

VARIOUS

HARPER'S YOUNG
PEOPLE, JANUARY 11,
1881

Various

**Harper's Young People,
January 11, 1881**

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MILTON

John Milton was a blue-eyed, yellow-haired Saxon boy, the type of the English race. He was somewhat short, stout, and healthy; his eyes were bright and sparkling in his youth, before he became blind. But he inherited weakness of sight from his mother. He was born 1609, in a pleasant house in Bread Street, London, almost under the shadow of Bow Bells. It was back in a court. His father, who had made a fortune as a scrivener, was fond of music, books, and literature, and his son was carefully educated at St. Paul's School. Milton relates that he frequently studied in the house in Bread Street until after midnight, and his head ached and his sight grew dim with these late vigils. He was then about twelve years old.

When he was six years old he may have seen Shakespeare and Ben Jonson pass on their way to the Mermaid Tavern, which was in Bread Street, not far from his father's house. He was one of the best scholars at St. Paul's School, and loved study as most boys like play. He was eager to know how men lived and acted in Greece and Rome, what they thought of, and what they had discovered. He studied the rise and fall of empires and republics, and became a republican in the midst of kings and princes. He was always fond of poetry, and soon began to write fine verses. One of his earliest pieces is his "Ode on the Nativity."

His father leased a place in the country, at Horton, near Windsor, and here Milton wandered when a young man over the smooth-shaven lawns and beside the pleasant streams, filling his mind with knowledge and pictures of fine scenery. It is not likely that as a boy he was fond of fishing or hunting, as we may well fancy Shakespeare was. He never tilled the soil like Burns and Virgil. He knew nothing of farming. He went to Cambridge University, the most learned of its scholars. It was the custom then to whip the students, and Milton's enemies spread the report that he was flogged for some breach of the rules. He was always independent. He travelled, came back to defend republicanism in the civil war, married, kept a school, was Cromwell's Latin secretary after he became blind, and published some poetry. But when the republic fell with Cromwell, Milton was proscribed, and in danger of his life. His enemies would, gladly have put him to death, and "Paradise Lost" might never have been written.

Milton hid in obscurity, blind, forgotten, but constantly engaged on his great poem. He wrote "Paradise Lost" in his old age. He repeated the verses aloud to his daughters or some friends who came to visit him, and they wrote them down. It was finished in 1667, and Milton received twenty-five dollars for the copyright. It was long neglected, until Addison gave it great fame. Milton died November 8, 1674.

THE MESSENGER BOYS AT THE CAPITOL

BY HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD

A lad who visits the city of Washington for the first time, and looks down from the galleries of the House of Representatives or of the Senate on the busy scene below, will be sure to find his eye attracted by groups of bright-looking and neatly dressed boys moving hither and thither about the floor, speaking familiarly with this and that great man, or amusing themselves on the steps of the Vice-President's or of the Speaker's platform, and he will perhaps regard these boys with something like envy – all the more when told that they receive about two dollars and seventy-five cents a day, during the sessions of Congress, to pay them for having such a good time.

Possibly our lad would not regard the picture as so pleasant if he knew how burdensome are the duties of these boys, and how exceedingly well they earn the money paid them. There are nearly thirty of them attached to the House, and half as many to the Senate. Their ages run from nine years upward, some numbering twice as many summers; and it is not by any means the oldest who are the brightest and the most favored. They are of respectable families; some of them are nephews of Members of Congress – a Member once, indeed, had such questionable taste as to procure the appointment of his own son; and some of them have been known in after-years to become Members themselves. The recently chosen Senator from Maryland is doubtless proud to remember that he himself was once a page. Although in two or three instances these boys have been elected to their places, instead of appointed, they are usually appointed by the Sergeant-at-Arms – of course on the recommendation and through the influence of the Congressmen – and they are under his control. The old custom of appointing only orphan boys is no longer adhered to. The boy who fell over the balustrade, and was made a page by special resolution of the Senate, is a very exceptional case – probably his favorite song thereafter was, "Such a getting up stairs I ne'er did see."

