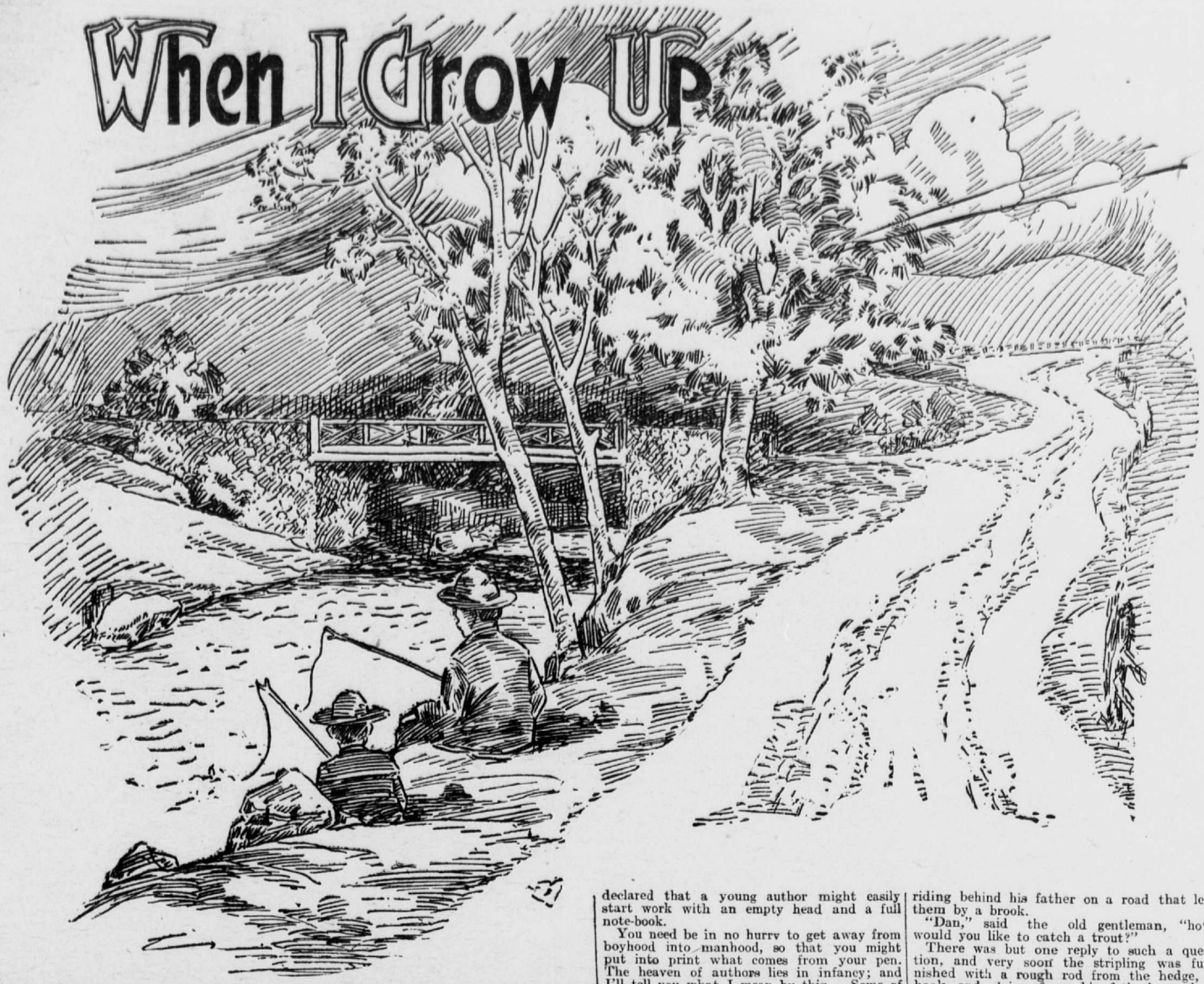
When I Grow Up



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WE all have our dreams, whether we be boys or men. I was going to say that we all are boys—actual boys to the end of our days—only of a different size and age. Anyhow, we are forever planning what we will do when the morrow comes; and if there is really any romance in our minds it is when we are young. Then life seems full of all kinds of beautiful possibilities for us.

"I will be a merchant," says one boy, "and my ships shall trade with the whole world."

