

BOYS AND BOATS.

BY J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

HAPPY is the boy who is born by the water side, whether that water be fresh or salt. His life will have a flavour unknown to another whose environment does not include a stretch of sea, a reach of river, or an expanse of lake. There is no sport better calculated to make boys self-reliant, ready of resource, and steady of nerve, than boating, especially if that boating be done upon a bay or harbour where wind and tide play their perplexing pranks, and oftentimes, like tiger-cubs, are found to have dangerous moods, when their play becomes dead earnest.

Now by boating, I do not mean only that feverish fighting for records and first-place in races which absorbs so much attention now-a-days, but being in a boat for the pure love of the thing, taking delight in driving your jaunty craft through the rippled calm, or amidst the snowy "white caps," by dint of deftly feathered oar, or expertly-managed sail. That, after all, is the best kind of boating, because it is not monopolized by a few "phenomena," but may be shared in by any boy who has strength enough to tug an oar, or wit enough to handle a sail.

What a simple matter it seems to dip an oar into the water, draw it steadily through, turn it neatly as it emerges dripping from the brine, and throw it forward for another stroke! But lo! it proves anything but easy when you try it for the first time. You plant yourself firmly upon the thwart, press your heels hard against the stretcher, take a light grip of the oar with both hands, and then, bending forward until your nose almost bumps against your knuckles, plunge the blade in deep, and pull for all you are worth. Hurrah! in spite of a little wobbling the oar cuts through the water, and you have the delight of feeling the boat move forward in response to your effort. Exultant in your success, you recover hastily and give another stroke. Hullo! What's become of you, and why are your heels bobbing up in the place where your head ought to be? Surely you can't pretend to row lying on the broad of your back in the bottom of the boat?

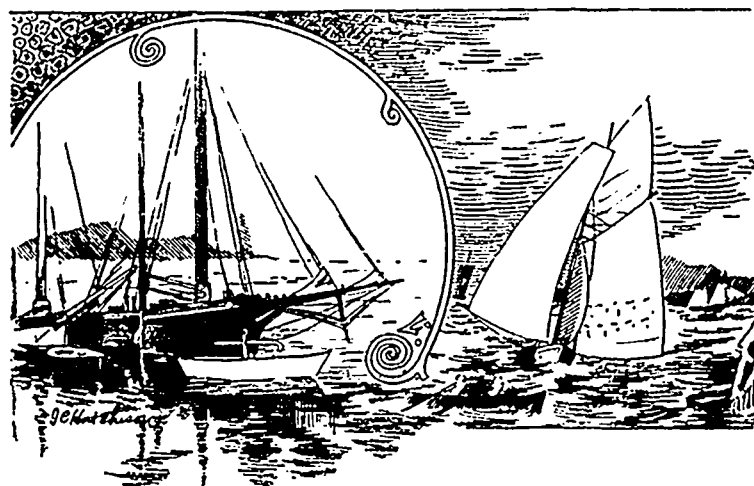
"Ah! ha! my boy, you've caught a crab!" laughs somebody who knows all about it. "Caught a crab?" Expecting to see a pink and mottled shell-fish at the end of your oar, you scramble back to your seat, and look eagerly over the gunwale. No crab there. What *do* they mean? Well you learn soon enough, and a particularly bright boy you need to be to succeed in mastering the difficulties of reaching, dipping, pulling through, feathering, and recovering, without catching a dozen crabs at least.

The features of a perfect stroke can be described in a few lines. You must reach forward until your hands are just over your up-turned toes, and dip your oar in so that the blade is completely covered without being buried, then draw it steadily through, maintaining the same depth from the beginning to the end of the pull, commencing your feather before the blade leaves the water, and finishing it by a quick turn of the wrist as you gather yourself together for another stroke. Dip evenly, pull steadily, feather cleanly, recover quickly, and you are a good oarsman whether you sit in a fishing flat, a trim-built wherry, an egg-shell scull, or a long-legged eight-oar.

Of course, all this is not to be learned in a single summer, any more than Rome was built in a day. When you have got over crab-catching, the next direction given you, in all probability, will be "Don't watch your oar

Keep your eyes astern," and this you will find more easily said than done, for there still seems to be a good deal of perversity in the piece of wood your hands hold, and somehow or other it behaves very much better when you have your eyes on it than when you are looking at the coxswain. Nevertheless, orders must be obeyed, and you fix your gaze astern, and tug away manfully. The blisters gather, your back begins to ache, and the seat to feel uncommonly hard. You are, of course, too proud to confess it, but oh! how glad you are when the command comes "Easy all ship your oars," and the lesson is over for that day.

When the difficulties have all been overcome, then comes the delight of independence, and there is, perhaps, no prouder moment in a boy's life than that which sees him for the first time able to manage a boat alone. It is well for him if his bump of caution is duly developed, or he may be tempted into enter-



prises beyond his powers. The other side of the harbour may look wonderfully attractive on some calm summer morning, and he cannot resist the impulse to voyage across. It is only a couple of miles, and what is that when the water is like glass? So off he starts, and, exulting in his new accomplishment, awakens the calm into merry ripples as he pushes vigorously forward. Half-way over he pauses to rest his hands, and looking back is inclined to turn about, the distance seems more than he thought. But pride says "No, go ahead," and he resumes rowing.

At length more tired than he expected to be, and very hot, he reaches his goal. The beach is of clean yellow sand, just perfect for a bathe. Off go shirt, and trousers and boots, and in goes the boy, who finds the water so delicious that he is slow to notice that the calm has vanished, and a brisk breeze taken its place. When he does discover this, he hurries into his clothes, pushes off his boat, and plies the oars with nervous energy. Soon he realizes that he is to have no easy task getting home again. The ripples grow into waves, the waves put on white-caps, and it takes all his strength to keep the boat's head up to the wind.

To the bottom of his heart he repents having started, and wishes himself safe home again. The work is so hard that he would fain drop the oars, and let himself drift, in hopes of being picked up by some other boat or passing vessel. But the waves look so threatening that he dare not do this, and, banishing the idea, he applies