

A Quiet Sunday Afternoon

(By M. E. Colman.)

Jennie's idea of a quiet Sunday afternoon and mine hardly agree. We found that out last Sunday afternoon, when in response to a telephonic S. O. S. I went to stay with her while Jack and Mable went to Bellingham.

The Van Jones have a lovely verandah, always cool and shady, and Jennie and I were soon installed in great, deep wicker chairs, with the pleasant tinkle of the ice in the lemonade pitcher a pleasing accompaniment to our cosy chat. We had hardly begun an intimate discussion of the implications of the Spencerian theory of the discipline of natural consequences as applied to the training of children of pre-scholastic age, when a dismal wail sounded from the fastnesses behind us.

"My goodness gracious," I cried. "what's that?"

"Why, that's only Baby. Mable left him with me for the day," replied Jennie, pouring herself another glass of lemonade with heartless precision.

The wails became howls.

"How can you sit there so coolly, with that helpless infant probably on its dying bed?" I asked in horror.

"Dying bed, nothing," retorted the cruel aunt. "He's in the carriage, and all he wants is to be picked up. He'd stop crying at once if you took him in your arms. Just leave him alone, crying won't hurt him."

"For pity's sake!" I gasped, and made one bound for the carriage. In two minutes the angelic infant was cooing and gooing upon my lap, and we fell into a spirited discussion concerning the Mendelian theory and its practical bearing upon the metaphysics of the adherents of the Pragmatical Philosophy.

A series of weird bumps and thumps, punctuated by agonized yelps, brought us both to our feet with startled exclamations.

"That bl—essed pup!" gasped Jennie. We ran into the house. Round and round the drawing-room ran a mad thing, tearing at a sort of cape upon its head. The floor was strewn with magazine leaves as a boulevard after an autumn wind. Mable's most precious possession, a Ming vase, lay in atoms on the floor. As we stood aghast, the whirling mass that was Topsy, the pup, was catapulted against the fern-stand, and the pride of Jennie's heart lay in a thousand pitiful pieces among the wreckage of the music-stand. Jennie made a flying leap for the pup, stumbled against a rocker, knocked over a table, and collapsed in a bruised heap on the floor just in time to receive in her lap the contents of the gold-fish bowl, and Topsy.

Topsy was encased in sticky fly-paper, and still making frantic efforts to be free, which of course only succeeded in gluing her more firmly to the "warranted" paper. To free her we had to resort to a tub of hot water, and as two of us were none too many for the job, Baby had perforce to exercise his lungs once more. In point of volume and persistency that child could give hints to Galli-Curci. He shrieked till we hesitated to answer the telephone for fear one of the neighbours might be inquiring who we were murdering. When Topsy had subsided, free but panting, into a towel, Jennie glanced at the clock. "My patience!" she cried, "no wonder the infant shrieks blue murder; it's nearly an hour past his bottle time." The bottle prepared and administered, a semblance of peace reigned again, and we turned our attention to gathering up the remains from the scene of conflict. It took us 79 minutes 4¾ seconds, then by common consent we collapsed into opposite chairs and wept.

After we had dried our tears, Jennie went to the pantry to forage for an evening snack. Just as I assured her that bread and cheese would be as ambrosia to me, the door-bell rang. I opened the door and ushered in a large and smiling man, followed by five large and smiling females.

They left the car at the curb.

"We were out for a drive," said the largest of the party with a dazzling smile, "and we thought we would drop in." Whereat the five others smiled similar smiles and chorused: "Thought we'd drop in!"

"Delighted, I'm sure," said Jennie; "won't you take off your things and stay for tea?"

(Whether she were merely temporarily insane, or whether it was but a symptom of a chronic condition we have not yet decided.)

"Why, yes, we'd love to," came the smiling chorus.

Oh, yes, they would excuse us while we set the table; they could entertain themselves, and they proceeded to do so with thoroughness and dispatch. One of the young ladies played, and another sang; she had been trained, "years, under the best masters, frightfully expensive, but quite worth while, don't you think so?"

The infant protested loudly and long. It is not easy to carry a howling, squirming baby and a brimming bowl of preserves at one and the same time, but, as Jennie said, one spill more or less no longer mattered.

At last we sat down. Jennie took the tea-pot and I took the baby. Our guests were radiant.

"There is nothing, after all, so pleasant as a quiet Sunday evening spent in congenial company," said one of them.

"Nothing," agreed the smiling chorus.

The infant took his thumb out of his mouth and howled.

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