The pages wear no uniform, or regulation clothes, or badges of any sort. They are required to present themselves for work at nine o'clock in the morning, although Congress does not meet till twelve, and they are not dismissed until adjournment for the day takes place. They put the desks of the Members in order, file for each the bills and papers which are strewn about in confusion, then go to the Document-rooms and work there, helping to put affairs in shape; and they present themselves at twelve in the great chambers of legislation to answer the clapping of the Members' and Senators' hands, and attend to their countless wants. Now they are sent hunting for some book that is needed, for some man, now for a glass of water, now they take messages from one Member to another at a distance, from one House to the other, and sometimes to ladies in the gallery; they fetch a cup of tea into the Cloak-room; fetch the hat and stick out of it; they distribute mail by the armful; they struggle into sight, behind piles of palm-leaf fans big as they are themselves, which are soon cooling the hot air, if it be a late session; and during the nights preceding the close of the session they do not know what sleep is, but are worn out with running and waiting. Thus it will be seen that they are on their feet with but very little intermission, running and tumbling over each other in their eagerness to please; but they seem happy and good-natured through it all, and when they do sit down it is on the steps of the presiding officer's desk, where they are usually tickling or punching or teasing each other as if they had nothing else to do, and were passing away the time.

Sometimes during a recess of Congress you may come upon them in a lower room, assembled in a body, a mimic Senate, one of them in the chair, and another making a speech, and Mr. Blaine and Mr. Conkling and Mr. Bayard and the rest are being imitated to the life. It is in some contrast to these gay rogues that one sees a crippled and dwarfed little hunchback outside the Hall of Representatives,

opening and shutting a door for the passer in hopes of the coppers or the nickel that may be tossed him, although he does not beg. At night a little goat carriage comes for him, and he drives off.

The pages whom we have described do not leave the Capitol during the hours of their service, and carry no messages beyond the doors. For outside work there are three riding pages, who are furnished with horses, and who go to the various Departments, the Executive Mansion, or on other of the outside errands of the legislators. And theirs is not exactly the pleasant horseback riding that looks so attractive, but, on the contrary, it is hard and weary work, cold in the winter, and burning under a fierce sun in the summer, leaving them meanwhile as badly off as John Gilpin.

Many of these youths are appointed because there is some great need in their families, or have been some pitiable circumstances in their history. This curly-headed little fellow is the only support of a mother and younger brothers and sisters; there is one who takes care of a paralyzed father, the only relative he has in the world, going home, after his hard work, to make life as pleasant as he can for him who can never do any more work; here is another whose little house is kept for him by a child-sister, who looks for his step at night with solicitude. Most of them have somebody besides themselves to take a share of their earnings.

Beyond their regular pay, there are various perquisites and fees which swell their income considerably. Thus they may often be seen slipping an open book, with a bit of blotting-paper, under the nose of some Member who is sitting at his desk: it is an album for somebody who wants the signatures of all these statesmen, which the statesmen kindly give, but which nevertheless are not always easy to obtain, owing to the difficulty of finding individuals in their seats, as all of the Congressmen are by no means in constant attendance, many of them being busy in committee-rooms, or lounging in cloak-rooms, or lunching, or following the bent of their inclinations in other ways, and seldom coming in after roll-call, save to hear a heralded speech, or to vote on measures with which they are already familiar either from the reading of the daily journal of proceedings, or in the committee-room, or by the word of mouth of others. For every album that they thus fill with signatures the boys receive ten dollars from the eager visitor of the Capitol, and they fill a good many during the year.

In another way they also sometimes earn an additional penny. For after any gentleman on the floor has made a particularly strong speech, the Members on his side of the question are wont to subscribe for the printing of thousands of copies of the speech, to be sent broadcast into their districts; the pages therefore go about with subscription papers, and they are allowed two dollars for every thousand of the speeches that are taken.

