

STORIES FOR BOYS

**BY
RICHARD HARDING DAVIS**

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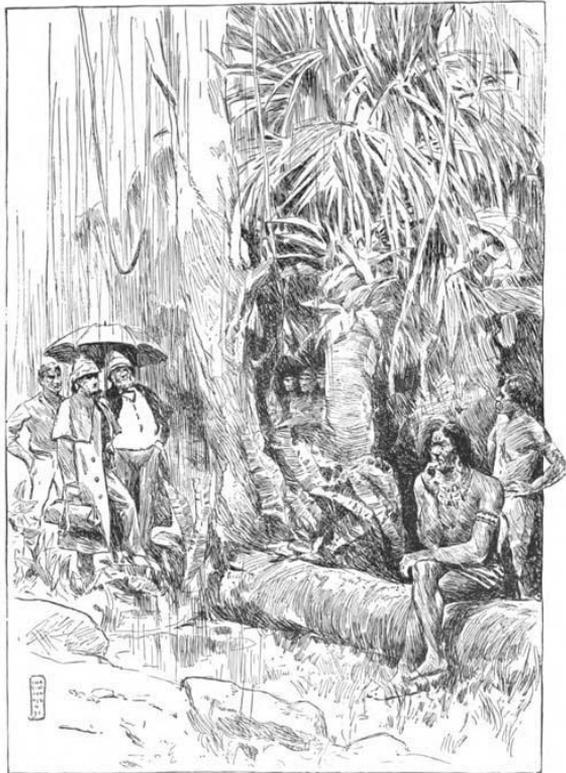
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STORIES FOR BOYS



“I never saw a King,” Gordon remarked, “and I’m sure I never expected to see one sitting on a log in the rain.”

THIS BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES IS DEDICATED
TO MY BROTHER

C. BELMONT DAVIS

WHO WAS A BOY ABOUT THE SAME TIME I WAS

THE REPORTER WHO MADE HIMSELF KING.

THE Old Time Journalist will tell you the best reporter is the one who works his way up. He will hold that the only way to start is as a printer's devil, or as an office boy, to learn in time to set type, to graduate from a compositor into a stenographer, and as a stenographer take down speeches at public meetings, and so finally grow into a real reporter, with a fire badge on your left suspender, and a speaking acquaintance with all the greatest men in the city, not even excepting Police Captains.

That is the old time journalist's idea of it. That is the way he was trained, and that is why he is reporting still. If you train up a youth in this way, he will go into reporting with too full a knowledge of the newspaper business, with no illusions concerning it, and with no ignorant enthusiasms, but with a keen and justifiable impression that he is not paid enough for what he does. And he will only do what he is paid to do. Now, you cannot pay a good reporter for what he does, because he does not work for pay. He works for his paper. He gives his time, his health, his brains, his sleeping hours, and his eating hours, and life sometimes, to get news for it. He thinks the sun rises only that men may have light by which to read it. But if he has been in a newspaper office from his youth up, he finds out before he becomes a reporter that this is not so, and loses his real value. He should come right out of the University where he has been doing "campus notes" for the college weekly, and be

pitchforked out into city work without knowing whether the Battery is at Harlem or Hunter's Point, and with the idea that he is a Moulder of Public Opinion and that the Power of the Press is greater than the Power of Money, and that the few lines he writes are of more value in the Editor's eyes than the column of advertising on the last page, which they are not. After three years—it is sometimes longer, sometimes not so long—he finds out that he has given his nerves and his youth and his enthusiasm in exchange for a general fund of miscellaneous knowledge, the opportunity of personal encounter with all the greatest and most remarkable men and events that have risen in those three years, and a great readiness of resource, and patience. He will find that he has crowded the experiences of the lifetime of the ordinary young business man, doctor, or lawyer, or man about town, into three short years; that he has learnt to think and to act quickly, to be patient and unmoved when every one else has lost his head, actually or figuratively speaking; to write as fast as another man can talk, and to be able to talk with authority on matters of which other men do not venture even to think until they have read what he has written with a copy-boy at his elbow on the night previous.

It is necessary for you to know this, that you may understand what manner of young man young Albert Gordon was.

Young Gordon had been a reporter just three years. He had left Yale when his last living relative died, and taken the morning train for New York, where they had promised him reportorial work on one of the innumerable Greatest New York Dailies. He arrived at the office at noon, and was sent back over the same

road on which he had just come, to Spuyten Duyvil, where a train had been wrecked and about everybody of consequence to suburban New York killed. One of the old reporters hurried him to the office again with his "copy," and after he had delivered that, he was sent to the Tombs to talk French to a man in Murderer's Row, who could not talk anything else, but who had shown some international skill in the use of a jimmy. And at eight, he covered a flower show in Madison Square Garden; and at eleven was sent over the Brooklyn Bridge in a cab to watch a fire and make guesses at the insurance.

