

At the Sign of the Wooden Leg

By "Silas Wegg."

A Letter from Boston.

"The Devil has charge of only thirty-five things." I send this along to you, dear readers, as a piece of news. I heard it in the Boston Subway, and the man who made the statement was a prosperous looking citizen who may own a department store. This was not all he said, but this was in itself the most startling thing he said. He was talking to two other prosperous looking men and he talked earnestly, with gesticulations even, yet he was not mad or drunk with new wine as far as I could make out. Yes, there on an electric car running through the subway, a grey dressed man with tan shoes and a brown fedora, talked to two other men of righteousness and judgement. "I intend to ally myself with God," said he, "that is, with the good in the world. So allied I can go forward unafraid." And then he made the statement that the devil has charge over only thirty-five things.

One of his friends asked him how he was so sure of the exact number. He replied that thirty-five was a limit beyond which the devil could not go, that he was restricted, in fact, to a much smaller group of things in the course of an ordinary day. I took it that the devil made his possible only on the Sabbath.

I had to change cars before the prosperous looking man entered into details concerning Satan's jurisdiction, but he had dropped the seed of his gospel in one heart at any rate and I have been dwelling much on his words during the last few days. I have been able to pick out a dozen things in the Civil Service over which he seems to

have control if not entire dominion. This leaves twenty-three things at the most for him in the outside world. It is plain that the Devil pays a relatively fair amount of attention to the respectable minorities.

We are not all of the fearless order of the subway optimist. The devil and his deputies are tacitly allowed by us more than their quota of portfolios in the cabinet of the Universe. Representation by population is an ideal rule for civilized communities, I suppose, and that may account for the satanic pull in the cosmic government as conceived by us day in and day out.

Is it not time for a change? A change not of the government, but of our notions of what the government of the Universe is! Don't you think it would be better for us as civil servants if we believed that merit was stronger, —yes absolutely stronger,—than pull, that courtesy, was more effective than bullragging, that fair play was more expedient than following the main chance? It was years ago, when I thought the statement irreverent, that I heard a christian taking exception to Paul's remarks that when he would do good evil was present with him. "The text should read", said the christian, "that when I would do evil good is present with me." The christian was at one with the subway optimist. The human race could not exist if disease was as strong as the patent medicine almanacs say it is, and society would fall into anarchy if the evil in the world had such a grip on things as you and I generally think it has.

There now, I have been preaching; but in this city of Boston where 1