"I will be a traveler, like Livingstone and Stanley," says another; whilst others think of farming, or office work, or the army.

Now and then one actually has the courage to say, "I will be a writer, and give the world stories and poetry." If he really has the gift in him, it might show itself in the careful stitching together of sheets of note-paper, and in the scribbling of impossible tales, in which Indians and prairies will surely be found.

All this, I need hardly say, is discountenanced by considerate parents, who know what a queer occupation a writer's is. How Robert Browning's father must have stared when, asking his son to choose a profession, he got for answer, "I will be a poet!"

Hjalmar Hjworth Boyesen's father was practical enough, and, on hearing of his boy's leanings in this direction, he boldly said, "Norway is too small a country to support poets." And there was yet another astonishment, years ago now, in a family bearing the name of Whittier. And when you think for a moment of the funny ideas prevailing in the district at the time, the astonishment will perhaps be better understood.

One night, when a big black insect came buzzing into a room, it was declared to be an old woman who was suspected of witchcraft, and, of course, was immediately knocked down and killed. Just about this time, too, a man was seen in the neighboring woods with a gun, looking into all the bushes and trees.

The honest folk thought there must be something suspicious in such conduct, and immediately arrested the man, who, by the way, was a celebrated ornithologist, and brought him before the judge.

"Well," said the judge, when he found out that the prisoner's only business was shooting birds, "what do you do with them—eat them?"

"No."

"Do you sell them?"

"No; I study them."

And it would have gone hard with the student had he not been possessed of a letter from a well-known Boston gentleman.

Into such a simple neighborhood came one day the editor of a local newspaper to thank young Whittier for some poems which had been sent for publication; and the poet turned out to be a lad of eighteen, who was working in the fields clad only in a shirt, trousers and straw hat.

The world knows this Whittier now.

Any boy who has ambition in the direction of literature cannot begin his preparation too early. Of course, we all know Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island;" and while to the younger of us its charm is all that of a thoroughly good boy's book, to those who are somewhat older its artistic workmanship is a no less remarkable feature. Stevenson himself lets us into the secret of his mastership in the craft.

"All through my boyhood and youth," he says, "I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside I would either read, or a pencil and a blank book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene, or commemorate some halting stanza. Thus I lived with words."

This careful jotting down of what is in the mind or before the eye has been carried on by many great writers. The poet Gray did it, and Pliny, and a host of others. Beethoven actually tramped the streets of Vienna with his tablet in his hand. Dean Swift, with his customary exaggeration of a little truth, once declared that a young author might easily start work with an empty head and a full note-book.

You need be in no hurry to get away from boyhood into manhood, so that you might put into print what comes from your pen. The heaven of authors lies in infancy; and I'll tell you what I mean by this. Some of the best things written by our story-tellers have been founded on their recollections of early days.

George Eliot's books are full of such, and so are Thomas Hardy's. In fact, the last-named author is so jealous over his impressions of this kind that during the writing of one of his last volumes he was within twenty miles of the place he was describing, but would not go near it for fear of disturbing the idea he had of it from his childhood. Hawthorne once said "everything is beautiful in youth;" and you cannot well get away from the ideas you glean their. You may to some extent grow out of them, but they will never be lost.

There is a story told of a boy who used to read his Plato, covered to his chin with a cloak, in a cold upper room, and all through life the Dialogues were associated in his mind with a woolen smell.

Mr. Hamerton, the artist, says.

"It is not the written poetry which affects us most, but the unwritten poetry of our own youth, and mine is all bound up with heather and fern, and streams flowing under the shade of alders."

One spring day a boy of five years old was riding behind his father on a road that led them by a brook.

"Dan," said the old gentleman, "how would you like to catch a trout?"

There was but one reply to such a question, and very soon the stripling was furnished with a rough rod from the hedge, a hook and string from his father's pocket, and creeping along a rock that lay on the margin of a deep pool, he threw his line, and soon found that he had actually hooked a large trout.

That first experience was always remembered, and when the boy grew up to be the famous Daniel Webster his recreation was still fishing. He never forgot his early love of this kind, for when he became a member of the Legislature of Massachusetts he introduced a bill, that passed into law, which forbade, under pains and penalties, the taking of trout in any other way but the old one of hook and line.

