



Whether Common or Not

By WILL N. MAUPIN.

Where Peace Was Proclaimed

For weeks Portsmouth, N. H., has been in the eyes of all people, for there gathered the peace commissioners from Russia and Japan in an effort to put a stop to the war and bring warring nations once more into the bonds of friendship.

To thousands of boys—old boys and young boys—there was something familiar about the telegraphed descriptions of historic old Portsmouth. Every day they recognized some old landmark, some old scene upon the water front, some quaint old character among its people. It seemed to these thousands as if they had once lived or visited in Portsmouth, for memory was something more than a dream. But how many of them really know why there were so many familiar things about the descriptions telegraphed broadcast over the land by the correspondents gathered to secure the news? It need no longer remain a secret. The reason for the seeming familiarity is not far to seek.

Did you ever read Thomas Bailey Aldrich's "Story of a Bad Boy?"

Ah! Now you begin to understand!! Rivermouth! And with recollections of Rivermouth come recollections of the snow fight on Slatter's hill, Gypsy, the pony, Bailey's battery, the burning of Ezra Wingate's old mail coach, Tom Bailey's fight with the red-headed Conway, the cruise of the Dolphin, old Sailor Ben—what a medley of recollections, to be sure!

The Rivermouth of Aldrich's splendid "Story of a Bad Boy" is the Portsmouth made yet more famous because it was the scene of the peace conference. And Riv—we mean Portsmouth—will be remembered because of the escapades of Tom Bailey much longer than it will be because of the peace conference.

"The Story of a Bad Boy"—who wasn't nearly so bad as he might have been—is one of the best boy stories ever written. No matter how old a boy you may be, if you have the least recollection of your youthful days you can take down that book and read it again with a deeper interest than when you read it twenty, thirty, forty—aye, sixty years ago. The newspaper correspondents at Portsmouth have endeavored to describe the quaint old city, but not one of them has succeeded in making his description as interesting as the one in "The Story of a Bad Boy." Read it:

"As we drove through the streets of the quiet old town. I thought Rivermouth the prettiest place in the world; and I think so still. The streets are long and wide, shaded by gigantic American elms, whose drooping branches, interlacing here and there, span the avenues with arches graceful enough to be the handiwork of fairies. Many of the houses have small flower gardens in front gay in the season with china-asters, and are substantially built, with massive chimney-stacks and protruding eaves. A beautiful river goes rippling by the town, and, after turning and twisting among a lot of tiny islands, empties itself into the sea.

The harbor is so fine that the largest ships can sail directly up to the wharves and drop anchor. Only they don't. Years ago it was a famous seaport. Princely fortunes were made in the West India trade; and in 1812, when we were at war with Great Britain, any number of privateers were fitted out at Rivermouth to prey

upon the merchant vessels of the enemy. Certain people grew suddenly and mysteriously rich, and a great many of the 'first families' of today do not care to trace their pedigree back to the time when their grandfathers owned shares in the Matilda Jane, twenty-four guns. Well, well!

"Few ships go to Rivermouth now. Commerce drifted into other ports. The phantom fleet sailed off one day and never came back again. The crazy old warehouses are empty; and barnacles and eel-grass cling to the piles of the crumbling wharves, where the sunshine lies lovingly, bringing out the faint spicy odor that haunts the place—the ghost of the old dead West India trade! * * *

"Rivermouth is a very ancient town. In my day there existed a tradition among the boys that it was here Christopher Columbus made his first landing on this continent. I remember having the exact spot pointed out to me by Pepper Whitcomb! One thing is certain, Captain John Smith, who afterwards, according to their legend, married Pocahontas, whereby he got Powhatan for a father-in-law—explored the river in 1614, and was much charmed by the beauty of Rivermouth, which was at that time covered with wild strawberry vines.

"Rivermouth figures prominently in all the colonial histories. Every other house in the place has its tradition more or less grim and entertaining. If ghosts flourish anywhere, there are certain streets in Rivermouth that would be full of them. I don't know of a town with so many old houses. Let us linger, for a moment, in front of the one which the oldest inhabitant is always sure to point out to the curious stranger. It is a square wooden edifice, with a gambrel roof and deep-set window frames. Over the windows and doors there used to be heavy carvings—oak leaves and acorns, and angels' heads with wings spreading from the ears, oddly jumbled together; but these ornaments and other outward signs of grandeur have long since disappeared. A peculiar interest attaches itself to this house, not because of its age, for it has not been standing quite a century; nor on account of its architecture, which is not striking—but because of the illustrious men who at various periods have occupied its spacious chambers.

"In 1770 it was an aristocratic hotel. At the left side of the entrance stood a high post, from which swung the sign of the Earl of Halifax. The landlord was a staunch loyalist—that is to say, he believed in the king, and when the overtaxed colonists determined to throw off the British yoke, the adherents to the crown held private meetings in one of the back rooms of the tavern. This irritated the rebels; as they were called; and one night they made an attack on the Earl of Halifax, tore down the signboard, broke in the window-sashes, and gave the landlord hardly time to make himself invisible over the fence in the rear.

"For several months the shattered tavern remained deserted. At last the exiled tavern-keeper on promising to do better was allowed to return; a new sign, bearing the name of William Pitt, the friend of America, swung proudly from the door-post, and the patriots were appeased."

