





BOY-WORSHIP.

"Three visions in the watches of one night,
"Made sweet my sleep—almost too sweet to tell.
"One was Narcissus;"—

"NEW REPUBLIC."

"Oh, Mr. F., what a boy-worshipper your friend must be!"

Thus appealed to, I turned to discover what had caused my fair companion's remark. A large book lay open upon her knee, a photograph album, in which I noticed photographs of boys, of all ages, and in every conceivable attitude.

Mrs. Dan

dog

Something in the words themselves, or in the tone which they were spoken, aroused my curiosity, and set me thinking. Strange as it may appear, the more I thought, the more friends I recalled whose albums were equally well stocked with photographs of boys, and who might with equal justice be ranked among the "boy-worshippers."

Certainly, the *cult* seemed very popular!

And, reader, popular as it unquestionably is, it is by no means universal; hence, for the sake of those who may be a little mystified by the expression, I will try to make clear exactly what I mean by *boy-worship*.

First, let me repudiate, utterly and entirely, any quibble of the *cultus-adoratio*, δουλεία-λατρεία kind: I have nothing to do with any such theological love-terms, nor have they with my subject. "*Worship*," here, is the outcome of a swift, sudden, and almost irresistible attraction of one

person towards another; the feeling is often involuntary, and at times utterly inexplicable. No one can deny that it does exist, and that it may be, and often is, a most subtle and enchanting link between a man and a boy.

In some natures this *attractability*, if I may use the expression, is dormant, and is aroused with the utmost difficulty; in others, and chiefly in those of an artistic or æsthetic temperament, it is continually making itself felt. It will not suffer the mind to rest, but fills it with fevered longings, and at length urges the man who gives way to it, into the presence of the being who so strongly and strangely attracts him.

The ancient Greek knew well the power of this wondrous fascination. All beauty was to him a thing to be adored, and the mere contemplation of sweet harmonious lines, of soft and glowing colour, was in itself an act of the deepest reverence.

The delicate beauty of many an ancient statue

which shews us youth on the verge of manhood, emerging, as it were, from Spring, and just, but only just warmed with the glow of Summer, is a record, significant indeed and exquisite, of the influence I have described.

The mythology of Greece is rich with the loves of men and boys. Phœbus and Hyacinthus, Herakles and Hylas, great Zeus himself and fair-haired Ganymede, all tell the same sweet tale.

In the days of the Empire, beautiful slave-boys were amongst the many objects on which a Roman loved to lavish care. Strong and ardent was the friendship between many a wealthy citizen, and his slender, dark-eyed Greek slave-boy.

Such attachments were by no means rare; Virgil, indeed, gives a playfully pathetic account of the unhappy Corydon and his wayward boy-love Alexis.

The records of the Middle Ages abound with instances of deep, and, as it is called, "romantic" devotion.

The story of Blondel, improbable as it seems in itself, does but re-echo the strain of tender love which linked together knight and squire. The "pretty page with dimpled chin," dear to readers of Thackeray, is no ideal creation; he flourished in every knightly castle, and knew full well how to turn his good looks to the best account, one may be sure of that! Passing, however, from the days of doublet and silken hose, (a costume which showed off to perfection a boy's slim figure,) to the age of sailor suits and Eton jackets, let us consider more closely, and with more reference to the present time, our subject of boy-worship, and boy-worshippers.

Boys are just as pretty now, and, in their way, as fascinating as they ever were. No one will deny it. Few men, indeed, are proof against the fresh young voice and pretty petulance of a boy of fourteen or fifteen.

The many, and not the few, become boy-worshippers.

The number of "worshippers" in any place depends, of course, upon the presence or absence of suitable objects of adoration; in Oxford the variation is very slight. Come with me, reader, to one of the many fashionable book shops in that city. A customer enters, and asks, we will say, for the "Epic of Hades," illustrated edition. The obliging shopman vanishes in quest thereof. Meanwhile, our customer's attention is aroused by the sound of clear, boyish voices. Somewhere in the back regions of the shop, two lads are making merry over the last popular caricature of the day.

