

CONCERNING BOYS.

BY ARNOLD GOESWORTHY.

Like a good many other people who live to see greatness, the boy starts in life without a shirt to his back. Most folks have to toil for years to gain a small share of the world's applause, but the first time the boy gets a look-in upon this sinful earth, his appearance is greeted with loud cheers and waving of handkerchiefs; and a hurried deputation, consisting of grandma and the monthly nurse, waits upon Pa, in the dining room, with the surprising information that it's a boy after all—as though they had quite expected it was going to be an elephant or a two-headed calf.

The first year or so of a boy's life is one of pure and uninterrupted bliss. He sits in solemn grandeur, wrapped up in an old flannel petticoat, in the cheerful society of an india-rubber tube and a tin of condensed milk, with nothing to do all day long except brush the flies away from the bald spot on the top of his head. It is not till he has attained the mature age of seven or eight that he begins to find out that there is some objectionable person living in his house, called Ma, who is always ready with personal remarks when a fellow comes home with the after part of the rigging of his trousers torn away, and who invariably fosters the wild delusion that a fellow has been fighting just because he has got a black eye, and can't remember where he has left his front teeth. But the horriest thing about the house is the fat little man with no hair on his head, called Pa, who comes home every night, and wants to know how many pennies make twopence halfpenny, and why William the Conqueror did it when he couldn't help himself. It is always a problem to the small boy why he has to keep these two interfering people hanging about the place; and sometimes, after an exciting, but unsuccessful attempt to dodge the old man round the front parlor, when he is left alone with the feeling that it's much more comfortable standing up than sitting down, he can't help thinking what fun it would be if little boys could be born orphans. This Pa business is one of most depressing drawbacks an enterprising boy has to contend with. When he gets to be about fourteen he feels it is simply pathetic to have to stand by and listen to his father's appalling ignorance of the world; and when the time comes for him to be allowed out alone, if he shouldn't happen to reach home till about midnight once or twice a week, the fuss that is made about it is most irritating. Indeed, sometimes, on these occasions, the old man is positively rude to him!

It is very nice for a boy to be always good and obedient and all that, but as a rule that kind of boy never gets to be fit for much else. It seems natural for a healthy-minded boy to have a day off with Satan once in a while; and there is a good deal of nature about the boy who gets up on a fine summer's morning, and after saying his prayers with dutiful regularity, goes out and breaks a window or punches another boy on the nose. The painfully good little boy never strikes another boy, because it's sinful. It generally is—extremely sinful, especially, if the other boy can fight.

When the average boy gets to be somewhere about nine, he begins to realize that he has lived all along without anybody to love, and the cares of bachelorhood are beginning to tell upon him. Then, one fatal day, the pleasure of his company is requested at a dancing party in the neighbourhood, and during the evening he finds himself seated in the corner beside a lovely young creature, with fluffy hair, who can't dance because she has a sore toe; and suddenly the utterable yearning comes upon him to nurse that toe till death. He crawls home that night with a lock of hair in his trousers pocket and a heavy burden at his heart, which is partly the ecstasy of undying love and partly the effect of mixing strawberry-ice with sausage-roll. The next day he waits for her when school is over, and presses upon her a little keepsake in the shape of a piece of slate pencil or a couple of tiddlers in a pickle jar; and after a while they will go out fishing together, and see will hold his rod while he goes round to shy a stone at another boy's float. By degrees the slight acquaintance ripens into deep and imperishable

affection; and the next week she sees somebody she likes better, and he has got another girl. The peculiar thing about the boy is that in after years he never marries the sweetheart of his boyhood. It may be because they have drifted apart on the remorseless sea of time; but the likeliest reason is that during his boyhood he has had the advantage of seeing how she can fight, and he comes to the conclusion that it isn't good enough. Boys will be boys, bless 'em! and I'm glad to think that it's not much longer ago than yesterday since I was a boy myself.

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