

A Study of the American Small Boy.

by the Author of "HELEN'S BABIES."

These are the Boys.

A Word to the Mothers.



"Mothers of American boys, accept from me a tribute of respect, which no words can fitly express—of wonder greater than any of the great things of the world ever inspired—of adoration as earnest and devout as the Catholic pays to the Virgin. In a single day I, a strong man, with nothing else to occupy my mind, am reduced to physical and mental worthlessness by the necessities of two boys not over-mischievous or bad. And you—Heaven only knows how—have unbroken weeks, months, years, yes, lifetimes, of just such experiences, and with them the burden of household cares, of physical ills and depressions, of mental anxieties that pierce thy hearts with as many sorrows as grieved the Holy Mother of old."
—From "Helen's Babies."

DESCRPTIONS of the personality and temperament of twelve-year-old Harold Fields, held in \$1,500 bail to answer a charge of frequently setting fire to the house in which he and his dearly loved mother lived, renews interest and curiosity in one type of the genus boy.

It was evident from the first that even if Harold Fields had kindled the several fires that have been discovered in the house in which he lived, there was nothing in common between him and the juvenile "toughs" of his age. There are hardened criminals not more than twelve years of age, but this boy is not one of them. All the occupants of the apartment house in which he lives like him and speak well of him—a circumstance so unusual that few boys who afterward became noted in business, philanthropy or religion—few boys who afterward reached the Presidency of the United States—had so good a record. Perhaps Washington did, but it was George's fortune to be "brought up" five miles from anybody, so there were no neighbors upon whom he could inflict himself. The youngster accused of incendiarism is of delicate physique, refined face, artistic tastes, good manners, large head and nervous temperaments—qualities that make of a boy an exception to his kind and a source of joy to those who know him.

But to his temperament must be charged his fault, if he really committed it. The vagaries of which a well-meaning yet unformed, sensitive and consequently excitable nature is capable are restricted only by the extreme outer boundaries of human activity. Indeed, it is not necessary that the possessor of such a nature should be of the unformed age to do deeds unexpected and dangerous. History is full of stories of outrageous pranks of men and women who were honest, affectionate, truthful and even religious, yet of whom men could truthfully say, in the words of a popular song of a few years ago:

"You never knew just where or when That cuss would break out next."

Coming from sensitive and impressionable adults down to boys of similar nature, the uncertainty increases, for the younger nature, no matter how well-meaning, is a combination of uncontrolled impulses and of ignorance as to the relative fitness of things. To revert to a moment to Washington, did not that model youth, long before he had reached Harold Fields's age, cut down his father's pet cherry tree? It is true that he could not tell a lie about it, but history and tradition are silent as to whether he could explain why he selected the most valuable tree of the plantation for his sportive hatchet. A few years afterward, yet while not ten years of age, he rode to death his mother's most valuable horse, apparently with no unkind purpose.

Boys of sensitive mentality must have something to occupy their minds; after a season of occupation they must have diversion. If this is provided for them in proper quantity and quality they are fairly safe members of society; if they must find it for themselves, there is an uncertainty the reverse of delightful as to where they may find it and what it may be. Du Maurier expressed the probabilities capitally a few years ago, when, under a sketch of a third mother, he put the line: "Go find out what Johnny is doing, and tell him to stop."

If the charges against little Harold Fields are to depend for their support on the boy's alleged confession, they might as well have been left unmade, for there is no limit to the admissions that may be extorted from a nervous, unbalanced or organization through fear or any one of several other forms of pressure. In "the good old times," when confessions would convict, this fact was so well understood that a number of the purest and noblest of men and women have been sent to the gallows or State prison for crimes which they confessed, yet never committed. A child is more susceptible to the methods of extorters of confessions than any adult; his imagination, if sufficiently stimulated, will run away with all his sense, including the sense of truth, and he will become mentally incompetent and irresponsible.

