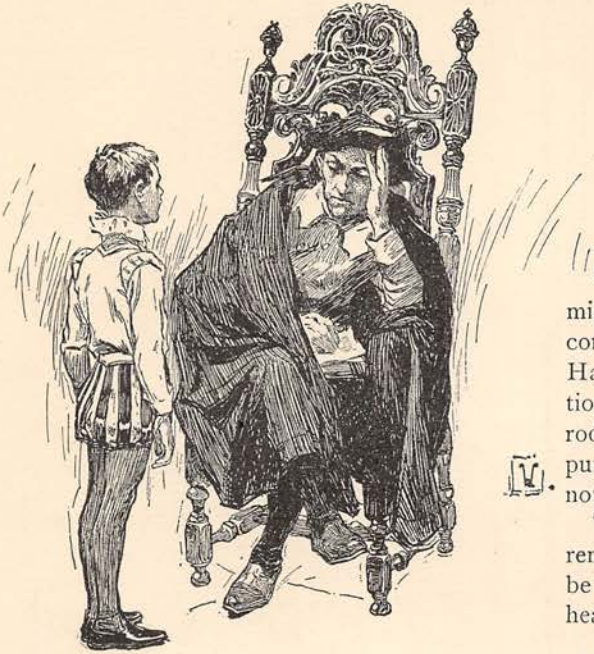


ELIZABETHAN

BOYS.

BY L. H. STURDEVANT.



Some to the wars, to try their fortune there,
Some to discover islands far away,
Some to the studious universities.



THESE were some of the manifest destinies of the Elizabethan boy. What sort of lad he was who waited impatiently for the time to come when he, too, should go out into the world and try his fortune, is not so easy to find out. Elizabethan chroniclers do not "waste their time" in talking of children! Even Harrison, who writes at length of most things, from the High Court of Parliament to the brewing of beer, scarcely mentions boys and girls. He might so easily have given us a chatty chapter on them, and he so evidently thinks it not worth while, for he "pads" his book now and then with far less interesting matter.

He does complain that the poorer sort of women do not sufficiently correct their children, "wherein their husbands are also to be blamed," says the old canon, very fairly, and "by means whereof very manie of them . . . doo oftentimes come to confusion . . . which

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might have proved good members of their commonwealthe and countrie." This same Harrison whipped his own children conscientiously until his mastiff "essaies to catch the rod in his teeth" for the preventing of further punishment, which, in his master's opinion, "is not unworthie to be noted."

That kindly mastiff should be known and remembered of all children, though the years be so many since, moved by his big, loving heart, he interceded for the little Harrisons.



Certainly lack of discipline was not a failing of the sixteenth century, and we know that chil-

dren were brought up austerely and made to study hard, whether they had tutors at home or were sent to the excellent grammar-schools of the time, where such a quantity of Latin was crammed into them, for they profited much, and were packed off to the universities early indeed, as we shall see.

They were carefully trained in all courtesy of speech and hearing, but repressed and kept in the background in a way that would be

been much esteemed for all men, and Harrison tells us with pride of "the great silence that is used at the tables of the honourable and wiser sort, generallie all over the realm."

The fathers of that time sent their sons to travel on the Continent when they could, for they believed that "home-keeping youth have ever homely wits," and that "he cannot be a perfect man, not being tried and tutor'd in the world." So let him go, said these wise fathers,



"BEARING THE LATEST NEWS FROM SCOTLAND OR FRANCE OR THE LOW COUNTRIES." (SEE PAGE 203.)

little relished by boys of to-day. They were advised to be "checked for silence, but never taxed for speech," or, as Sir Henry Sidney puts it in a very noble letter to his son Philip, then twelve years old, "rather be rebuked of light fellows for maiden-like shamefacedness, than of your sad friends for pert boldness. Tell no untruth; no, not in trifles," he goes on; "there cannot be a greater reproach to a gentleman than to be accounted a liar."

An Elizabethan boy was not likely to be a babbler, and, in truth, silence seems to have

"practise tilts and tournaments, hear sweet discourse, converse with noblemen"; he will be the more ready to go out in the world and take his place with other men.

The carefully guarded boyhood was soon over, and they were marvelously young when they sprang from the quiet and seclusion of childhood into the glow and dazzle of that wondrous age—those noble Elizabethans who were soldier and sailor, courtier and councilor, in turn; taking time now and then to write a mask or a group of sonnets, or to give a help-



"STORIES OF STEADFAST RESISTANCE, UNFLINCHING BRAVERY, AND PATRIOTISM." (SEE PAGE 204.)

ing hand to some struggling genius—to Spenser or that promising actor-manager Will Shakspeare, perhaps. Francis Bacon entered Cambridge at twelve, so did Lord Southampton (Shakspeare's friend and patron); Spenser went at sixteen; Philip Sidney was sent to Oxford at thirteen, from there went to Cambridge,

traveled and won golden opinions from all men before he was eighteen, and was sent on an important embassy at twenty-two. George Herbert, who was an Elizabethan for the first ten years of his life, went to Cambridge at fifteen, "having spent much of his childhood in a sweet content under the eye and care of

his prudent mother, and the tuition of a chaplain or tutor."

