

"RED, THE BOY BURGLAR."

**Harry Cunningham, a Precocious Lad of Eight Years,
Sent to the Sisters of St. Francis, at
Peekskill, for Moral Repairs.**

**With a Number of Other Youngsters He Planned a Western Scouting
Expedition, and to Obtain Funds for Arms, Ammunition
and Supplies Broke into an Empty House to Steal
Lead Pipe, Begged and Indulged in Various
Other Tricks on the Street.**

In the mother house of the Sisters of St. Francis at Peekskill, N. Y., there is a new inmate. It is a boy—a very small boy, with childish features and large, questioning dark eyes. He looks innocent enough to pose as a cherub on the ceiling of a Fifth avenue church, but in reality there is enough moral depravity in this sixty-five pound youngster to demoralize the whole congregation. His name is Harry Cunningham, alias "Red, the Boy Burglar;" his

age, eight years, and the unappreciative city of New York has just sent him to the Sisters for a year of quiet and uninterrupted reflection. Harry's career, brief as it has been, and now interrupted by a "combination of circumstances over which he had no control," has been checkered and interesting. Some boys are born tough, some achieve toughness and some have toughness thrust upon them. In "Red's" case it was a combination of those conditions. He took to wicked-

ness as naturally as a duck to water; he never lost an opportunity to add to his experience, and he was constantly in the company of older boys, who carefully dragged him into all the bad places they visited themselves.

There is a legend to the effect that at the early age of one year he stole a penny and swallowed it to escape detection. At fifteen months it was his favorite occupation to decapitate flies with a piece of string, and during his second Summer he made an heroic but abortive attempt to perform the same interesting operation upon a playmate of his own tender age. The youngster had a comfortable home at No. 104 East 57th street, and his father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Cunningham, labored faithfully with their son and heir. But he was too much for them. He continued to follow the alluring paths he had laid out for himself, and at six he could swear like a trooper, fight like a tiger and lie like a Sumner.

He soon met congenial spirits, among whom he became a leader on account of his superior acquirements. A ten-year-old tough hid his diminished head in this infant's presence, and when a little fruit-stand raid was planned "no party was complete without him." He took his first lessons in stealing under the lynx eyes of Italian street vendors, and covered himself with glory by walking off with a whole watermelon on one occasion while the merchant

was selling a confederate two apples for a cent.

The dime-novel period came on apace and Harry's tastes became literary. He joined a select reading circle, which met nightly in the attic room of an east-side tenement, where one of the larger members of the gang reigned supreme. Harry's education had been somewhat neglected; he had not been able to find time to attend school. So he was forced to retire to the background while the others read aloud. But he was a whole audience in himself and a most appreciative one, and in moments of high excitement, when the boy scout had killed seventeen Indians at one shot, Harry was wont to stand on his head and beat his heels against the wall as a slight evidence of his appreciation. They practiced Indian killing in this same room, but the pleasure had its limitations. The victims to be scalped invariably objected to the shedding of their gore, and, as Harry truthfully remarked: "Taint no fun to cut off de feller's hair less ye kin see de blood."

Several times a Western expedition was planned and supplies, consisting of old box of crackers and a toy pistol, were laid in. On one occasion a small party led by the hero of this tale got as far as Jersey City in its way to the plains. But they were recaptured, the leader was taken home, bent across his mother's knee and (the pen of the historian falters) actually chastised with the end of a bed slat. The hero of countless un-

fought battles, the rescuer of numerous imaginary maidens, was conquered by one little east side woman. The memory of this indignity burned into the brain of Harry for several days; then it was effaced by another, and so on.

The Western scheme, however, was not abandoned, but experience had taught the future scouts that some money and at least a small outfit would be very desirable before another attempt was made. Harry's mind became harassed by financial cares.

"We got t' have de cash, boys," said he, and they all agreed with him and waited for him to get it. He did his best, considering the limitations by which he was bounded. He removed and pawned all he could lay his hands on in every quarter; he begged and lied and stole. Finally, in the still watches of an August night, an inspiration came to him.

