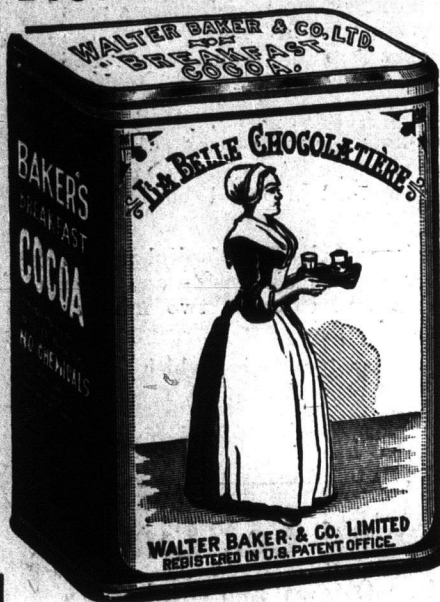


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A Very Superior Man.

By Anne Warner

RUFUS Timmans was the firstborn of his parents. They regarded him as a very superior baby and remarked freely on the fact to one another and to their various friends.

"It isn't just because he's our baby that we think he's out of the common run," his proud father told Mr. Clark (of the postoffice and Clark's city store), "no, sir. I know what fools folks are over the babies and I ain't in for making an ekal exhibition of myself. No, I don't call Rufus out of the common because he's my child—I call him out of the common run because it's the simple truth."

The mother of the young prodigy was not the less convinced of his remarkable advantages over the ordinary average of human beings.

"He looks to me like he'd grow up

procession was made by an occasional pair of twins.

Under the circumstances it would have seemed that the eldest born must become a mere cab and cradle adjunct—but his superiority saved him. For at eight years old Rufus was still superior—very superior.

"Why don't that biggest boy help you more?" Mrs. Tripp, a caller, asked of Mrs. Timmans as the latter sat rocking her third son, while her two daughters crawled about the visitor's feet with the sprightly gait of very young kittens. "Ain't he most nine years now?"

"He'll be nine next February," said the mother proudly; "but oh, he's above baby-tending, Mrs. Tripp. He's so smart I can't tell you. You ought to see some of his whittlings! Why, he whittled out an open-work inkstand the other day and I've put it in the parlor to keep till I die."

"How can you make it hold ink?"



They regarded him as a very superior baby."

to be a inspector or maybe the president," she said to Aunt Eliza. "Anyone can see he's sure to be something high up and sort of quiet and important."

Aunt Eliza was a woman of great practical gifts, she wore spectacles and had a sharp point on her nose and her tongue; sympathetic admiration was not her forte.

"You'd better teach him to quit suckin' his thumb while he's little," she said in a tone that went over the young mother like a douche of ice water. "It's an awful job to break 'em of it when they get bigger."

Rufus was the first child of John Timmans, but he was by no means the last. No child was the last for years and years and years. Little brothers followed little sisters with machine-like regularity, and the only break in the

asked Mrs. Tripp.

"Oh, it won't ever hold ink unless we can find a bottle to fit in it"—Mrs. Timmans paused to turn the baby over and roll little Eliza's ball out from under her chair—"but I don't care about that. It's just as pretty and it'll always show what Rufus could do when he wa'n't but eight years old."

By the time that Rufus was the eldest of a family of nine he was himself all of fourteen years of age. He was in school and the subject of much meditation on the part of Miss Daly, his teacher. Finally the perplexed lady made up her mind to call personally and see if there was any maternal answer to the riddle.

She found Mrs. Timmans darning stockings over the prostrate body of Rufus' fifth younger brother.

"I come to see you about that old-

est boy of yours," the teacher said. "I'm so sort of troubled about him."

"He never can have done anything, has he?" the mother asked anxiously, quite unaware of the sarcasm which lurked in her speech.

"Oh, no, he ain't done anything," replied the teacher reassuringly; "it ain't that!"

"Is he studying too hard?"

"Well, I don't know. He is and he ain't."

Mrs. Timmans paused in her work and looked as if she didn't understand. "You see, Mrs. Timmans, it's this way. Rufus knows more than the whole school put together in some ways, and in some ways he don't know a thing. Here he isn't but fourteen years old and crazy to find some way to learn chemistry, and he spells it 'kemstry'—and him every day of fourteen years old."

The mother cut some thread from her work, shook her head, and said, "Dear, dear," with earnest, worried, motherly fervor.

"He never has his plain lessons—his writing is just awful—but he's got more brains than all the rest of the school put together, and I find that out very day. He understands things that the others can't see through to save their necks, and when the Board comes he shows up so well that I just can't help being proud of him and forgiving his writing and spelling."

The mother smiled, grateful tears springing to her pale, tired eyes.

"You can't ask him anything that he hasn't got an answer for, even if he never heard of the subject before that minute—"

Just here the baby woke suddenly and began to cry so loudly that its withdrawal from society for a time appeared inevitable. Mrs. Timmans took it away and Aunt Eliza came in to entertain the guest. Aunt Eliza's nose and tongue had not become any the less pointed during the lifetime of Rufus, nor had her charm of manner been heightened by the continual care of Rufus' brothers and sisters.

"That eldest boy's a born fool," she said sharply to the startled Miss Daly; "you know it's well 's I do. Why don't you say so?"

"But I don't know any such a thing," Miss Daly cried, appalled. "I think he's really a most remarkable boy. I shouldn't be surprised to see him turn out a very superior—"

"Very superior fiddle-faddle!" said Aunt Eliza with tigerish emphasis. "Ain't I livin' here? Don't I know?"

Miss Daly gasped.

But the sound of Mrs. Timmans' footsteps coming back through the dining-room saved her from further danger.

When Rufus was twenty-one he left home.

One month later the sewing society of the town to which he went, met at Mrs. Gemmel's. Mrs. Gemmel was very disagreeable and much disliked, but her house was in such a convenient location for the meeting of the sewing society that no one ever quarreled with her.

"That young Timmans in the drug store seems to be a very superior young man," said Mrs. Clay just as soon as they were all snugly set out to gossip (and sew).—"at least he strikes me so."

"Oh, he's way above his business, any one can see," said Mrs. Brown, threading her needle. "I went in there the other day for some simple salts and he set right out to tell me about the comet. I said I'd never noticed it, but it turned out that that wasn't so surprising, for he explained to me that you can only see it from China and Maddygasgar. I was mighty interested, and he kept talkin' about this and t'other and in the end he found he hadn't poured out of the salt bottle at all. It was just a chance that he remembered that it was salts I wanted."

"Are you sure it was salts you got?" asked Mrs. Grummel.

"Oh, yes, he wrote it on the label, and I must say he was mighty pleasant over it all. He told me about how they got gum arabic, while he was corkin' the bottle, and I was so interested that I never noticed and he stuck a poison label on it, and then he laughed as much as I did and then he wanted