

**THE BOYS OF THIRTY-
FIVE, A STORY OF A
SEAPORT TOWN**

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The boys of thirty-five, a story of a seaport town by Edward Henry Elwell

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EDWARD HENRY ELWELL

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A STORY OF A SEAPORT TOWN

BY
EDWARD HENRY ELWELL

BOSTON
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THE BOYS OF THIRTY-FIVE.



CHAPTER I.

THE SCENE OF ACTION.

I WAS born at Landsport, a town which boasted of having the best harbor on the Atlantic coast. I am particular to state this fact, because I have heard that seven cities disputed for the honor of being the birthplace of Homer, but I do not want any uncertainty to hang about the place of my nativity. It must be very annoying not to know where you were born. I knew a young lady once who said she was not born anywhere in particular; she was the daughter of a Methodist clergyman. I thought she always had a bewildered look, as if she were trying to select her birthplace out of the score of towns which mingled confusedly in her memory. Another young lady of my acquaintance was born on the Pacific Ocean, on board an American ship, under the English flag, and was nursed by a Chinawoman. She has always been troubled with perplexing doubts as to her nationality, and then it is so awkward when

asked your birthplace to be compelled to say, "In about lat. $30^{\circ} 15'$ N., and lon. $140^{\circ} 10'$ E." Who would care to make a pilgrimage to such a birthplace?

I hasten, therefore, at the outset of my story, to give Landsport the credit of being the place where I was born. I have good authority for the statement, which I need not introduce here. Landsport is now a considerable city, but when I arrived there, on a dark day in December, at seven o'clock in the morning, it was but a bustling village, largely engaged in exporting lumber to the West Indies, in return for which its low-deck brigs brought home cargoes of molasses, great part of which was made into rum at its half-dozen distilleries. Some portion of the molasses, together with a good many "kintals" of salt fish, and a sufficient quantity of the rum to appease the thirst which the fish created, was exchanged for round hogs, cheese, butter, and lard, which the Vermonters, in their low red pungs, brought down through the Notch of the White Mountains. I took little note of these things, however, on my arrival, but devoted myself for a long time, as I have been informed, to sucking my thumb.

The first thing I can remember is my grandfather's house, in which I was born. I can see it now, in my mind's eye, although it was long since destroyed in the great fire which swept over the town, and was

stayed just beyond the line on which the old house stood. It had seen many a troublous time, having been one of the few houses that escaped the flames when the British burned the town in 1775.

It stood close upon the sidewalk, and originally fronted the street; the town authorities declared that it encroached upon the roadway and proposed to set it back, but my grandfather threatened to shoot the first man who attempted to move it. I used to fancy him stalking up and down in front of the house, with his gun upon his shoulder.

His direful threat was not without its effect, for the old house remained undisturbed until after his death. He was a ship-master, and one dark night, while going down Long Wharf in Boston, he fell overboard and was drowned. All fear of the avenging gun being now removed, the selectmen turned the house about, presenting its gable end to the street. My grandmother weakly consented to this encroachment, but she always said that the town never kept its agreement to make the house as good as it was before. She was only a widow, and kept no gun.

The old house was of but one story, but like a Dutch man-of-war, it had great breadth of beam, and was solidly built. The frame was of oak, and the corner posts stood out in the rooms with great prominence. I can see the "front room" now, with

my grandmother sitting by the fire busily knitting. On the right as you entered was the buffet, a recess in the wall, extending half-way from the ceiling to the floor, and forming a sort of cupboard, with a curtain in front. Here my grandmother kept her best "chany" set; but the chief ornament of the buffet was a great naval pitcher, with a picture on it of two frigates engaged in battle, and guns and flags crossed in the foreground. Inscribed upon it was the sentiment, "Success to our Infant Navy." I used to wonder who was the infant Navy, not doubting that he was somebody's baby. My grandmother, whose father had sailed with Commodore Truxtun, said the picture commemorated Truxtun's victory over the French frigate *La Vengeance*, away back in 1800, but this information did not much enlighten me.

I had good reason to remember that pitcher, for it owed its destruction to one of my youthful indiscretions. One day, with many injunctions to carry it carefully, I was sent with it to the house of a neighbor who had wished to borrow it. The neighbor lived at some little distance, and as I went on my way, with my precious burden, it occurred to me that it would be interesting to ascertain how fast I could walk with my eyes shut. I tried the experiment, and thought I was going on in a remarkably straight line, when my progress was suddenly arrested by a violent

shock and a great crash. I opened my eyes, and was much surprised to find that I had run into a stone post that stood on the edge of the sidewalk, and that the great naval pitcher lay in fragments at my feet.

My heart sank within me, for I knew my grandmother set great store by that pitcher. As I looked sorrowfully down at the fragments I saw that the picture of the ships engaged in combat was unbroken. I took heart at this, for I knew that it was in one of those ships that my great-grandfather had fought, and that my grandmother took great pride in that picture. Picking up the fragment I ran home, and bursting into the house exclaimed, "I saved the ships, grandma'am!"

"Saved the ships, child; why, what have you done with my pitcher?"

"It hit against a post and broke all to pieces, but I saved the ships," said I, with an air worthy of the descendant of a naval hero.

"What a pity! But did n't you hurt you, child?"

That was all she said. If I had been a boy of to-day I should have inwardly remarked, "Is n't she a bully grandmother?" But being forty years behind the times, I only said, "No, ma'am," and ran off to my play.

Next beyond the buffet was the fireplace. I remember the brass-headed andirons that stood in it,