If the boys of whom we are speaking are very bright, they are apt to be spoiled, as in such case the Members and Senators take pleasure in indulging them to some degree. But there are not many, it may be imagined, who are thus injured. Some of them, indeed, are as careless as the blowing wind; these have no awe or reverence in their compositions: the great men with whom they are brought into contact are not great men to them, but simply folks who send them on errands, and the directions given them go in one ear and out the other – as we all know never happens with boys anywhere else. One little chap, dispatched to the Document-room for the "Fortification Bill," asks for the "Mortification Bill"; another, sent for the "Census," asks for the "Ascension Bill"; still another, insisting on the "Compulsive Capacity Bill," and returning without it, is told that he was sent for nothing of the kind, but for that on "compulsory pilotage," whereupon he presently comes back to say that there isn't any bill on "pulsive politics." The same youngster asked the Document Clerks for the "Bill for the Suppression of Supreme Literature." A little "compulsive capacity" would have been good for this urchin, were it to be obtained as easily as was thought by that gentleman whose daughter lacked capacity, as her teacher said. "Get it, madam," said he – "get it; she shall want for nothing that money can buy her." To the same class with these scatter-brained urchins belonged the little fellow who once brought into the Congressional Library a note signed by one of the most powerful "Sons of Thunder" in the Senate, and which we begged the librarian's pardon for reading as it lay a moment on the desk

beside us: "William H. Turner wants *The Headless Horseman; or, The Scalp-Hunter*. I ask that he may have it under the rules of the Library."

But to offset such idle fellows as the reader of *The Headless Horseman*— who certainly could do no better than hunt for a "scalp," and a head with it, too — there are other pages who make it their business to understand their duties thoroughly, and two or three who even go so far as to read for themselves every bill that is introduced, to follow its fortunes, to be able to tell the person that asks just where it is in its progress to passage or defeat, and who can always be relied on by any Member who has been absent or out of the way to let him know exactly what has been done and said in the mean time, and how the vote stands on this question or the other. It would be no wonder if boys of this sort should be indulged; and there is little danger of spoiling such good material. These boys are learning the business of legislating, and if they wish, will, in their turn, come back some day to make the laws.

But careless or faithful, their bright faces and light ways are a pleasant sight to see in all the throng of bustling, noisy men; and as one looks at them slipping about on their countless errands, one feels as if the boys themselves bore some small part in the work of governing the country.

A HERO OF CHIVALRY

Bertrand du Guesclin was born in 1314 at the castle of Motte Broen, near Rennes, in Brittany. His heroic character showed itself early. As he was not troubled with lessons (he never learned to read or write), he formed a company of boys of his own age, and, acting as their general, practiced them in battle and combat. His mother often clasped her forehead in alarm when he came home with bruised face and bleeding head. Even in his seventeenth year he excelled many older knights in strength and dexterity in the use of arms. But he was ridiculed by the ladies because he looked so ugly, and rode such a wretched horse. They jeered at him, saying that he looked more like a donkey-driver than a knight and nobleman, and that he must have borrowed his steed from a miller.

Bertrand was indignant, and, as there was another tournament about to come off, he begged a cousin of his to lend him a steed and armor. Both were granted, and with a joyful heart he entered the lists, where, in his strange armor, and with his visor down, no one, not even his own father, recognized him. A well-known valiant knight opposed him. The signal was given, they ran at each other with lightning speed, and with a loud crash their lances broke into splinters in their hands. Bertrand, however, had struck with such force on his adversary's helmet, that the latter was thrown from the saddle to a distance of several paces, where he lay insensible on the sand, and had to be carried out of the lists.

The young victor returned to his post with a fresh lance, and waited for fresh opponents. Now his own father ranged himself against him. Bertrand did not wish to fight against him, but was equally unwilling to make himself known. So he resolved to lower his lance in his tilt, and to receive his father's blow on his shield without making a counter-thrust. He did this so adroitly that he kept firm in his saddle, and, without tottering, galloped by, and then declared positively that he would not fight again with that knight. People were surprised, but made no derisive remarks, for the knight's courage had been sufficiently proved in the former combat. His father rode out of the lists, and gave place to other knights. Guesclin laid them in the dust, and was unanimously declared the winner.

Every one was eager to know who the champion was, and his father especially longed for the unravelling of the mystery.

At length, when the tournament was over, and Bertrand had received his prize, he rode up to his father, raised his visor, and cried, "Do you know me now, father?" The old man embraced him with tears of joy, and at once provided him with a steed and armor. The fame of the young hero now spread all over France.