He went to bed at one, and dreamt of shattered locomotives, human beings lying still with blankets over them, rows of cells, and banks of beautiful flowers nodding their heads to the tunes of the brass band in the gallery. He decided when he awoke the next morning that he had entered upon a picturesque and exciting career, and as one day followed another, he became more and more convinced of it, and more and more devoted to it. He was eighteen then, and he was now twenty-one, and in that time had become a great reporter, and had been to Presidential conventions in Chicago, revolutions in Hayti, Indian outbreaks on the Plains, and midnight meetings of moonlighters in Tennessee, and had seen what work earthquakes, floods, fire, and fever could do in great cities, and had contradicted the President, and borrowed matches from burglars. And now he thought he would like to rest and breathe a bit, and not to work again unless as a war correspondent or as a novelist. He had always had enough money of his own to keep him alive, and so he was in consequence independent of what the paper gave him. The only obstacle to his becoming a great war correspondent lay in the fact that there was no war,

and a war correspondent without a war is about as absurd an individual as a general without an army. He read the papers every morning on the elevated trains for war clouds; but though there were many war clouds, they always drifted apart, and peace smiled again. This was very disappointing to young Gordon, and he was more and more keenly discouraged.

And then as war work was out of the question, he decided to write his novel. It was to be a novel of New York life, and he wanted a quiet place in which to work on it. He was already making inquiries among the suburban residents of his acquaintance for just such a quiet spot, when he received an offer to go to the Island of Opeki in the South Pacific Ocean, as secretary to the American consul to that place. The gentleman who had been appointed by the President to act as consul at Opeki, was Captain Leonard T. Travis, a veteran of the Civil War, who had contracted a severe attack of rheumatism while camping out at night in the dew, and who on account of this souvenir of his efforts to save the Union had allowed the Union he had saved to support him in one office or another ever since. He had met young Gordon at a dinner, and had had the presumption to ask him to serve as his secretary, and Gordon, much to his surprise, had accepted his offer. The idea of a quiet life in the tropics with new and beautiful surroundings, and with nothing to do and plenty of time in which to do it, and to write his novel besides, seemed to Albert to be just what he wanted; and though he did not know or care much for his superior officer, he agreed to go with him promptly, and proceeded to bid good by to his friends and to make his preparations. Captain Travis was so delighted with getting such a clever young gentleman for his secretary, that he

referred to him to his friends as “my attaché of legation”; nor did he lessen that gentleman’s dignity by telling any one that the attaché’s salary was to be \$500 a year. His own salary was only \$1500; and though his brother-in-law, Senator Rainsford, tried his best to get it raised, he was unsuccessful. The consulship to Opeki was instituted early in the ’50’s, to get rid of and reward a third or fourth cousin of the President’s, whose services during the campaign were important, but whose after-presence was embarrassing. He had been created consul to Opeki as being more distant and unaccessible than any other known spot, and had lived and died there; and so little was known of the island, and so difficult was communication with it, that no one knew he was dead, until Captain Travis, in his hungry haste for office, had uprooted the sad fact. Captain Travis, as well as Albert, had a secondary reason for wishing to visit Opeki. His physician had told him to go to some warm climate for his rheumatism, and in accepting the consulship his object was rather to follow out his doctor’s orders at his country’s expense, than to serve his country at the expense of his rheumatism.

Albert could learn but very little of Opeki; nothing, indeed, but that it was situated about one hundred miles from the Island of Octavia, which island, in turn, was simply described as a coaling-station three hundred miles from the coast of California. Steamers from San Francisco to Yokohama stopped every third week at Octavia, and that was all either Captain Travis or his secretary could learn of their new home. This was so very little, that Albert stipulated to stay only as long as he liked it, and to return to the States within a few months if he found such a change of plan desirable.

As he was going to what was an almost undiscovered country, he thought it would be a good plan to furnish himself with a supply of articles with which to trade with the native Opekians, and for this purpose he purchased a large quantity of brass rods, because he had read that Stanley did so, and added to these, brass curtain chains and about two hundred leaden medals similar to those sold by street pedlers during the Constitutional Centennial celebration in New York City, and which were cheap. He also collected even more beautiful but less expensive decorations for Christmas trees, at a wholesale house on Park Row. These he hoped to exchange for furs or feathers or weapons, or for whatever other curious and valuable trophies the Island of Opeki boasted. He already pictured his room on his return hung fantastically with crossed spears and boomerangs, feather head-dresses, and ugly idols. His friends told him he was doing a very foolish thing, and argued that once out of the newspaper world, it would be hard to regain his place in it. But he thought the novel he would write while lost to the world at Opeki would serve to make up for his temporary absence from it, and he expressly and impressively stipulated that the editor should wire him if there was a war.

