

THE PERIODICALS.

Outing and the Wheelman for February opens with a pleasant and well illustrated paper on the "The St. John's Region in Florida" by Mr. John Ransom. Mr. Maurice Thompson's "Summer Sweet Hearts," goes on breezily and wholesomely; this instalment contains a mild bit of fun at the expense of the "Sweet Singer of Michigan." Mr. John S. Phillips contributes part II. of "A-Wheeling in Norambega" with Mr. Sandham's spirited sketches; a portion of it is devoted to that beautiful little New Brunswick Watering-Place, the Island of Campobello. "Under the Southern Cross," by Mr. T. E. Edwards, is a paper on Bicycling; in Australia. A humorous short story is the "Twiddle Twins," by President Bates, which we quote for the edification of men of the wheel;—

THE TWIDDLE TWINS.

It was a sultry August day. The sky was covered with a thick blanket of clouds, which yielded no cooling rain, and scarcely moved in the still air. Though these clouds shut out the direct rays of the sun, they also seemed to shut out every breath of wind and to pen in and reflect back the quivering heat which rose from the steaming earth. The road was deserted. Its length of baked gravel and clay stretched away a silent and lonely whitish-yellow streak across the languid landscape. Mr. Twiddle drove his wheel along with a faint and half-witted indifference as to whether he ever arrived anywhere. He had the whole road to himself, and he took improper liberties with it, wobbling all over its glowing breadth, with many lazy side-lurches, as if he did not care how many rods to the mile he made of it. It was so hot—so almost infernally hot—that nobody else was abroad on the highway. Man and beast remained at home. As he rode the sweat poured from every pore of his body, and enveloped him in filmy steam that would have been almost visible if anybody had been there to see him. Where he was riding the road traversed a wood, without a house within a mile of him, either before or behind. This wood on either side, instead of looking cool and inviting, seemed like two rows of vast ovens, out of whose myriad mouths exhaled a heated air, making the highway thus walled in still more insufferably sultry. The woods seemed toilsome because of their monotonous silence and sameness. No squirrel rustled their leaves; no bird flitted among their branches; even the insects had retired to the deeper shades to seek shelter from the heat.

Presently Mr. Twiddle rolled slowly across a wooden bridge spanning a ravine, through which flowed a sluggish brook. If the water of this brook had exhibited a lively motion, if it had looked cool, clear, and inviting, for either drinking or bathing, Mr. Twiddle would have been tempted to leave his saddle and refresh himself by bathing his head, neck, and arms in its current. But its waters flowed slowly and looked dark and warm; the banks were steep, and the exertion of dismounting and going down to the water appeared a greater task than his languid ambition was willing to undertake.

Nevertheless, after riding two or three rods beyond the bridge, Mr. Twiddle suddenly checked his wheel. He came so nearly to a stand-still that he lost his balance and dismounted after a few preliminary wobbles. Then he leaned one arm on his saddle and stared sharply, with his mouth ajar, at an object under the edge of a thicket on the left-hand side of the road. Presently Mr. Twiddle shut his mouth with a snap, pursed his lips, and emitted a long whistle, expressive of great astonishment. Waiting a moment as if to see what effect his whistle would produce, he pronounced in a solemn and emphatic manner the word "Je-ru-sa-lem!" expressive of prodigious surprise.

The object whose appearance in that retired and silent place had thus singularly upset Mr. Twiddle's long and pretty thoroughly trained equanimity—a virtue which receives a pretty sharp and continual tillage at the hands of the club wits—was a small red and white checkered shawl spread out upon the grass, with a three or four months' old baby sitting bolt upright in the middle of it, and no other person, especially no female person, anywhere apparent either to sight or hearing!

This baby was dressed in crumpled white muslin, with a soiled pink ribbon about its waist. It held in one of its chubby fists a rubber rattle. It stared at Mr. Twiddle for a moment with unwinking eyes, and a very business-like expression, as if taking an inventory of his visible qualities. Apparently its investigation proved satisfactory, for it suddenly raised its rattle and brought it down with a vigorous whack of approval on one of his legs, and looked at Mr. Twiddle to note if he had anything to say about it.

Mr. Twiddle looked up the road, down the road, all along the wood and at the brook. He saw nobody; he heard nobody. Then he looked at the baby again, and remarked with sincere earnestness:—

"Great Scott!"

This remark the baby immediately applauded with another vigorous whack with its rattle.

