

"Instances! Too numerous to mention! You cannot fail to have noticed it yourself. Why, before I got into harness for this season I was snubbed."

"How? Unintentionally, I am sure."

"What difference does the intention make? I was going to buy a book at one of Smith's railway bookstalls, when I saw a poor woman and a little boy—this sort are usually my staunchest adherents. Before us was a row of highly-coloured presentation plates, such as are given away with Christmas numbers of the journals. These were under discussion, and when the mother called the attention of the child, 'Eh! what a bonny lady!' he said, referring to a large expanse of bare back, with a bare arm and hand, holding a dog upon a bare shoulder. 'Eh! what a bonny lassie!' he continued, gazing with wide-open eyes, enviously, at a second foolishly dressed young person in the middle of a summer flower-garden, with a foolish sun-bonnet on her head—and this winter, too! and, lastly, 'Eh! what a silly old man!' when he came to one of the conventional pictures representing me. Though I cannot say the plate did me justice, yet I confess I was hit very hard."

"I fear taste in all classes has not changed for the better," I said soothingly.

"No; it is the same thing in the streets. The first time I went out for a walk, in character, this year, I took a North-country town, where I heard there was a good deal of distress. I came upon a miserably clothed boy, and my heart throbbed with pain to see his shoeless feet and starved look. But he was smoking a real, brand-new cigarette; not a chocolate one, I assure you. I thought I would open a conversation with him, judiciously, with a view of making him a small present. I asked him his age."

"Well?"

"He said 'Ask a p'liceman,' puffed some smoke in my face, and was off!"

"Surely this is a solitary instance?"

"Not at all. All the time I was about I was hailed with such greetings as, 'Ere's another bloke on strike a-flittin'!' or 'It took a lot o'colourin' to paint that nose.' And even when a serious little boy seemed inclined to smile at this bad taste, his mother severely rebuked him with 'Don't laugh at sin.' I tell you children are not what they were. They are sophisticated little nuisances. Insult you and run away—that's what they do. A positive foot-and-mouth epidemic I call it!"

He was evidently much hurt, and could scarcely conquer his resentment.

"No," he continued almost to himself, "I am going to give up this costume and my old, old ways. It will be a wrench, but I cannot stand being compared to a goat or a drunkard, and having all my good evil spoken of. The fact is society

has petted and spoiled its children so much; it has belauded them and trotted them out at breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper; talked them over, praised their sayings and doings, and criticized their seniors so much, and all this in their presence, that all respect is gone, and now the father, and the whole family as well, is governed by the Boy. Boy is writ large in every house. Boy is ubiquitous and omnipotent. He dominates in the house, in the street, and all over."

"The boy is gov'nor to the man," I ventured.

"Yes, that's true, and it's the parents' fault. We shall never be comfortable or simple again until we are free from boy. But it is not easy to find a remedy now."

"Have you no suggestion to offer?"

"To succeed, any measures would need to be very drastic. In the first place, I do not intend to come here again—at any rate in this get-up. I am thinking of having my beard trimmed, and taking the paint off my nose (of course you know it is paint), and laying aside these old-fashioned clothes and boxes of presents. I shall then obtain a thorough outfit at some City tailor's, and start a new mission."

"Pray go on."

"Well, I thought of a Society—"

"Yes."

"For the Protection of Society against Children. Of course we shall have to begin rather mildly. Delicate ground to go upon."

"How do you propose to begin?"

"Well, it seems to me, we must begin by getting at the parents. Fathers and mothers must be impressed with the danger of the present condition of affairs. They must be thoroughly got at by capable missionaries, or they will not have the moral courage to join us."

"Do you anticipate any difficulty in securing the co-operation of fathers? They are not cowards, are they?"

"Not all; but a large majority are."

"Well, then, supposing you have accomplished this?"

"Why, then, as I said, we must advance by degrees; and first, I should say, limit boys under fifteen to three cigarettes a day. Compel them to dance at children's parties. Forbid their drinking foreign wines, especially champagne. Make it a capital offence to criticize a father's cellar at his own table. I also think that opera-hats and tail-coats should be forbidden for those under sixteen. I should be inclined to restrict the number of theatres to be entered by them, and insist upon their seeing one pantomime—including a harlequinade—every year. As for the younger ones—"

"Of course you will legislate for them?"

"I should repress priggism by forbidding the use of velvet or velveteen suits,

with lace frills and tuckers, and if any boy put on a stiff, straight collar, why, I'd—I'd—"

"Yes?"

"Make him wear a strait-waistcoat, too," said the old man, with a sparkle of his old good-humour.

"And what about Literature?" I queried.

"Well, that is a difficult matter, but one that goes to the very root of the grievance."

"You have, of course, some suggestion for dealing with the question?"

"Yes, I think that every boy should be compelled to pass a searching examination in Hans Andersen at the age of nine. Then, at thirteen, in Walter Scott. All half-penny comics and 'police-news' literature should be banned."

"But how prevent the circulation?"

"Once having got hold of the fathers, we shall compel the Government to impose a tax of threepence on each sheet of comic drawings; threepence on every joke that can be proved to have been printed in three different papers in one week."

"These reforms seem aimed at one class only."

"Not altogether; but in the next class below, we shall make it penal for curates—you know curates have a great deal to answer for—to manufacture more than a limited quantity of choir-boy-angels out of street-cads, per annum."

"You consider the supply exceeds the demand?"

"Yes, most assuredly, in this class of goods; and as for the curates—"

"Poor curates! are you not rather severe on them?"

"Not more so than on the fathers and mothers. Indeed, I think there is a striking analogy between the latter and curates in the output of angels. In the former case, however, it is the home-made article; in the latter, the imported goods that I complain of."

"And then?"

"When I have my way, the mother will learn wisdom, and the curate—well, he—"

"Yes, he—?"

"Can retire to his obscurity."

I thought now that my old friend was regaining his composure, and that, though he spoke with apparent severity, his bark was far worse than his bite. I asked for satisfaction on only one point more.

"I notice that your suggested reforms seem to touch chiefly the boys. What about the girls?"

"Oh! the girls!" he said briskly.

"They'll follow."—Saty. Review.

When a man is young he feels his oats,
And takes his sweetened rye in horns;
But he bar'ly reaches middle age
When he begins to feel his corns.
In either case the fact is plain:
It always goes against the grain.