Captain Travis and his secretary crossed the continent without adventure, and took passage from San Francisco on the first steamer that touched Octavia. They reached that island in three days, and learned with some concern that there was no regular communication with Opeki, and that it would be necessary to charter a sail-boat for the trip. Two fishermen agreed to take them and their trunks, and to get them to their destination within sixteen hours if the wind held good. It was a

most unpleasant sail. The rain fell with calm, relentless persistence from what was apparently a clear sky; the wind tossed the waves as high as the mast and made Captain Travis ill. There was no deck to the big boat, and they were forced to huddle up under pieces of canvas, and talked but little. Captain Travis complained of frequent twinges of rheumatism, and gazed forlornly over the gunwale at the empty waste of water.

“If I’ve got to serve a term of imprisonment on a rock in the middle of the ocean for four years,” he said, “I might just as well have done something first, to deserve it. This is a pretty way to treat a man who bled for his country. This is gratitude, this is.” Albert pulled heavily on his pipe, and wiped the rain and spray from his face and smiled.

“Oh, it won’t be so bad when we get there,” he said; “they say these Southern people are always hospitable, and the whites will be glad to see any one from the States.”

“There will be a round of diplomatic dinners,” said the consul, with an attempt at cheerfulness. “I have brought two uniforms to wear at them.”

It was seven o’clock in the evening when the rain ceased, and one of the black, half-naked fishermen nodded and pointed at a little low line on the horizon.

“Opeki,” he said. The line grew in length until it proved to be an island with great mountains rising to the clouds, and as they drew nearer and nearer, showed a level coast running back to the foot of the mountains and covered with a forest of palms. They next made out a village of thatched huts around a grassy

square, and at some distance from the village a wooden structure with a tin roof.

“I wonder where the town is,” asked the consul, with a nervous glance at the fishermen. One of them told him that what he saw was the town.

“That?” gasped the consul; “is that where all the people on the island live?” The fisherman nodded; but the other added that there were other natives up in the mountains, but that they were bad men who fought and ate each other. The consul and his attaché of legation gazed at the mountains with unspoken misgivings. They were quite near now, and could see an immense crowd of men and women, all of them black, and clad but in the simplest garments, waiting to receive them. They seemed greatly excited and ran in and out of the huts, and up and down the beach, as wildly as so many black ants. But in the front of the group they distinguished three men who they could see were white, though they were clothed like the others, simply in a shirt and a short pair of trousers. Two of these three suddenly sprang away on a run and disappeared among the palm trees; but the third one, who had recognized the American flag in the halyards, threw his straw hat in the water and began turning handsprings over the sand.

“That young gentleman, at least,” said Albert, gravely, “seems pleased to see us.”

A dozen of the natives sprang into the water and came wading and swimming towards them, and grinning and shouting and swinging their arms.

“I don’t think it’s quite safe, do you?” said the consul, looking out wildly to the open sea. “You see, they don’t know who I am.”

A great black giant threw one arm over the gunwale and shouted something that sounded as if it were spelt Owah, Owah, as the boat carried him through the surf.

“How do you do?” said Gordon, doubtfully. The boat shook the giant off under the wave and beached itself so suddenly that the American consul was thrown forward to his knees. Gordon did not wait to pick him up, but jumped out and shook hands with the young man who had turned handsprings, while the natives gathered about them in a circle and chatted and laughed in delighted excitement.

“I’m awful glad to see you,” said the young man, eagerly. “My name’s Stedman. I’m from New Haven, Connecticut. Where are you from?”

“New York,” said Albert. “This,” he added, pointing solemnly to Captain Travis, who was still on his knees in the boat, “is the American consul to Opeki.” The American consul to Opeki gave a wild look at Mr. Stedman of New Haven and at the natives.

“See here, young man,” he gasped, “is this all there is of Opeki?”

“The American consul?” said young Stedman, with a gasp of amazement, and looking from Albert to Captain Travis. “Why, I never supposed they would send another here; the last one died about fifteen years ago, and there hasn’t been one since. I’ve been living in the consul’s office with the Bradleys, but I’ll

move out, of course. I'm sure I'm awfully glad to see you. It'll make it more pleasant for me."

"Yes," said Captain Travis, bitterly, as he lifted his rheumatic leg over the boat; "that's why we came."

