



THE INVENTIONS OF THE IDIOT

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morning until night, and all night too, for one of them shared his room with me, and the worst of it all was that they all had to be new stories and new poems, so I was kept composing from one week's end to the other."

"Why weren't you firm with them and say you wouldn't, and let that end it?" said Mr. Pedagog.

"Ha—ha!" laughed the Idiot. "That's fine, isn't it, Mr. Poet? It's very evident, Mr. Pedagog, that you're not acquainted with children. Now, my small cousin can make the same appeal over and over again in a hundred and fifty different ways. You may have the courage to say no a hundred and forty-nine times, but I have yet to meet the man who could make his no good with a boy of real persistent spirit. I can't do it. I've tried, but I've had to give in sooner or later."

"Same way with me, multiplied by seven," said the Poet, with difficulty repressing a yawn. "I tried the no business on the morning of the third day, and gave it up as a hopeless case before the clock struck twelve."

"I'd teach 'em," said Mr. Pedagog.

"You'd have to learn 'em first," retorted the Idiot. "You can't do anything with children unless you understand them. You've got to remember several things when you have small boys to deal with. In the first place, they are a great deal more alert than you are. They are a great deal more energetic; they know what they want, and in getting it they haven't any dignity to restrain them, wherein they have a distinct advantage over you. Worst of all, down in your secret heart you want to laugh, even when they most affront you."

"I don't," said Mr. Pedagog, shortly.

"And why? Because you don't know them, cannot sympathize with them, and look upon them as evils to be tolerated rather than little minds to be cultivated. Hard a time as I have had as an Alp, I'd feel as if a great hole had been punched in my life if anything should deprive me of my cousin Sammie. He knows it and I know it, and that is why we are chums," said the Idiot. "What I like about Sammie is that he believes in me," he added, a little wistfully. "I wouldn't mind doing that myself—if I could."

"You might think differently if you suffered from seven Sammies the way the Poet does," said the Bibliomaniac.

"There couldn't be seven Sammies," said the Idiot. "Sammie is unique—to me. But I am not at all narrow in this matter. I can very well imagine how Sammie could be very disagreeable to some people. I shouldn't care much for Alp, I suppose, if when night came on Sammie didn't climb up on my lap and tell me he thought I was the greatest man that ever lived next to his mother and father. That's the thing, Mr. Pedagog, that makes Alp tolerable—it's the sugar sauce to the batter pudding. There's a good deal of plain batter in the pudding, but with the sauce generously mixed in you don't mind it so much. That boy would be willing to go to sleep on a railway track if I told him I'd stand between him and the express train. If I told him I could hammer down Gibraltar with putty he'd believe it, and bring me his putty-blower to help along in the great work. That's why I think a man's so much better off if he is a father. Somebody has fixed a standard for him which, while he may know he can't live up to it, he'll try to live up to, and by aiming high he won't be so apt to hit low as he otherwise might. As Sammie's father once said to me: 'By Jove, Idiot,' he said, 'if men could only be what their children think them!'"

"Nevertheless they should be governed, curbed, brought up!" said the Bibliomaniac.

"They should, indeed," said the Idiot. "And in such a fashion that when they are governed, curbed, and brought up they do not realize that they have been governed, curbed, and brought up. The man who plays the tyrant with his children isn't the man for me. Give me the man who, like my father, is his son's intimate, personal friend, his confidant, his chum. It may have worked badly in my case. I don't think it has—in any event, if I were ever the father of a boy I'd try to make him feel that I was not a despot in whose hands he was powerless, but a mainstay to fall back on when things seemed to be going wrong—fountain-head of good advice, a sympathizer—in short, a chum."

"You certainly draw a pleasant picture," said Mr. Whitechoker, kindly.

"Thank you," said the Idiot. "It's not original with me. My father drew it. But despite my personal regard for Sammie, I do think something ought to be done to alleviate the sufferings of the parent. Take the mother of a boy like Sammie, for instance. She has him all day and generally all night. Sammie's father goes to business at eight o'clock and returns at six, thinking he has worked hard, and wonders why it is that Sammie's mother looks so confoundedly tired. It makes him slightly irritable. She has been at home taking things easy all day. He has been in town working like a dog. What right has she to be tired? He doesn't realize that she has had to entertain Sammie at those hours of the day when Sammie is in his best form. She has found him trying to turn somersaults at the top of the back stairs; she has patiently borne his musical efforts on the piano, upon which he practises daily for a few minutes, generally with a hammer or a stick, or something else equally well calculated to beautify the keys; she has had to interfere in Sammie's well-meant efforts to instruct his small brother in the art of being an Indian who can whoop and scalp all in the same breath, thereby incurring for the moment Sammie's undying hatred; she has heard Sammie using language which an inconsiderate hired man has not scrupled to use in Sammie's presence; she has, with terror in her soul, watched him at play with a knife which some friend of the family who admires Sammie had given him, and has again incurred his enmity by finally, to avoid nervous prostration, taken that treasure from him. In short, she has passed a day of real tragedy. Sammie is farce to me, comedy to his father, and tragedy to his mother. Cannot something be done for her? Is there no way by means of which Sammie can be entertained during the day, for entertained he must be, that does not utterly destroy the nervous system of his mother? Can't some inventive genius who has studied the small boy, who knows the little ins and outs of his nature, and who, above all, sympathizes with those ins and outs, put his mind on the life of the woman of domestic inclination, and do something to make her life less of a burden and more of a joy?"

"You are the man to do it," said the Bibliomaniac. "An inventive genius such as you are ought to be able to solve the problem."

"Perhaps he ought to be," said the Idiot; "but we are not all what we ought to be, I among the number. Almost anything seems possible to me until I

think of the mother at home all day with a dear, sweet, bright, energetic boy like Sammie. Then, I confess, I am utterly at a loss to know what to do."

And then, as none of the boarders had any solution of the problem to suggest, I presume there was none among them who knew "How To Be Tranquil Though A Mother."

Perhaps when women take up invention matters will seem more hopeful.

"I don't know," said the Doctor. "But I suspect that without knowing it he's had some of the stuff he describes. Most of his schemes indicate it, and Dreamaline, I think, proves it."