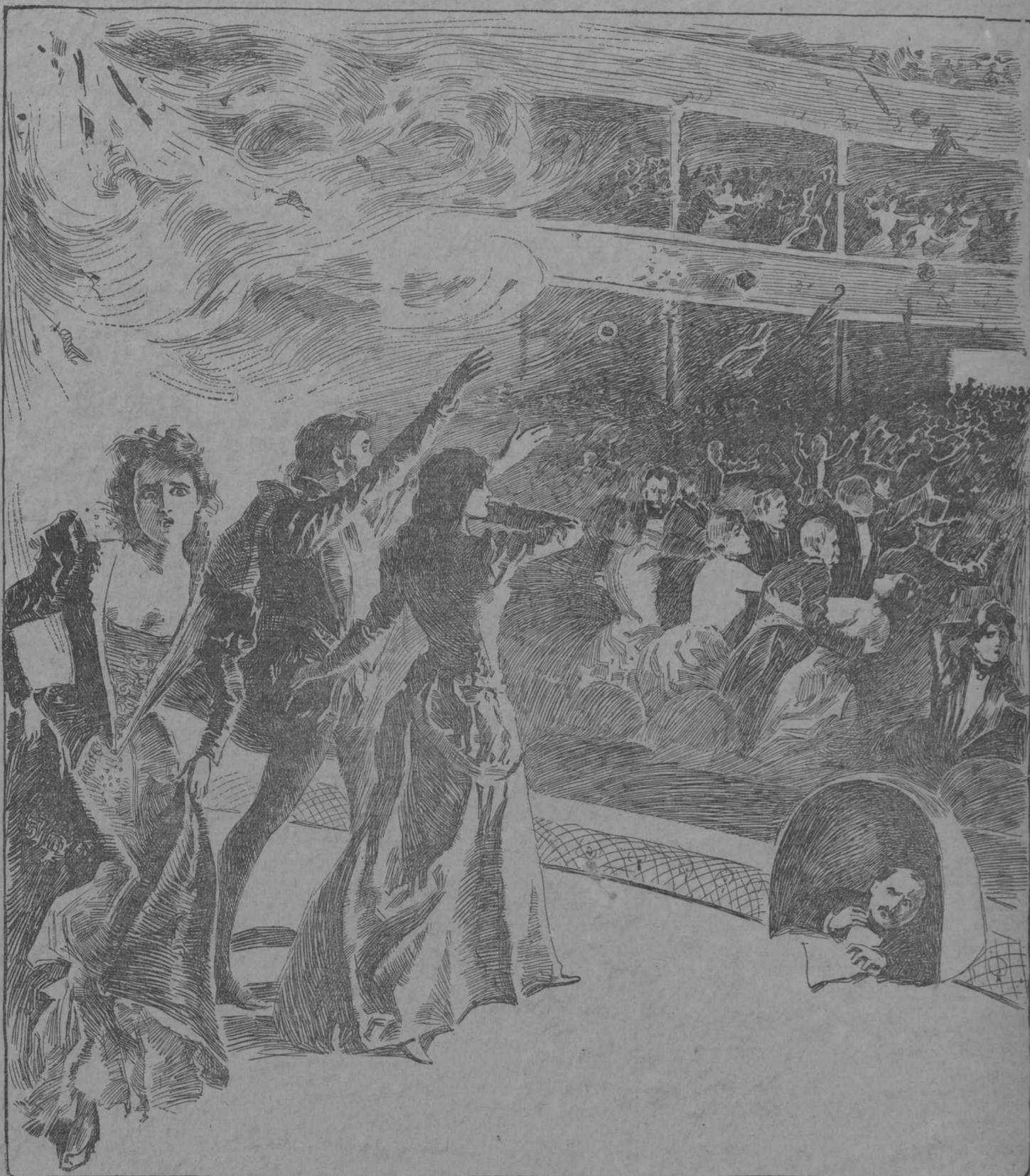
Some men of high standing in the community have recalled such experiences of their own youth, and one of the consequences is that few judges and criminal lawyers regard a confession as conclusive. The human mind is a delicate, shaky machine, even in the average adult. Thousands of honest men on the witness stand have been hangered and cross-questioned until they have unknowingly told a lot of important falsehoods under oath, so what dependence can be placed upon a boy's confession?

