

THE TOYS OF PEACE

by Saki

Hector Hugh Munro was a British author who published under the pen name SAKI or H.H. Munro. He wrote many short stories and sketches. During the World War I, Munro fought in France and was killed in action. The story "The Toys of Peace" satirizes the campaign by the National Peace Council (Founded in 1908, and disabled in 2000, Britain), a coordinating Committee of anti-war organization, against violent toys. It proves that attempts by the parents and organizations to nurture children against their nature would not be successful.

Eleanor Boper, mother of Eric, about eleven and Bertie who is nine and a half is concerned about her sons' upbringing who she fears might be influenced by wars. Hence, she asks her brother Harvey to buy them peace toys so that they would become peace loving citizens. She reads out from a newspaper (London morning paper) cutting about the Children's Welfare Exhibition. The Peace Council suggested the parents to consider peace toys for the impressionable young minds for the ideas of peace. She knows from her experience that the boys had learnt to use most objectionable language influenced by the toys sent by their aunt Susan. Though Harvey supports his sister in her thoughts, he does not rule out the hereditary tendencies of the boys from their uncles and great grandfather who had fought the wars.

Harvey believed it would be challenging to alter the innate instincts and tendencies of human nature, particularly the desire for conflict and competition. Harvey thought elementary education needed rethinking as traditional methods failed to address the inherent aggressive instincts, necessitating a more innovative and effective approach. On Easter Saturday, Harvey opens a large red cardboard box which contained a square, rather featureless building. The children expected exciting, thrilling toys from their uncle but were disappointed to receive educational, non-violent toys that lacked the anticipated thrill. Eric identifies it as "the Palace of the Mpret of Albania". He says "it's got no windows, you see, so that passers by can't fire in at the Royal Family." But Harvey discounts their imagination. He says, "It's a municipal dustbin." Then, Harvey opens toys such as civilian figures like John Stuart, a model of Manchester branch of Young Women's Christian Association, another civilian Robert Raikes, a model of a municipal wash-house and official's part of the Local Government Board. He then opens some tools of industry. He also shows other civilians like Mrs. Hemans a poetess, Rowland Hill who introduced the system of penny postage and Sir John Herschel, the eminent astrologer.

The boys were perplexed and wondered if they could play with them. Harvey suggests to them that they might make two of them contest a seat in parliament and have an election. Eric and Bertie again take this hint to modify according to their imagination; elections with rotten eggs, free fights and bleeding noses. Harvey tries to reason with them that the toys should be used to play peaceful games. By now the boys were not interested to play with those toys temporarily. They turn to their holiday task of history about the Bourbon Period. Harvey again stresses on the civilian aspects of historical times downplaying wars. He then heads to the library to see if he could compile a history without mentioning of battles,

massacres and murders. He finds it very hard to do so without making reference to any of them. However, he finds the invention of Calico Printing worth drawing the boys' attention to.

Harvey returns to the boys' room determined, only to watch them with disbelief about what they were doing. They were playing war game with those civilian toys! They had turned the forts into a sight of savage encounter. Harvey could do nothing but speak to his sister, "Eleanor, the experiment has failed." Thus, the story concludes with a message that the attempts to nurture the boys to change their nature fail.