

Shall Boys be Boys? What My Fellow-Passenger Told Me

BY GREVILLE H. TENPANY.

THERE were three of us in the carriage—myself, an elderly man, and a boy.

The elderly man, who was seated in the farthest corner of the carriage, appeared to belong to the professional classes, and had all the air of being well-to-do.

The boy, who was sitting face to face with me in the opposite corner, was an ordinary, healthy, good-humoured, and good-looking British boy, and I guessed him to be probably travelling down to a certain well-known public school which was situated at a town some distance down the line on which we were.

This boy and myself fell into conversation. I found that my surmise as to his destination was correct; he was returning to school, and he described to me at some length what a "ripping good time" he meant to have this term.

It was then that it occurred to me that it might be an advantageous and appropriate thing were I to remind the boy just before he departed that it was not entirely for the purpose of having a "good time" that he went to school, but that there were other aspects to be considered.

Accordingly, I ventured on my gentle reminder, and as I concluded my observations, the train slowed down at the station. Then it was that the man in the far corner spoke for the first time.

"My dear boy," he said gently, as the boy was just about to pass him, "learn how to have that 'good time' of yours in the right way, and you'll have learnt something better than most of us. Nothing is worth knowing except the right way to be happy."

Next moment the boy had gone, and the two of us were alone in the carriage.

"Don't you think that that was a rather dangerous idea to give to a boy, that of yours?" I asked.

"Ah, but think," said he, "think of a childhood—a boyhood—that should be made unhappy by a spectre of duty, of responsibility sometimes in the background, sometimes not, but always there; by a fear of failure before one ought to realize its possibility, consider what a childhood made unhappy in that particular way must be like. Who are of their most precious possessions—irresponsibility?"

"At one time," he continued, "I held very different ideas from these which you have questioned. I was, in fact, a different man altogether. I had strong views as to the duty of children to their parents, and I was full of a sense of the necessity of sacrificing happiness to one's responsibilities. At the time of which I am speaking I had been married for four years, and my family consisted of three children, two daughters and one son, the youngest of the three.

"It was in this boy that my whole interest in existence seemed to centre. I was resolved that he should make a great success of his life, that he should have a brilliant career, and from his very earliest days I can remember impressing upon him constantly the responsibility that rested upon him, as an only son, to do something that should enable his parents to be proud of him. I was constantly reminding him of those ideas of duty, always his duty, that occupied my mind so largely.

"The time arrived at length when he was to be sent to school, and before he

went I had a long talk with him, and told him all that I expected of him, and what a great success I hoped that he would be. From the time when he first went to school, I believe that his mind can never have been quite free from that sense of responsibility that I had so religiously instilled into it, and from a consciousness that, come what might, he must succeed."

"Did he never rebel?" I ventured to ask.

"Once, and only once. At the end of one of his school terms, I was not satisfied with what he had done and reproached him, and then he replied that he had done his best, and that he could not and would not give up his whole

anything could make up for that! And I remember thinking how proud I should be of him, and how completely my conduct towards him would have proved to have been justified when the result was seen.

"I was full of this self-congratulation, when my hopes were suddenly scattered by my being sent for to Oxford to see my son, who had been suddenly taken ill. I got there to find him suffering from brain fever, and worse than when I had been sent for. He was quite delirious, and did not know me, and the same evening I telegraphed for his mother, but before she could get to him he had died; but even that wasn't the worst of it.

"All the while that I sat by his bedside," he resumed slowly, "and he was talking in his delirium, he kept on repeating: 'I must pass. I must pass. Father would never forgive me if I didn't!' Over and over again he said that, and would follow it with long lists of Greek paradigms and scraps of Latin verse, which he would keep up for half an hour at a time, always coming back

sooner or later to the repetition of that phrase that he must pass. If it had ever been in his heart to punish me for my folly, which I knew it never was, he could not have thought of any punishment which would have been more terrible or more effectual than that I underwent during his delirium. And at the end of it all he died, and I had to break the news to my wife when she arrived, and that was almost as bad as what I had been through before, for many times she had pleaded with me to be less strict with the boy, only to be met with the reply that it was all for his good."

He was silent again, and then, after a pause, he said:

"Do you wonder now at my feeling as I do?" he asked.

"No! Who could?" I replied.

"And when I hear anyone speaking as you spoke to that boy, I always feel that we should at least see that children are happy, for who knows if they will ever be happy when they cease to be children?"—*Sunday Companion.*

O never falling splendour!
O never silent splendour!
Still keep the green earth tender,
Still keep the gay earth strong.

O angels sweet and splendid,
Throng in our hearts and sing
The wonders which attended
The coming of the King!

Till we, too, boldly pressing
Where once the shepherds trod,
Climb Bethlehem's Hill of Blessing,
And find the Son of God.

—*Phillips Brooks.*



time to what he called 'swotting,' with-out a minute to call his own, and to do what he liked in. I replied that, if necessary, he could and should do so, and the end of it was that I thrashed him for what I considered impertinence, and after that I think that he had an actual physical fear of me, which urged him to refrain from disappointing my hopes.

I gained what I had desired, however, and he left with a brilliant record behind him, having gained a scholarship to Oxford. There he followed up his success at school with even greater success, and when his last year there came, I expected and believed that he would be able to leave after having greatly distinguished himself in the final examination for his degree.

"I remember that at this time I was always telling myself that afterwards, when he was fairly started on a successful career, I would make amends to him for anything that he might have taken for unnecessary strictness on my part when he was a boy—as though

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"Don't pray for tasks equal to your powers but for powers equal to your tasks."