The mothers and tutors and grammar-schools did good work, whether their pupils were sent to the universities, or sped away to the "military academies of the times" in Flanders or Ireland, or took ship and sailed to the Spanish Main and fought Spaniards, which was a habit of the times.

What was he like, this boy who was kept so sternly and taught so well, and blossomed so early into the flower of noble manhood? There are some heroic boys in Shakspeare: Arthur, who was beloved even of his jailer; the gallant young Prince Edward, and forward little York, who asks for his terrible uncle's dagger, and jests with him as one who plays with a tiger; and little Mamilus, who is so young as to be little more than a plaything, yet who droops and dies at his mother's disgrace, so sensitive and honorable is his spirit. Were they drawn from English boys as gallant and daring as they? And little William Page, who hung his head, and spoke only when he was spoken to, and was of a "good sprag memory," was he some Elizabethan school-boy straight from life, or a reminiscence maybe of little William Shakspeare, who once went to Stratford grammar-school, and was of a "good sprag memory" too?

But boys have studied hard and been trained severely before and since. Never has a nobler band stood in the forefront of a nation than the men who glorified that time: Raleigh, Sidney, the Gilberts, Frobisher, Drake, Grenville, Cecil, Walsingham, Bacon; and that other group, Shakspeare, Spenser, Jonson, Marlowe—there is no end to the names. One would like to know just what made them what they were; what futures they planned and dreamed through the long days of childhood; what they heard and saw in the talk and example of the men about them—ever the thing that most influences a boy.

It was an age of learning, of increased refinement and courtesy. England had never been so prosperous, never advanced so rapidly in comfort and even in luxury. Houses were built of brick or stone, chimneys abounded, rooms were "large and comelie"; there was "great

profusion of tapestry, Turkey worke, pewter, brasse, fine linen, and therto costly cupbords of plate" in gentlemen's houses; nor did it stop there, for "even the inferiour artificers, and many farmers" learned to "garnish their cupbords with plate, their joined beds with tapestry and silke hangings, and their tables with carpets and fine naperie," and even a poor man had "three or four feather beds, and a dozen of spoones," and pewter platters in place of wooden ones.

With all this, and the talk of older men, who looked back to the plainness and hardships of an earlier day, no doubt the Elizabethan boy thought there never had been such times or such a queen, and over his Latin and Greek fretted and chafed for the day when he would be free and see it all for himself.

Those were great, heroic, terrible days—the days of the Dutch Republic, of the St. Bartholomew Massacre, of the Spanish Armada. A boy must have heard wonderful things in his father's hall, as he stood respectfully by, or carried wine to the gentleman who had ridden down from London through the mire, bearing the latest news from Scotland or France or the Low Countries. Perhaps it was a kinsman, an uncle or an elder brother, who had been fighting by sea or land, and had come home to nurse a wound, and be glorified and honored by the whole household and neighborhood.

How the boy must have admired and envied him, followed him about, waited on him, longed to go back with him into that heroic world where men won name and fame so quickly!

England must have been full of such wide-eyed listeners by the fire, and there were stories enough for them to hear, as the news filtered slowly through the land, from town to town and hall to hall, losing nothing in the transit, one may be sure: stories from Scotland of the beautiful young queen—pretty tales, at first, of her charm, her gaiety, her popularity, growing gradually more somber, until men told, with a shudder, how her husband was slain,—it was said, by her own plots,—how her subjects had risen against her and imprisoned her on an island in a lake, like a fairy queen, how she escaped and fled to

their own England, where she was fast captive again—and “Best keep her so,” said the stern narrators, doubtless; stories from the Low Countries, where some of the best blood in England was fighting—stories of persecution and cruelty and wrong, of steadfast resistance, unflinching bravery, and patriotism, of the Spanish Fury, when blood ran like water in Antwerp streets, and no horror of murder and flame and violence was spared.

Did he set his teeth as he listened, that eager boy, as he saw his father's face darken, his mother and sisters shiver and turn white? No man knew when such a fate might come to his own in those days, for the Armada was not yet, and the power and cruelty of Spain overshadowed the whole world. Did he not resolve to die at his own threshold, if need were, fighting for his own people, and grow a man in thought and purpose, in the resolve?

Is it any wonder that at sixteen or seventeen, finding books and study no longer endurable, he flung himself into the conflict, like Raleigh, who was no sooner entered at Oxford than he broke away, and was across the Channel fighting for the Huguenots when he was barely seventeen?

