

**NELSON
FAIRCHILD**

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Nelson Fairchild by Various

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VARIOUS

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THIS THE PEOPLE SAW, AND UNDERSTOOD IT NOT . . .
TO WHAT END THE LORD HATH SET HIM IN SAFETY

WISDOM IV. 15, 17

PRIVATELY PRINTED

1907

N. S. Fairchild

[Faint, illegible text or markings, possibly a library stamp or handwritten notes.]

ON the twenty-first of December, 1906, there were held five services—at Mukden, at Paris, at Santa Barbara, California, at Madison, Wisconsin, and at New York City—for Nelson Fairchild, Vice-Consul-General to Manchuria, cut down in the flower of his years.

But life is not a sum of months and days, and to him was given time to develop into a completeness not often granted to age, and into a beauty of character which makes the memory of every one of his twenty-seven years a joyous possession to us who knew him best.

There is not much to be set down in formal record, and his own letters best express the happiness which came to him so unexpectedly, so unreservedly at the last; but what he seemed to others, and never knew he seemed, they themselves may be allowed to indicate. The recollection of a beloved friend becomes a lens through which we see the future no less than the past; and those who look at life through the memory of Neil Fairchild can only behold it magnified in love and kindness, in harmless gayety and never-failing courage.

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NEIL FAIRCHILD was born, September 22, 1879, at Holiday House, Belmont, Massachusetts, the sixth in a most happy family of seven children. He was a delicate baby, and for a long time unable to take his place in the ranks of his sturdier brothers and sisters; he said, years afterwards, that he remembered always feeling tired when he was a child. A great capacity for sleep was almost the only hopeful sign of those first years, when a large part of every day had to be spent on a pillow, and the long nights seemed but just sufficient to repair the wasted vitality of the days. One evening, coming a moment late to say good-night, his mother was greeted by a whisper from the adjoining bed: "Neil was so tired he could n't wait, and I said it for him: 'Now he lay mes down to sleep, he prays the Lord his soul to keep.'" But in the fragile body was even then an unflagging spirit, and his early childhood did not lack gayety or companionship, for Gordon, next younger, was a playmate who could not make too great demands on his slender strength, and Neil showed from the first a delightful readiness to take and make the jokes of the nursery. When he was four years old he was attacked by diphtheria in a very severe form. It was long before the anti-

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toxin treatment, and the doctors did not expect him to live; but the disease, once expelled from his system, seemed to carry off with it the seeds of early weakness, and from that time he grew slowly but steadily stronger until he reached a vigorous manhood.

Six months of every year were then passed at Holiday Farm, and the children thought it a paradise. The farm was full of pets, and the summers were never long enough, although Neil's part in all the games had, at first, to be a very minor one. His winters also were full of the most natural and healthy enjoyment, for Boston did not present any obstacle to normal boy life. As he grew older there were games of prisoner's base and marbles on the Mall in front of his own door; hare-and-hounds all through the safe streets of the Back Bay; and in their season, "cutting" behind the boobies, where almost every coachman was a friend, building and storming of snow forts, and much skating and tobogganing in the empty lots. But for many years the dearest playground was a few square feet in a brook flowing through an estate near Boston, easily accessible on Saturdays and even in the short afternoons of winter. There still exists a map of this principality of the imagination, drawn and colored by Neil with the same scrupulous care with which he, like all the chil-

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dren in school, was obliged to make a map of "Boston in William Blackstone's Time." All the materials for adventure and travel were here provided; and "Tortoise Island" was to the little boy with two crowns already a confirmation of the prophecy that he should eat his bread in two countries. And it is impossible to speak, however briefly, of Neil's childhood, without mention of Tug, beloved comrade in all sports. Tug belonged to their eldest sister, and accordingly Neil and Gordon became in family language "the little uncles," by which name they were known long after they were grown men.

"It was always a pleasure to meet him in the street when he was a very little fellow," a friend of his mother has written, "because he bowed with such a cordial, happy smile, as if it were really a pleasure to see one. I remember so well a talk I had with him one day in the Charles Street Garden, when he was about ten years old, full of a quaint philosophy of life, and showing such a brave, bright spirit." And another calls him "a dear lad, so gallant, so courteous to his mother's friends always." It must have been about this time that he met a lady who stopped him in mid-career. Neil gave her message pleasantly when he came home, but added: "It was most unmannerly of Mrs. — to keep on talking to me when she must

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have *seen* I was a hare!" His courtesy was equally spontaneous at home, and often very amusing. When he and Gordon were very small boys indeed, the son of some neighbours did a rough and overbearing thing which caused great excitement among the Commonwealth Avenue children. Their mother heard them discussing it one morning as she was coming into the breakfast-room. She paused a moment to consider how to present the difference between the sin and the sinner, but Neil caught sight of her, got down from his chair and came toward her, holding out his hand. As she put her hand in his he made a bow and said: "Gordon and I want to thank you for bringing us up so well."

In 1886, Holiday Farm was sold, and after that the summers were almost wholly passed in Newport in the little house on Narragansett Bay, which stands, as a friend once said, "with its back to the world and its face to the Infinite," and to which, twenty years later, Neil bade an affectionate farewell. The boys liked well enough the vacations spent in England or on the Continent, but their greatest joys were connected with the Bay, which they explored and knew as pilots do. By this time the older children could all swim, and the little boys were learning from the "Captain" who had acted as boatman on the short annual visits

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to Newport before, and who for many years was the daily guardian of all the children. It was in his shop that they designed and built the fleets of toy boats for which their grandmother hemmed endless racing sails, and it was he who taught them all in turn the management of their catboats and the rules governing the right of way. Fishing and family clam-bakes on Conanicut,—then, except for a few farmhouses, uninhabited,—driving through the quiet island roads or riding their little Western ponies over the beaches beside their father, filled the long holidays. Of course there were occasional mishaps, but they were none of them serious. Blair wrote the following account of one the day it happened, when he was nearly nine and Neil nearly seven years old:

“A BRAVE BOY”

“One day, on the 16th of June, I, and my brother Neil, were fishing on the Samson’s pear. After a while I pulled in a fish. Then my brother Jack came and fished for Neil.

[PART 2]

“Soon Jack pulled in a fish. We put him in the pail, and Jack left us. After a while I pulled in another fish. In a minute up came another fish on my hook.

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