Mr. Aldrich tells how the French

fleet anchored in the harbor at Rivermouth in 1782. How Marquis De LaFayette visited the fleet there, stopping at the William Pitt inn. Here John Hancock, whose name stands out on the Declaration of Independence with startling distinctness, often visited there. Louis Phillippe and his two brothers, the sons of the Duke of Orleans, visited Portsmouth while the fleet was there, stopping at the William Pitt. And years afterwards, when Louis sat upon the throne of France, he asked an American lady at court if the old tavern was still standing. In 1789 George Washington visited Portsmouth and occupied one of the chambers in the famous old tavern.

And this is historic old Portsmouth—the scene of the greatest triumph of peace since the birth of the American republic.

But make believe you are a boy again and once more read "The Story of a Bad Boy." One boy whose years number not less than forty-two has just finished reading it for perhaps the one hundredth time, and he felt like taking off his shoes, whooping in sheer joy and going racing knee-deep through the grass towards the river once more.

There is a little incident in Mr. Aldrich's book that is a forceful reminder of the recent peace commission sittings. Conway, a red-headed youth, was the bully of the school, and he took especial delight in imposing upon Binny Wallace, a quiet little fellow who had not the nerve to defend himself. Tom Bailey stood for it as long as he could, and one day, when Conway had been particularly mean towards Binny, Tom took up Binny's battles and the result was a desperate fight. Tom won out, but it was at the price of a badly blackened eye and a swollen cheek. Mr. Grimshaw, the good old pedagogue, saw them, and meted out dire punishment. Conway lost his recesses for a month, and Tom had a page added to his Latin lessons for four recitations. Then Tom and Conway were required to shake hands in the presence of the school and acknowledge their regret at what had occurred. Mr. Aldrich says—and he is the hero of the story:

"Conway and I approached each other slowly and cautiously, as if we were bent upon another hostile collision. We clasped hands in the tamest manner imaginable, and Conway mumbled, 'I'm sorry I fought with you.' 'I think you are,' I replied, dryly, 'and I'm sorry I had to thrash you.'

"'You can go to your seats,' said Mr. Grimshaw, turning his face aside to hide a smile.

"I am sure my apology was a very good one."

Now doesn't that little scene remind you of Russia and Japan? Russia is sorry she fought with Japan, and Japan rather thinks she is, too. And doubtless Japan is sorry the occasion arose making it necessary for her to thrash Russia.

But read "The Story of a Bad Boy" again. Engage once more in a snow fight on Slatter's hill. Load up the remnants of Bailey's battery and scare the sleepy inhabitants into hysteria. Run Ezra's ancient old coach into the Fourth of July bonfire once more, and then dig down into your pockets and pay foxy old Ezra ten times what his ramshackle old wagon was worth. Listen again to the stories of Sailor Ben, eat your fill of Aunt Abigail's doughnuts and pies, and above all bear in mind that Aunt Abigail's six black silk patches still dangle from a beam in the garret of the old Nutter mansion, awaiting the time when you and Conway get into another scrap and you come home with eyes painted a delicate tinge of blue and black.

Portsmouth, indeed! We'll call it Rivermouth to the end of time, and

all the peace commissions of all the future ages cannot make us call it anything else. We would rather romp through its streets with Tom Bailey, Pepper Whitcomb, Binny Wallace, Phil Adams and Fred Langdon, than to sit with Komura and Witte and have the eyes of Christendom turned upon us. And yet, through the swarm of joys that surround us when the old town is recalled to memory, there comes one tinge of sadness—for Binny Wallace, bright-eyed, sunny-haired Binny Wallace—still lies sleeping beneath the rippling waters of the beautiful river.

I'd Rather

I'd rather be Old Mother Goose
Than statesman quite gigantic.
I'd rather be that quaint old dear
Than scholar quite pedantic.
I'd rather wield the spell she wields
In realms of childish laughter
Than to be placed on kingly throne
And rule by force thereafter.

Temperature

Richley.—"Gee, but this is hot weather!"

Scribbler.—"I don't think so; I'm positively chilly."

Richley.—"Is that possible?"

Scribbler.—"Yes; I've just had a meeting with De Splurge of the Nonesuch Magazine, and tried to submit some of my stuff."

A Reflection

O' winter is a comin'
F'r I feel it in th' air,
An' I'll soon be payin' tribute
To my ol' friend, Trustee Baer.
F'r he's got me in his clutches
An' he's bound to squeeze me tight
When I try negotiations
For a ton of anthracite.

Foci

"Grabem is suffering from a severe case of yellow fever."

"Gracious; has the disease appeared in our midst!"

"Yes, but he's had it for years. Grabem would rather hear the chink of gold than the music of the best orchestra."

Artistic

"My, how youthful Miss Passe is looking this evening."

"Yes; she looks as if she were eligible to membership in the Painters and Decorators Union."

NOT INTERESTED NOW

"Do you take any interest in rare and beautiful books?"

"No," answered Mr. Cumrox. "I used too. But now if you subscribe to an expensive publication people think you did it to keep something out of print."—Washington Star.

GLORY ENOUGH FOR ALL

There is dispute as to whether John Paul Jones, Commodore Barry or Esek Hopkins was "the father of the American navy," but it doesn't matter much. They were all ornaments to the service and the country is rich enough to give them all fitting monuments.—Philadelphia Inquirer.

"NOTHING DOING"

Globetrot—I say, old man, I've been abroad for eight months and I'm rusty on the styles. Are they wearing the same things this summer that they did last?

Deadbroke—I am.—Pittsburg Post.

FRENZIED FINANCE

Teacher—Now, Willy, supposing you accidentally stood on a gentleman's foot, what would you say?

Willy—I would say, "Beg pardon."

"If the gentleman gave you sixpence for being polite, what would you do?"

"I would stand on the other and say, 'Beg pardon.'"—Tit-Bits.