One who knew the late Richard Jefferies, wrote of him as a boy:

"He was a great reader, and I remember a sunny parlor window, almost like a room, where many books of adventure and fairy-tales were read by him. Close to his home was the 'Reservoir,' a prettily situated lake surrounded by trees, and with many romantic nooks on the banks. Here we often used to go on exploring expeditions in quest of curiosities or wild Indians."

Mr. Besant, in quoting this, says.

"Here we get at the origin of 'Bevis.' Those who have read the romance—which, if it were better porportioned and shorter, would be the most delightful boy's book in the world—will remember how the lads played and made pretense upon the shores and waters of the lake. Now they are travelers in the jungle of wild Africa; now they come upon a crocodile; now they hear close by the roar of a lion; now they discern the traces of savages; now they go into hiding; now they discover a great inland sea; now they build a hut and live upon a desert island. The man at thirty-six recalls every day of his childhood, and makes a story out of it for other children."

So you see, boys, that if you are to become writers when you grow up, the games and amusements of many odd experiences you are having now, must provide you with material for your work. Nothing in this world is ever lost. In the meanwhile, if you are wise, you will keep your minds clear of the "dime neovel," which is only another name for rubbish in literature.

You may take a grown-up boy's word for it—the sweeping out of this worthless stuff to make room for better is an unpleasant task, and if you are going to do work worth the name you had better be free of the necessity for thus "cleaning up."

You never need be ashamed of building all kinds of big castles for the future—always provided, of course, that you steadily work toward the same point.

I suppose it is hardly necessary to say that you must by no means neglect your playground, your base ball, football and racing, even for your books and dreams.

Plutarch, in his "Lives"—a book, by the way, full of interesting incident—tells of the wisdom of Lycurgus, who prescribed plenty of games even for the girls of Sparta. He ordered them to exercise themselves in running, wrestling and throwing quoits and darts, so that thereby they should become possessed of strong and vigorous bodies. He, at all events, believed in healthy minds in healthy bodies.

Lost in the Woods

HAVE you ever been lost in the woods? Possibly not, as comparatively few boys live near or travel through forests without well-defined limits; and, if you are a girl, decidedly not, as the average girl has not the adventuresome spirit to wander far from home.

If you have ever been lost in the woods you will not be likely to forget the sensation. It is not a pleasant one. In a dense forest the sun is so shrouded by the trees that its position is very difficult to determine at any time of day, and at its best the sun is not a very reliable guide, and when darkness falls there is absolutely no guide at all.

Trees look distressingly alike, and very few persons possess the ability to climb to the top of a forest monarch to get their bearings. Even this resource would be futile if the forest was of any great extent.

Persons lost on the mountains or the prairies are apt to move around in a circle, and therefore a compass is an invaluable aid, provided care is taken to obtain the bearings of the place to which they wish to return before leaving it; but when mists have settled down upon the summits of the higher mountains, it is not prudent to attempt to traverse them, as a false step might lead the pedestrian over the edge of a precipice. The true policy in such a case is to remain quiet till the atmosphere clears enough to make further walking safe.

Instances have been known of persons creeping on their hands and knees over a path with which they were familiar, and thus finding their way back to their starting point; but in this case the path was well defined and there were no dangerous ravines near by.

In some parts of the White Mountains the wanderer can be safely guided by the course of streams which flow in the direction from which he has started, but if he is ignorant of his bearings he may become confused by the appearance of the water-courses and led far away from the object of his search. By following a stream, however, he is more likely to be led into logging camps, or near other human habitations, than if he had no such guide to the valleys.

To be on the safe side the hunter or explorer should never wander too far away from a water-course or lake, but if he finds himself turned around and there are others in the party, the best plan is to sit down, build a fire and wait to be rescued. Search will almost certainly be made for him, and if he keeps moving around he may be all the time moving away from his would-be rescuers.

Above all, the one who is lost should keep cool and not give way to despair. If he has a gun and a fishing line he may wander around for an indefinite period without any danger and learn a valuable experience from his adventure.

Ammunition should be carefully husbanded, and not wasted—with the hope of attracting attention, unless he is certain that the searching party is near at hand.

Should the lost one be without hope of rescue from outside sources he must depend upon the compass and his knowledge of woodcraft. As cautioned above, keep cool, note the run of the streams and the lay of the land; be of good heart, and recall all the stories you have ever heard of such cases. Remember that ninety-nine out of a hundred lost people are found, and don't give up until you have to.