Hitherto Bertrand had only won victories in tournaments, but now the more serious field of battle was to behold the first exploits of his sword. Duke Charles of Blois made war on John de Montfort for the possession of Brittany. Philip the Sixth, King of France, sided with the former; while, on the other hand, the King of England (Edward the Third) supported De Montfort. Bertrand had naturally no choice in the matter, for, like a brave Frenchman, he followed his king wherever he led him.

At that time the castle of Fougeray was in the hands of the English, and Bertrand resolved to take it from them, as it was a place of no mean importance. With this view he disguised himself and sixty companions as wood-cutters, and divided them into four bands, which approached the place from different sides. He then fixed on a time when the governor of the castle and a part of the garrison had gone out on a reconnoitring expedition, when he made a party of his men hide themselves in the neighboring wood during the night. At break of day they loaded themselves with fagots and brushwood, concealed their weapons under their clothes, and came up to the castle from different directions. Bertrand, in a white smock, with a heavy load of wood on his back, was the first to appear before the draw-bridge, which was instantly lowered for him. He at once threw down his fagot, drew his sword, and transfixed the warder; then he raised the cry of "Guesclin." At this signal

the rest hastened forward to come to his assistance and take the bridge. As, however, there were two hundred Englishmen in the castle, the conflict was very unequal, and a horrid slaughter ensued. An Englishman clove the skull of one of Bertrand's companions with his battle-axe. Guesclin, in return, cut him down, and caught up the axe, with which he dealt slashing blows on every side. So he fought on, and kept the enemy off the body for a time, until a troop of cavalry of his own side accidentally arrived in the neighborhood, rescued him from his perilous situation, and helped to take the place. It was, indeed, high time for relief to arrive; for, in his combat against tenfold odds, he had dropped his battle-axe, and his head was so covered with wounds that the blood was streaming down his face. The conspicuous valor which he here displayed gained him the reputation of being the boldest and most dauntless knight of his time.

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TOBY TYLER; OR, TEN WEEKS WITH A CIRCUS

BY JAMES OTIS

Chapter V

THE COUNTERFEIT TEN-CENT PIECE

When the doors of the big tent were opened, and the people began to crowd in, just as Toby had seen them do at Guilford, Mr. Lord announced to his young clerk that it was time for him to go into the tent to work. Then it was that Toby learned for the first time that he had two masters instead of one, and this knowledge caused him no little uneasiness. If the other one was anything like Mr. Lord, his lot would be just twice as bad, and he began to wonder whether he could even stand it one day longer.

As the boy passed through the tent on his way to the candy stand, where he was to really enter upon the duties for which he had run away from home, he wanted to stop for a moment and speak with the old monkey who he thought had taken such an interest in him. But when he reached the cage in which his friend was confined, there was such a crowd around it that it was impossible for him to get near enough to speak without being overheard.

This was such a disappointment to the little fellow that the great tears came into his eyes, and in another instant would have gone rolling down his cheeks if his aged friend had not chanced to look toward him. Toby fancied that the monkey looked at him in the most friendly way, and then he was certain that he winked one eye. Toby felt that there was no mistake about that wink, and it seemed as if it was intended to convey comfort to him in his troubles. He winked back at the monkey in the most emphatic and grave manner possible, and then went on his way, feeling wonderfully comforted.

The work inside the tent was far different and much harder than it was outside. He was obliged to carry around among the audience trays of candy, nuts, and lemonade, for sale, and he was also expected to cry aloud the description of that which he offered. The partner of Mr. Lord, who had charge of the stand inside the tent, neither showed himself to be better nor worse than Mr. Lord himself. When Toby first presented himself for work, he handed him a tray filled with glasses of lemonade, and told him to go among the audience, crying, "Here's your nice cold lemonade, only five cents a glass!"

Toby started to do as he was bidden; but when he tried to repeat the words in anything like a loud tone of voice, they stuck in his throat, and he found it next to impossible to utter a sound above a whisper. It seemed to him that every one in the audience was looking only at him, and the very sound of his own voice made him afraid.

He went entirely around the tent once without making a sale, and when he returned to the stand he was at once convinced that one of his masters was quite as bad as the other. This one – and he knew that his name was Jacobs, for he heard some one call him so – very kindly told him that he would break every bone in his body if he didn't sell something, and Toby confidently believed that he would carry out his threat.

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