Thus far Mr. Twiddle had stood facing the baby, and had not looked at the opposite side of the road. But now a slight noise beside him caused him to suddenly turn about. He started violently, and let his wheel drop rattling to the ground. In falling, one of the handles grazed the pet corn of his left foot. He immediately gathered up this foot affectionately in both his hands, and sought to press it to his bosom, while he hopped ludicrously about on the other foot till he stumbled and sat down hard on the road. All this time he kept his eyes fixed upon the object which had a second time upset his equanimity. After sitting and staring a few moments, Mr. Twiddle slowly arose and dusted off the expanse of his knickerbockers with various slaps of his hands. Then he ejaculated with solemn force and deep feeling:—

"I'll be blowed!"

This second object which had so singularly disarranged Mr. Twiddle's collection of ideas was another small red and white checkered shawl, spread upon the grass, under the edge of the thicket, on the right hand side of the road, with another baby, very much like the first one in size and appearance, and also dressed in soiled white crumpled muslin, with a pink ribbon about its waist, sitting bolt upright in the middle of the shawl, and staring at the astonished wheelman. This second baby in white was also armed with a rubber rattle.

Seeing that this second baby made no reply to Mr. Twiddle's first eloquent remark, he looked first at one, then at the other, of the singular phenomena, meanwhile mopping his face and neck with a handkerchief already saturated with sweat, and observed with increased emphasis, indicative of the extreme climax of surprise:—

"Well by George!"

To this pertinent remark both babies responded by simultaneously banging their rubber rattles down upon their knees, producing the effect of unanimous applause.

Mr. Twiddle now walked to the right-hand side of the road, where he mounted a log and peered carefully into the recesses of the wood. Nobody in sight. Then he crossed to the left-hand side of the road, mounted a stump and looked sharply into all the woody vistas. Nobody there. Then he walked back to the bridge, and looked over each side down at the water. Nobody visible. Then he went back to his wheel, and looked first at one baby and then at the other. They were both there. He went up close to the right-hand baby, and ventured to touch its head softly with his right forefinger. It was a sure enough live baby. Then he crossed over the road and touched the head of the other baby with his left forefinger. It was a no-mistake-flesh-and-blood infant. No optical delusion about either of them. Then Mr. Twiddle went back to his wheel, mopped his face and neck some more with his wet handkerchief, and cried out:—

"Hello-o-o!"

No reply from anybody. He tried it again, a good deal louder and longer:—

"Hello-o-o-o!"

No answer. Silence everywhere, thick enough to be felt. Then Mr. Twiddle laid his head back between his shoulder-blades, opened his mouth wide, shut his eyes, took a big breath and let out a yell that would have strained the vocal chords of a four-horse-power-steam calliope:

"Hello-o-o-ah!"

He paused for a reply, and gasped for air. Not a sound anywhere: not an indication that there ever would be any sound. Only the two babies looked at his performance with grave surprise and some alarm. But they concluded that this was merely a vocal entertainment gotten up out of pure kindness of heart for their amusement, so they simultaneously banged their rattles again in unanimous applause.

After waiting a few moments in the vain hope that somebody would appear, Mr. Twiddle began to consider the situation seriously. It was exceedingly awkward and perplexing. He thought of mounting his wheel and riding on to give an alarm at the first house where he could find a woman. It seemed to him that a woman was the one central necessity of the universe. His respect for woman rose almost to veneration. He felt that he would gladly give all the money in his pockets, and his note for any reasonable amount in addition, for a woman,—any sort of a woman, young or old, ugly or beautiful, without regard to race, color, or previous condition,—anything capable of taking charge of babies.

On further reflection he concluded not to ride on. Suppose a cow should come along and trample on one of the babies, or a hog, or dog, and attack them, or a snake. He thought that either of these animals would be a fool of its kind to travel on such a hot day; still one might do so, and he dared not take the risk. He wished ardently that some traveller would appear; but the road was deserted and lonely, as far as he could see in either direction.

Suppose these deserted babies should cry? His hair rose at the thought. He felt sure they would begin to cry pretty soon. Suppose they should get hungry? Dreadful supposition! They would, they must, ere long. A cold chill ran down his spine, in spite of the heat of the day.

While he was thus cogitating, the right-hand baby began preparations for crying. It snarled up its little face. Mr. Twiddle hastily snapped his fingers at it. It looked a little astonished for a moment, and then snarled up its face again. He rattled his watch-chain; no use. Then he blew a soft note on his wheelman's whistle. Only a temporary check. It suddenly emitted an unmistakable yell, indicating a fixed and business-like determination. He ran to it and tried to stop it by shaking its rattle, poking his finger at it, and saying "Boo!" and other demonstrations which he had read as the proper thing to do in such cases. The baby looked at him a moment with indignant astonishment and then shut both eyes, puckered its face all over, and howled. Mr. Twiddle stooped to pick it up: but suddenly drew back. Suppose it should be—sweaty? Very likely that was what ailed it. As if to reduce him to despair, at this instant the other baby began to cry also. Probably they were both—sweaty. The situation was simply appalling. Consternation; confusion; chaos; all nature demanding a woman!