Not all the tales were bloody ones. Think of the boys who listened breathless as that wonderful romance of Drake's voyage sounded through England like a trumpet-call in the autumn of 1580! What a dream of dreams it was—to sail around the world, fighting the Spaniard as a matter of course whenever one saw him, to struggle with wind and wave and danger for three long years, and to come triumphantly home at last, with a shipload of gold-dust, silver ingots, pearls, emeralds, and diamonds, the hero of England and of the world! Was there a boy in England who did not swear that he too would circle the globe and bring back treasure untold?

There were rare adventures toward, only waiting for the doing: cruising and fighting, gold and silver, honor and fame and glory, for brave men and true; and if God sent death instead, who feared it? Not boys who had been told of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who cried out from the deck of his ship, the “Squirrel,” as she disappeared in night and storm, “We

are as near heaven by sea as by land”; of that immortal speech of Sidney's to the dying soldier, as he gave him the water his own lips craved, “Thy need is greater than mine”; of Grenville, who fought fifty Spanish ships with his own “Revenge” from afternoon till the following daybreak, and was carried aboard a Spanish ship to die, saying, “Here die I, Richard Grenville, with a joyful and a quiet mind, for that I have ended my life as a good soldier ought to do, who has fought for his country and his queen, for honor and religion.” Such deaths were triumphs; who should fear them?

An Elizabethan boy heard much of his queen, of her wit, her glory, her wisdom, her love of her people and care for their welfare; and he was loyal with the passionate, personal loyalty peculiar to the time. He heard much of religion, for upon the maintenance of the national religion depended the national existence, home as well as heaven. He was brought up in a time when God's interposition and help were constantly sought and recognized, not only by individuals, but by the nation. The words of his queen when she was told of her accession to the throne, “It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes,” were stamped on the gold coinage throughout her reign for him to see and remember. “The Lord blew with his wind and they were scattered,” was graven on the Armada medal. He could no more forget that acknowledgment of God's direct protection than he could forget the fearful peril that summoned it. Strengthened and clenched by a hundred attacks and dangers, his religion could not but be earnest, deep-seated, and vital.

He had a fine spirit, the Elizabethan boy, a somewhat turbulent one, if the truth be told, when he was not allowed to work it off fighting and privateering, but was kept to his book at the university. One hears with pain that he and his fellows there “ruffle and roist it out, and for excuse, when they are charged with breach of all good order, thinke it sufficient to saie that they be gentlemen's sonnes, which greeveth manie.” The spirit of the people was as high, and Rathgeb says “the

street boys and apprentices collect together in immense crowds, and strike to the right and left unmercifully, without regard to persons." Stowe tells us how one Shrove Tuesday for most offenses then and later, and Busino saw a lad of fifteen led to execution for stealing a bag of currants. One wonders about the very many young boys who should have



THE DEATH OF SIR RICHARD GRENVILLE, COMMANDER OF THE "REVENGE."

"many disordered persons of sundry kinds, amongst whom were very many young boys and lads, assembled themselves," and did many riotous acts, and even "despitefully used and resisted the Sheriffes of London."

They were not over-gentle authorities that were so defied. The gallows was the penalty

been safe at home at their ages instead of trifling with death in that fashion.

One would like to know what kind of homes they had in that crowded, bustling little London of scarce one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, and why their fathers and mothers did n't keep them out of riots. It seems as

if Canon Harrison was right when he blamed their lack of discipline.

Shakspeare gives these boys a mention or two: these were "the youths that thunder at a play-house, and fight for bitten apples"; these the lads that, when street fights took place were likely to be found throwing pebbles at their quarrelsome elders, while remaining somewhat in the background. The great dramatist has sketched such scenes for us in his historical plays. Insubordinate, riotous little lads, these—what did they come to later on? Were they food for powder in the Low Countries, or jolly mariners, or boisterous apprentices?

Doubtless they were brave men, and did a man's work somewhere, and very likely made good citizens in spite of their unruly boyhood, and prospered, and died full of years and honors, some three hundred years ago.

Take him for all in all, we may guess the Elizabethan boy to have been a fine fellow, and peering back through the centuries, we see him, fearless, honorable, faithful, learned beyond his years, religious with the deep, per-

sonal religion that is won by those who have to fight for their faith. When we seek to look into his heart, there seems to be no limit to the hopes of such a boy, in such a time, with the world before him. What shall he do who might do anything? Shall he sail the seas with Drake, capture the Plate Fleet, loot rich galleons, discover gold-mines in Peru? Shall he fight manfully in the Low Countries, where was little gold, but much glory and noble companionship? Shall he go to the court, win favor with the queen, stand a trusted councilor at her right hand, and sway the realm? Shall he, being an ambitious boy, choose to do all these things in turn, as other men had done, and come gloriously home at last to the old hall, where his heart had been all the time, and end his days there in honor, like his father before him? It was likely enough. Boys lived out their dreams in those days oftener than not, in heroic life or death, and made great names for themselves in peace and war, and were faithful over a few things as over many, if need were; wherefore their works do follow them unto this day.

