and Dickie said, "What?" Of course he ought to have said, "I beg your pardon, I didn't quite catch what you said." That is what Oswald would have said; it is more polite than "What?"

"Repudiate the loan," the G. B. repeated. "I mean you might say you would not pay me back the money, and the law could not compel you to do so."

"Oh, well, if you think we are such sneaks——" said Dickie, and he got up off his chair. But the G. B. said, "Sit down, sit down, I was only joking."

Then he talked some more, and at last he said, "I don't advise you to enter into that partnership. It's a swindle. Many advertisements are. And I have not a hundred pounds by me to lend you; but I will lend you a pound, and you can spend it as you like, and when you are twenty-one you shall pay me back."

"I shall pay you back long before that," said Dickie. "Thanks awfully. And what about the note of hand?"

"Oh," said the G. B., "I'll trust to your honour. Between gentlemen, you know, and ladies"—he made a bow to Alice—"a word is as good as a bond."

Then he took out a sovereign and held it in his hand while he talked to us. He gave us a lot of good advice about not going into business too young, and about doing our lessons—just swatting a bit on our own hook, so as not to be put in a low form when we went back to school. And all the time he was stroking the sovereign, and looking at it as if he thought it very beautiful. And so it was, for it was a new one. Then, at last, he held it out to Dickie, and when Dickie held out his hand for it the G. B. suddenly put the sovereign back into his pocket.

"No," he said, "I won't give you the sovereign; I'll give you fifteen shillings and this nice bottle of scent. It's worth far more than the five shillings I'm charging you for it. And you shall pay me back the pound and only sixty per cent. interest—sixty per cent.—sixty per cent.!"

"What's that?" said H. O.

The G. B. said he'd tell us when we paid him back the sovereign, but sixty per cent. was nothing to be afraid of.

He gave Dickie the money. The boy was made to call a cab, and he put us in and

shook hands with us all, and asked Alice to give him a kiss. So she did, and H. O. would do it, too, though his face was dirtier than ever. The G. B. paid the cabman and told him where to go, and so we went home.

That evening father had a letter by the seven o'clock post, and when he had read it he came up into our nursery. He did not look quite so unhappy as usual, but he looked grave.

"You've been to Mr. Rosenbaum," he said.

So we told him all about it. It took a long time, and father sat in the armchair. He doesn't often come and talk to us now; he has to spend all his time thinking about his business. And when we'd told him all about it, he said—

"You haven't done any harm, this time, children—rather good than harm, indeed. Mr. Rosenbaum has written me a very kind letter."

"Is he a friend of yours, father?" Oswald asked.

"He is an acquaintance," said my father, frowning a little. "We have done business together. And this letter——" He stopped, and then said, "No, you didn't do any harm to-day, but I want you for the future not to do anything so serious as to buy a partnership without consulting me. That's all. I don't want to interfere with your plays and pleasures, but you will consult me about business matters, won't you?"

Of course we said we would with pleasure. Then Alice, who was sitting on his knee, said, "We didn't like to bother you."

Father said, "I haven't much time to be with you, for my business takes most of my time. It is an anxious business. But I can't bear to think of your being left alone like this."

He looked so sad, we all said we liked being alone; and then he looked sadder than ever.

Then Noel said, "We don't mean that, exactly, father. It is rather lonely sometimes, since mother died."

Then we were all quiet for a little while.

Father stayed with us till we went to bed, and when he said, "Good-night," he looked quite cheerful. So we told him so, and he said, "That letter took a weight off my mind."

I can't think what he meant, but I am sure the G. B. would be pleased if he knew he had taken a weight off anybody's mind. He is that sort of noble-minded man, I think