

Pampered Youth

US : 1925 : dir. : Vitagraph Silent : ? min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
 Ben Alexander
 Charlotte Merriam

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Hell's own Little Lord Fauntleroy, here in the shape of Ben Alexander, fielding another complaint about his haughty airs
 Source: The Silents Majority website

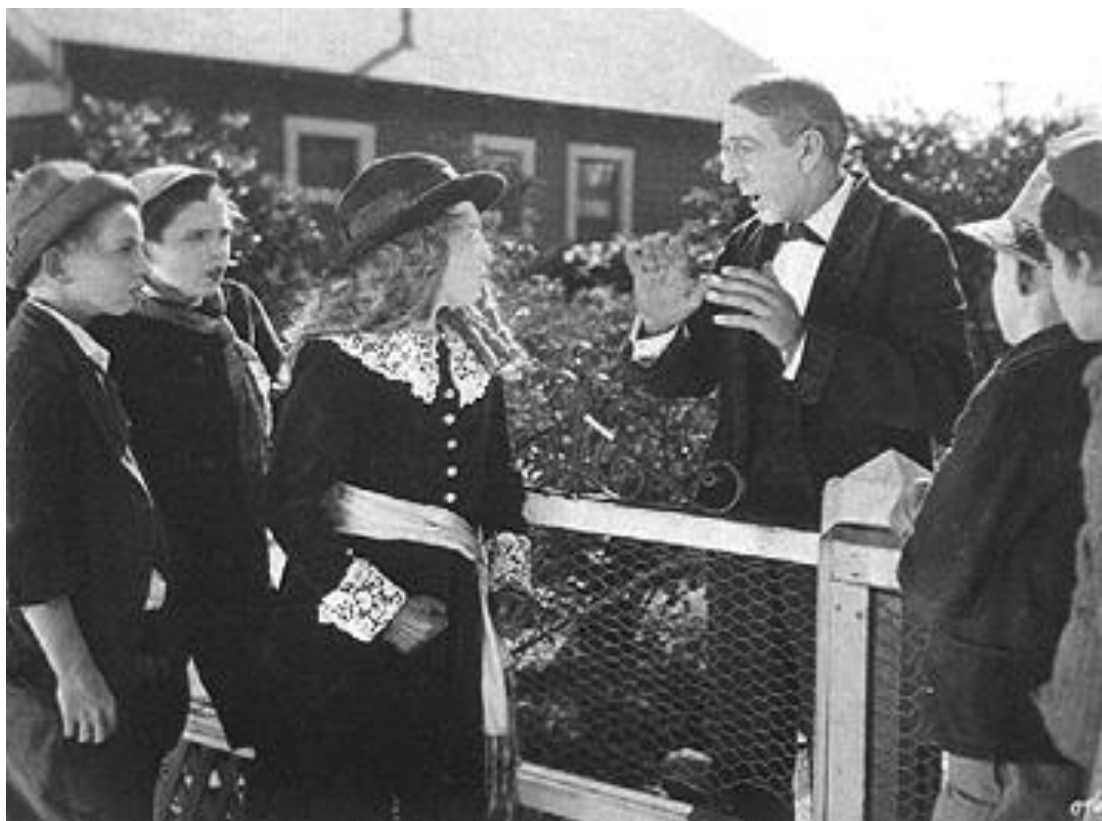
The Moving Picture Boy entry on Alexander:

"The freckled expounder and interpreter of a child's soul, to whom nice little Jackie Coogan and all other studious Baedekers of child psychology must bow the knee... Incredible artistry." Such was the verdict of Germany's "Filmwoche", in 1924, on the playing of Nicholas Benton Alexander III, better known as Ben or Benny. (But later, Nick to his friends.)

His first public appearance was on the cover of a rose catalogue, his second as Cupid in "EACH PEARL A TEAR"; and after two years in the movies he won the world's heart as "the

littlest brother" in Griffith's World War One epic "HEARTS OF THE WORLD", jealously sticking his six-year old tongue out at his brother's girl-friend. Ben Alexander began as a cuddlesome, strikingly Aryan infant, sleepy and sensual in a Robert Mitchumish way, gradually becoming more aquiline as adolescence approached.

He was the screen's second "PENROD", handsomer than Wesley Barry had been, more passionate than puckish.



Georgy Minafer (Alexander) puts parents in the neighbourhood to flight

Source: indeterminate website

Though never a star again – the real magic left him with the onset of puberty, and he became, in his own words, purely a commercial actor – the handsome Alexander continued to get good secondary roles during the Twenties and early Thirties. (He was, for instance, one of the young Germans in **"ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT"**, and Lew Ayres, its hero, became his closest real-life friend.) At first his roles were decent and idealistic, then turned caddish or worse in films like **"ARE THESE OUR CHILDREN?"** And **"THIS DAY AND AGE"**: he complained that he was fast becoming "the screen's youngest Dracula".

In 1935, however, he began working as a presenter for several NBC radio programmes, culminating in the Sunday-night "Signal Carnival" from 1936 to 1939. This left his weekdays free, and Ben went back to Stanford to complete his education, abandoning his original ambition of medicine in favour of Business Administration. Later he diversified from acting into commerce, and ended up owning a large Hollywood motel, two gas stations, a car dealership and some mortuaries.

After naval service in World War Two, Ben Alexander moved from radio to TV, and was only lured back to acting by his friend Jack Webb, whose tubby sidekick he became in the TV series **"Dragnet"** (52-59). A few years later he himself became the star of another series, **"Felony Squad"** (66-69). There was no time for more."

[no listing in "Classics of the Silent Screen", "Hollywood in the Twenties", "A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. These are the boyhood episodes of Booth Tarkington's "**THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS**", remade by Welles in 1942 but hacked to pieces by the studio before release, as happened to more than one of his films. In the pared-down version, the scenes of the loathsome spoilt rich boy Georgy Minafer pass by in a couple of minutes, but I recognise the confrontation at the neighbour's fence. Perhaps in this silent version also, the boyhood section is merely a preamble to the return from college of the full-grown hellraiser.

Ben Alexander was 14, two years after he played "**PENROD**" (another of Tarkington's creations) and the lead in "**BOY OF MINE**", and nine years after his debut in "**EACH PEARL A TEAR**". In 1934, at the age of 23, he appeared in "**NO GREATER GLORY**" alongside a whole fistful of later boy actors. What *is* the collective noun for boy actors, do you suppose? A fistful? A clutch? A bedlam?

See subject index under **BRATS / SPOILT KIDS, SILENT CINEMA** and **BOOTH TARKINGTON** adaptations.