Nevertheless, "the good little boy," no matter to whom he belongs, will bear watching, according to the sensitiveness and impressionability of his nature—bear watching like the weather, the steam-boller, the dynamite keg, or anything else that has capacity for both good and evil.

JOHN HABBERTON.

KATE CLAXTON

For the First Time Tells the Story of the Brooklyn Fire.



"But the terrible stifling smoke began to roll out in great billowy clouds as irresistible as the foaming breakers which dash upon the shore of the ocean."

A PICTURE OF THE BROOKLYN THEATRE WHEN THE PANIC FIRST BEGAN. FROM SKETCHES IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIODICALS.

IN the great crises of our lives, when we are brought face to face with what threatens to be immediate annihilation, we are compelled to recognize the absolute unimportance of self.

On the night of Tuesday, December 5, 1876, I was a young girl of but little experience with the practical events of life. My confidence in myself was that which youth and inexperience feels. Five minutes—yes, one second—before the most sensational occurrence in my life came to pass I had such confidence in the amplitude of my own ability that no task seemed too great for my powers. I knew nothing of the irresistible, sudden shock of great natural forces; I had never seen the face of Death thrust close to mine.

And in one single, dreadful moment I learned all that I saw Death in his most hideous form directly in my path. Can you fancy what it is?

My life had been that of a young girl with the most desirable ambitions, and the few brief years in which I had had an active part in professional theatrical life passed as pleasantly and as quickly as dream periods. The Brooklyn Theatre was then under the managerial control of Sheridan Shook and Albert M. Palmer, who were also the conductors of the Union Square Theatre, New York. It was at the last-named playhouse that "The Two Orphans" had been produced three seasons before, and its success there made it known from land's end to land's end. I had created the role of Louise, the blind girl, as Mr. Charles R. Thorne had that of Chevalier De Vandry, and we were assigned to interpret the same characters when the play was put on at the Brooklyn Theatre to run during the holiday season. The play was a long one, in five acts, you know, with numerous changes of scenery, and we had just passed the thrilling climax of the final act, which was laid in the bathhouse of Jacques Frochard on the banks of the

River Seine, in Paris. It happened that as I was speaking the first happy lines in the dialogue allotted me that I felt something warm on my right arm.

The costume which I wore was a thing of shreds and patches, and as best I could not imagine what it was that had fallen on my flesh with the sensation of a hot blast. Quickly I looked at my arm, and, seeing nothing, I as quickly looked up over my head. What I saw did not seem so frightful then—not nearly so frightful to my eyes as it has been many thousands of times since to my memory—but I think that it was simply a trifling fire in one of the preceding acts—that which showed the exterior of the Church of St. Sulpice, where Pierre, the crippled brother of the heroic Jacques Frochard, removes his littered seat and puts it over the shoulders of blind Louise, a "snow-box" was used, from which small pieces of white paper cut to resemble snowflakes were thrown, and when I first saw the falling fire brands I thought that the few remaining contents of the "snow-box" had become ignited and were dropping to the stage.

"Fire has a fascination for human beings," I am told. However that may be, I know that I could not take my eyes off of the little bunch of burning material. In less than five seconds the glowing space became a rapidly running streak of flashing flame and I saw that the "silly borders," which ran across the stage up in the flies, were on fire in the second entrance, as it is known to people of the stage, and that the flames were vigorous and seemed to be spreading.

