

PREFACE.

THIS book is written by the author in the belief that boys enjoy best those stories which are truest to real life in characters, plot and coloring. It has seemed to him that their interest in a "hero" who has the faults and limitations of "a good average boy," acting under environments of ordinary importance and probability, is keener than in an impossible prodigy of juvenile wisdom and courage who finds himself in a complex tangle of stupendous difficulties, from which he frees himself by a series of daring adventures sufficiently melodramatic to appal the "heavy villain" in a third-rate tragedy.

The boy who has a single real adventure, in the usual juvenile acceptance of the term, is a rare exception, for in *outward* circumstance and perils most boyhoods are commonplace enough. What, then, shall be said of the books which picture their boy heroes as suffering from an epidemic—a veritable cholera-infantum—of material perils? Certainly they are not true pictures of boy life as an average, or even as an average of reasonable exceptions.

It is to be doubted whether the time has come when the mass of story-reading American boys can