Suddenly Mr. Twiddle heard flying footsteps. Two women darted past him. One swooped upon the right-hand baby. She was a comely woman, apparently aged twenty-five or twenty-six years, and evidently a mother. She lifted the child to her bosom, where it instantly cuddled and became quiet. The other was a pretty girl, apparently about eighteen years old. She snatched up the left-hand baby, gave it a dexterous toss or two, and a pat on the back, when it also became quiet. Then the pair faced Mr. Twiddle and scrutinized him with a decorousness so demure and grave that he was instantly sure that they were inwardly laughing at him. No woman would be quite so unnaturally sober, he felt, unless she was sitting on the safety-valve of her laughter, to prevent an escape of pent-up merriment. The girl, he was convinced was inwardly boiling with giggle. Imps of mischief were dancing in her large, black eyes; but her face was as sober as the face on a postage-stamp.

Mr. Twiddle mechanically lifted his hat and bowed. Both the women nodded, but said nothing, only continuing to look at him demurely. Then the mother began making strange motions and antics with her fingers, her hands, and her free arm, looking fixedly at the girl. The girl shook her pretty head solemnly, and then made antic motions at the mother with her fingers, and hands, and her free arm. Then the women turned to Mr. Twiddle, who was watching this performance with increasing amazement, and began making queer motions at him. He started, backed away a step or two, and fell over his wheel. Both women advanced hurriedly. He thought they were about to attack him; but the kind concern in their faces, which, in spite of themselves, was mingled with mirthful smiles, reassured him. He arose, dusted himself with furtive slaps of his hands, picked up his wheel, and leaned upon its saddle, still gazing at the pair with deep astonishment. Then the mother smoothed a place on the surface of the road with the sole of her neat walking-shoe, stooped and traced in the sand with her forefinger the words:—

"Deaf and dumb."

She pointed to this inscription, and Mr. Twiddle bent and read it. He bowed, smiled, and pawed the air with lunatic gesture, which he fondly imagined conveyed to the woman a whole dictionary full of expressions of sincere sympathy. But she watched all his gestures closely, and then shook her head, signifying that she did not understand. He was about to go through another ridiculous pantomime when the girl, who had been shaking with suppressed merriment during his first attempt at sign-talking, suddenly burst out laughing in a clear, joyous, irrepressible peal. She laughed till she sat down on the grass, with the baby in her arms, and the tears softened her dark eyes. Mr. Twiddle's confusion was immense. He grinned, then looked sober, then grinned again, then looked indignant, and finally stood smiling like an idiot. As soon as the girl could command herself she spoke in a soft and lady-like voice:—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but really it was too funny to resist. We were sitting under the bridge when you first came, and saw the whole thing through a crevice. We had been down to the brook to bathe our faces, it was so hot. You looked so astonished when you saw the babies that we really couldn't help waiting and watching you. It was rude, perhaps, but I really never saw anything more amusing in my life. But we both beg your pardon. It was kind and gentlemanly in you to stay by the deserted little darlings, and we thank you. This is my sister, Mrs. Rudd; I am Jenny Wilson. She is deaf and dumb. You are Mr. Twiddle, I think. We have often seen your club ride by, and know the names of most of the gentlemen."

Mr. Twiddle instantly knew that the home of these ladies was the next farm-house. He had met Mr. Rudd, a prosperous deaf-mute: but he did not know that Mr. Rudd had a wife also a deaf-mute. He fell to chatting with the young lady while he walked with the pair to their house. At the gate he expressed a desire for a glass of water, when he was invited in and given a glass of iced milk, which Miss Wilson said she had been told was the favorite drink of wheelmen. After that he mounted his wheel again, and rode slowly into the city.

This is the reason why Mr. Twiddle always votes to have the club ride on the O Road. This is the reason why the club members so often speak of "The Twiddle Twins."

President Bates.

HINDOO and Parsee students sometimes write the most extraordinary English. One of them wrote recently to a Bombay newspaper about the overbearing manner of the professors, who, he said, were so iron-handed that it had become quite dangerous to "sneer the nose at them." He finished his complaint thus. "Very nice indeed! Poor students that we are, we have to kneel down before their menaces, their widened eyes and what not! lest we suffer rustication at their iron hands and be thrown into the same pitiable plight as 'a bud bit by an envious worm, ere he could spread his sweet leaves to the air, or dedicate his beauty to the sun!'"