Mr. Stedman did not notice this. He was too much pleased to be anything but hospitable. "You are soaking wet, aren't you?" he said; "and hungry, I guess. You come right over to the consul's office and get on some other things."

He turned to the natives and gave some rapid orders in their language, and some of them jumped into the boat at this, and began lifting out the trunks, and others ran off towards a large, stout old native, who was sitting gravely on a log, smoking, with the rain beating unnoticed on his gray hair.

"They've gone to tell the King," said Stedman; "but you both better get something to eat first, and then I'll be happy to present you properly."

"The King," said Captain Travis, with some awe; "is there a king?"

"I never saw a king," Gordon remarked, "and I'm sure I never expected to see one sitting on a log in the rain."

"He's a very good King," said Stedman, confidentially; "and though you mightn't think it to look at him, he's a terrible stickler for etiquette and form. After supper he'll give you an audience; and if you have any tobacco, you had better give him some as a present, and you'd better say it's from the President: he doesn't like to take presents from common people, he's so

proud. The only reason he borrows mine is because he thinks I'm the President's son."

"What makes him think that?" demanded the consul, with some shortness. Young Mr. Stedman looked nervously at the consul and at Albert, and said that he guessed some one must have told him. The consul's office was divided into four rooms with an open court in the middle, filled with palms, and watered somewhat unnecessarily by a fountain.

"I made that," said Stedman, in a modest off-hand way. "I made it out of hollow bamboo reeds connected with a spring. And now I'm making one for the King. He saw this and had a lot of bamboo sticks put up all over the town, without any underground connections, and couldn't make out why the water wouldn't spurt out of them. And because mine spurts, he thinks I'm a magician."

"I suppose," grumbled the consul, "some one told him that, too."

"I suppose so," said Mr. Stedman, uneasily.

There was a veranda around the consul's office, and inside, the walls were hung with skins, and pictures from illustrated papers, and there was a good deal of bamboo furniture, and four broad, cool-looking beds. The place was as clean as a kitchen. "I made the furniture," said Stedman, "and the Bradleys keep the place in order."

"Who are the Bradleys?" asked Albert.

“The Bradleys are those two men you saw with me,” said Stedman; “they deserted from a British man-of-war that stopped here for coal, and they act as my servants. One is Bradley, Sr., and the other, Bradley, Jr.”

“Then vessels do stop here, occasionally?” the consul said, with a pleased smile.

“Well, not often,” said Stedman. “Not so very often; about once a year. The *Nelson* thought this was Octavia, and put off again as soon as she found out her mistake, and the Bradleys took to the bush, and the boat’s crew couldn’t find them. When they saw your flag, they thought you might mean to send them back, so they ran off to hide again: they’ll be back, though, when they get hungry.”

The supper young Stedman spread for his guests, as he still treated them, was very refreshing and very good. There was cold fish and pigeon pie, and a hot omelet filled with mushrooms and olives and tomatoes and onions all sliced up together, and strong black coffee. After supper, Stedman went off to see the King and came back in a little while to say that his Majesty would give them an audience the next day after breakfast. “It is too dark now,” Stedman explained; “and it’s raining so that they can’t make the street lamps burn. Did you happen to notice our lamps? I invented them; but they don’t work very well, yet. I’ve got the right idea, though, and I’ll soon have the town illuminated all over, whether it rains or not.”

The consul had been very silent and indifferent, during supper, to all around him. Now he looked up with some show of interest.

“How much longer is it going to rain, do you think?” he asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Stedman, critically. “Not more than two months, I should say.” The consul rubbed his rheumatic leg and sighed, but said nothing.

The Bradleys turned up about ten o’clock, and came in very sheepishly, pulling at their forelocks and scraping with their left foot. The consul had gone off to pay the boatmen who had brought them, and Albert in his absence assured the sailors that there was not the least danger of their being sent away. Then he turned into one of the beds, and Stedman took one in another room, leaving the room he had occupied heretofore, for the consul. As he was saying good night, Albert suggested that he had not yet told them how he came to be on a deserted island; but Stedman only laughed and said that that was a long story, and that he would tell him all about it in the morning. So Albert went off to bed without waiting for the consul to return, and fell asleep, wondering at the strangeness of his new life, and assuring himself that if the rain only kept up, he would have his novel finished in a month.

The sun was shining brightly when he awoke, and the palm trees outside were nodding gracefully in a warm breeze. From the court came the odor of strange flowers, and from the window he could see the ocean brilliantly blue, and with the sun coloring the spray that beat against the coral reefs on the shore.

“Well, the consul can’t complain of this,” he said, with a laugh of satisfaction; and pulling on a bath-robe, he stepped into the next room to awaken Captain Travis. But the room was quite

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