Some members of the audience, which was quite a large one—the top gallery or family circle, and the first balcony or dress circle being particularly well filled that night—had evidently noticed that something very much out of the regular course of events was occurring upon the stage. The noise of shuffling feet and the low

The Horror That Made Brooklyn Mourn as Paris Mourns To-day.

hum of conversation among excited people reached my ears and I could see that some of the persons occupying seats in the orchestra near the stage were preparing to leave the theatre.

Although I had never seen a panic I felt that one was at hand. The stage hands had secured long poles and were endeavoring to beat out the flames.

Then came a sense of responsibility. Something had to be done, and I felt that I must do it—that I must decide upon it instantly, and act with the speed of thought, or it would be too late. I walked quickly to the footlights and begged the audience to be calm and to refrain from rushing to the exit doors. A few cool-headed persons in the audience, cried out, "Sit down!" "Keep quiet!" "Order!" and for an instant it seemed as though every one of the many there would succeed in leaving the building in safety.

But the terrible stifling smoke began to roll out in great billowy clouds, as irresistible as the foaming breakers which dash upon the shore of the ocean.

No human being could quell the feeling

of fear which must have come over every one in that crowd and the first principle of human nature very naturally asserted itself. It all occurred in what seemed to me less than three minutes from the time that I felt the first burning ember on my arm until I saw clearly that the whole audience was beyond human control and had become madly panic-stricken.

Even so—though the spectacle of a mad-dened crowd must always be terrible—I had no idea of the full meaning of what I was beholding. I stood there till the burning scenery was falling like a perfect rain of fire upon the stage all around me. Then I turned and fled through the smoke laden air, amid the flashing of the burning brands, to the stage door. The way was not greatly obstructed. It was only necessary to run swiftly. In that whirling smoke one could not stop even for breath, but must make haste or die.

When I reached the street, which was covered with snow, the chill of the December air struck to the marrow of my bones. I could not stay there in the rags which I had on. There was nothing I could do for any other person. I hastened to my lodgings. Then came the agony of waiting for news of the other members of the company, and of the audience that had assembled to see us. But those long hours seemed brief to the century of suffering which the terrifying details of death, made known the following day, brought to me. It did not at first seem probable to me that the number of dead could approximate such horrifying figures as the records show, for when I took the last view over the auditorium before flying from the footlights to the sidewalk I felt sure that almost every one would escape. If not in absolute safety, at least with but very little bodily injury. But as Henry Ward Beecher said in an address with the Brooklyn Theatre fire as his subject: "If a panic should break out on a prairie the inevitable result of injury and death would follow."

For months after that terrifying night I could not sleep soundly. Every little noise, which in my normal condition, would not have attracted even my passing attention, startled me, and when I was aroused suddenly I invariably awoke with a shudder and a feeling as though something dreadful was about to happen. My physicians have assured me many times since then that my nervous organization received a shock that night from which I will never recover.

The death of Edwin F. Thorne in the early part of this week recalled to me again the sad fate of his older brother, Charlie. He was the chevalier in the "Two Orphans" the night the Brooklyn Theatre disaster occurred and he from being a splendid specimen of physical humanity became a wreck and died in agony. Kate Gilard, who was the outcast Marianna, in escaping by the rear entrance from the stage was knocked down into the gutter and trampled upon by some brutal ruffian with the result that some of her ribs were broken. She lay unconscious and unattended for several hours. Her death soon after from consumption, may certainly be traced to that night's horror.

Lysander Thompson, the artist, and brother of Charlotte Thompson—every one who saw her play Jane Eyre will remember her—had a small part in the play. He was a big, robust fellow, but he, too, is dead and old Mr. Phillips, the good doctor of the play, has also passed away. The John Mathews, who was the officer of the guard in that faithful performance, and been the intimate personal friend and roommate of John Wilkes Booth, and was playing in Ford's Theatre, at Washington, the night that President Lincoln was assassinated there. Brave Harry Murdock and kindly "Cade" Burroughs could not escape in safety from the stage, but consideration for other "cast men" their lives and death will follow."

KATE CLAXTON