"It is just possible," says our customer to himself, "that the Epic of Hades, may be found in those back regions, whence issue such tempting sounds:" he forthwith strolls leisurely in that direction.

The boys look up. One of them is decidedly good-looking. (He doesn't look "good," that is quite another matter, and one absolutely fatal on



these occasions.) The man stops short, and stares steadily, and with undisguised admiration at the pretty soft face before him. In a few moments the boys go out. The man's gaze follows them to the door.

"What lovely eyes the little one had! I'm sure he knew I was looking at him! I believe he smiled! By Jove! he's smiling now!" The "Epic of Hades" is hastily ordered, and off bolts the purchaser in the direction the boys have taken. Yes, there is no mistake about it, the "little one" is certainly looking round. He does more, for he whispers to his companion, and off they both start as hard as they can pelt. In a few moments they are lost to sight and the man begins to realize what it is to be a boy-worshipper.

He goes home, and tries to read; but a soft young face steals between him and the book, and smiles shyly up at him.

Now in nine cases out of ten, the boy himself

is utterly unconscious of what has happened, but the "deed is done," nevertheless, and done most effectually! It is only when he meets the man again, and receives from him an unmistakable glance of recognition, that he begins to think about it. And when a boy "begins to think" in these cases, the boy-worshipper's path is easy. At first, the lad is secretly flattered by the notice taken of him; presently, deeper feelings are at work and he begins, unconsciously, to like the man who seems so bent upon knowing him. At last they meet, and the man speaks.

The boy is at first, perhaps, a little bit taken a-back, but not unbecomingly so, and the result of the interview convinces the man that he was an idiot not to have spoken before, the boy wouldn't have minded a bit: "and he was sure all the time, that the boy really liked him!" Such acquaintances grow often into deep and tender friendships.

Men of all tastes become boy-worshippers. It

is not only Sayge Greene who goes into ecstasies over a boy's face and figure, (he may, it is true, express himself more eloquently than some of his more robust brethren,) but the devotees of the cricket and football fields have ere now furnished many an ardent follower.

The Upper River, as well as a certain College Chapel, has its little band of *habitues*. Here I would remark, that although sundry restrictions have, in some quarters, placed difficulties in the way of free intercourse, an ardent boy-worshipper will always find means of access to the shrine.

It is often alleged that boys dislike to be caressed,—a statement, by the way, which is utterly without foundation, experience indeed showing the exact reverse.

It is, moreover, strongly urged by some good people that all outward demonstrations of affection should be checked, if the boy is to grow up to be "manly."

An inextricable confusion between *manliness* and *manishness* (quite a different word,) is at the root of this objection to the free natural expression of boyish love.

Many a boy who will get on your knee, and put his arms round your neck, is, for all that, just as *manly* as the hero of the "eleven," or "fifteen." The truth is, a *combination* is by no means as rare as some people make out.

In most boys there are wells of passionate love which can find no outlet in mere out-of-door sports; the stream is swift and strong, it will not be checked, but must flow on and on, until it meets the sea.

Then wave and waters will mingle, and together rest.

Boy Worship was by C. F.
Hutchinson of B.M.C.: it was
unjustly ascribed to Brown of B.M.C.
Widdowson

C. P. Shipton of St. Edmund
Hall tells me tonight that
in the Summer Term of 1884
G. C. Chambers of Ch. Ch.
printed 12 copies of a
letter, of which he sent out
a few copies to Heads of
Houses concerned, about the
dealings of certain University
men with boys of the College
Choir: he seems to have
requested enquiry into certain
alleged facts. The enquiries
took place and as a con-
-sequence the following among
others were either sent down
or removed:— Forty of Balliol,

Bate of Exeter, Perry of
Ch. Ch., the Rev. Hugh Watters
of Ch. Ch. (now Editor of "John
Bull") who was also apparently
turned out of his position as
chaplain at Hatfield House as
an indirect consequence. Others
implicated but unpunished were
G. C. Fletcher of B.N.C. and
N. Power of B.N.C.. A Keble
man was also sent down
who had to do with members
of the New College Choir.

F. Madan
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