The next day he called the boys in solemn council and unfolded his plan. In his strolls along Lexington avenue, which he occasionally took to distract an overburdened mind, he had noticed that the house at No. 719 was vacant. He was seven years of age at that time, and perhaps his mind was not quite matured, but it worked with marvelous rapidity and evolved conclusions which seemed logical to him. Heretofore his thieving had been done on a small scale. He moved at the council that they break into this empty house at night, carefully remove all the lead pipe in the premises, and sell the

same for large gain. The motion was seconded and promptly carried by his admiring colleagues, and on the next night, Aug. 17, 1890, three small boys crept into the back yard of the house mentioned. Harry was there, of course, and with him were Frank O'Keefe, aged nine, and Charlie Hill, who was thirteen, but got lots of pointers from the other two. They had a file and a few tools with them and they went to work in regulation style. They located themselves at the iron grating over the cellar window and with great pains and patience sawed the bars apart. Then "Red, the Burglar," was lowered into the depths below and signaled to his companions that all was well. They had candles and matches and were about to reap the reward of their labors when the light attracted the observant eye of a passing policeman.

"We are capchered," squealed "Red," and they were.

They were arrested. Hill was locked up and the other two boys were taken down to Mr. Gerry's house and lodged over night, the parents being notified of the "capcher."

On the morning of the 19th the trio brought up at the police station, where the parents of the younger boys were awaiting their hopefuls. Hill's people were conspicuously absent, and he was committed to the Juvenile Asylum, where he languishes at present. Keefe and "Red" were represented by tearful mothers, asking one more

chance to reclaim their depraved youngsters, and it was given them. "Red" was led away, and the probabilities are that the bed-slat came into requisition again. However that may be, he passed three days shrouded in gloom, and his friends noticed that he failed to take his usual interest in Indian killing and athletic sports.

Then he revived and evolved another scheme. It was old, but it paid beautifully for a few days. He located after dark in some side street, placed both dirty hands over a pair of dry eyes and howled dismally. Being very small and a born actor he had no difficulty in convincing sympathetic pedestrians that he had "lost thirty-seven cents and was 'traid to go home." The fund for the Western expeditions swelled rapidly and a ropegun, a pound of ginger snaps and two boxes of cartridges were added to the supplies. But one night "Red" had a narrow escape. One pedestrian was not sympathetic. He dragged the small boy under a street lamp, gave him a good shaking and threatened to hand him over to the police as a large-sized, double-back-action fraud. So one more field of labor was closed to young Cunningham.

But he was not discouraged. His inventive mind soon evolved new schemes.

Two weeks ago, in the intervals of his duties as chief of the gang, he set up as a peddler of pins on Fifty-seventh street. He supplied himself with a pasteboard box, forty or fifty crooked pins and a larger

amount of assurance than ever and piled his trade in the evening. He never sold a pin, but he was so pathetic-looking a little chap that his box soon filled with pennies and nickels or even an occasional dime "for the little man who had begun active life so early," as a sympathetic contributor remarks. "Red" told this with great gusto to the gang and concocted a nice little story about a sick mother, which he threw in with his offer of pins.

And so the Gerry Society got after him. Philip began to suspect him and several citizens called at the Gerry headquarters, corner of Twenty-third street and Fourth avenue, to say that there was a small imposter cheating the public in their vicinity. On Tuesday night, March 31, the officers of the Society had the bad youngster arrested and brought to justice. He was arraigned at the Yorkville Police Court Wednesday morning on a charge of vagrancy, found guilty and turned over to the Sisters of the Order of St. Francis. They retained him but a few hours at their reception-house in West Thirty-first street, and then sent him off in the train to Peekskill, where he will remain for some time to come.

All of which goes to show that the way of the transgressor is hard, and that the small boy who aims to be a villain of the deepest dre slides up in the end and becomes a horrible example to the good boy who always tells the truth and never absents himself from Sunday-school.