

## OBSERVATIONS

BY SARAH B. HARRIS

## A Man and His Son

A man with a comfortable income may drink and drink immoderately for years, and except for a lessening of the respect shown him at the club, on the street and in society, neither he nor his family will suffer the diminutions of intemperance. On the other hand the laboring man who spends a tenth or a fifth of his daily wage for liquor deprives his family and himself of some of the things known as the necessaries of life. His earning capacity is slowly but certainly affected by the liquor he drinks. If he is a skilled laborer and his wage is based upon the delicacy and cleverness of his fingers, whiskey makes them tremble and his deftness becomes awkwardness; his wages are reduced because the product of his labor and talent is no longer of the first quality.

Hunger and cold and unattended sickness wait just around the corner for the day-laborer who drinks. Between the man of securely-established income and hunger and cold there is long time and the friends of better days. His sentence is just as sure of execution as the poor man's sentence; but he is relieved again and again by friends and circumstances. Before the wolf can sink his fangs in the flesh of a rich man he must break down barriers of custom and ramparts laid by friendly hands. The poor man has friends, too; but they do not stand shoulder to shoulder to resist the pressure of the class below them. If a rich man does anything disgraceful his friends plead with the men and women he has injured to let him off. For the sake of his wife and his children, for the sake of the name which society has said is honorable, and which innocent children inherit, his creditors are implored not to prosecute him. When a poor man takes what does not belong to him he is called a thief. Embezzler sounds pollter, but for a thief who has no position in society, for one who is not supported by the crowding shoulders of a class, we do not take the trouble of three syllables. He is a thief and his road to the penitentiary is unimpeded by the solicitations of a class.

In the play of *The Climbers* the husband of a good woman and the father of a young son is a thief, a born thief, who began his career at school. First he stole his wife's money and then he stole other trust monies. And besides he is a coward. Some criminals have the courage of their business. Burglars have a certain kind of courage and a kind of pride in their own proficiency and dare-devilishness. Many burglars who consider that they stand at the head of their profession in this country relate their crimes with poorly-concealed exultation when they are finally sentenced to a long term in the penitentiary. But this man when he was caught was so big a coward that he tried to run away and had to have the electricity turned off before he could stop lying and protesting his innocence to people whom he knew were aware of his guilt. Well, when his crimes were completely disclosed and every listener knows that he has heard the confession of a born thief who will steal as long as he is allowed to live, all his friends begin to plead for his immunity from punishment. The escape of such a man from human punishment of his crimes because of high connections is one reason why the poor laugh at law and conclude that it is a matter of money and not of the degree of crime.

But it is not immunity from punishment that produces the highest types. The laboring men of Lincoln are in the way of becoming a more temperate, more courageously and consistently

moral class than the doctors, lawyers, bankers and merchants of Lincoln. Among themselves and unnoted by men of affairs they have talked over the question of saloons and determined that they must be exterminated. They do not believe that they can stop liquor selling or liquor drinking; but with high courage and confidence in their own united efforts and influence, they believe that they can force the adoption of a plan which will close the doors of saloons where the respectable class meets the law-breaking class on the same plane.

As it is at present, the youth of this educational centre are not ashamed to go into a place where the most respected citizens are met to drink and treat and be sociable. If we are not our brother's keeper the most hardened and selfish will not deny that the mature have charge of the young, the father of his boy. The saloon is an institution which is approved and licensed by the mature. It is a lure to the young. Good citizens, by common consent, go in and out of the saloon in the sight of the young. The older ones practically say to the youngsters: "This is a respectable place, it is where we get our daily drams, it is a beneficent institution which supports the schools, and you are taught that the public schools are the bulwarks of American constitutional government."

American youth are quick-witted. The fathers of the boys do not need to furnish their sons with anything more forcible than the paternal example. If the fathers consider the saloons a necessary institution of the city and make use of them, the mother who has taught her sons that their father is a noble man and a safe guide has the ground cut from beneath her feet. However fond and chivalrous the boys, rightfully their ideal is manhood. The bright boys have quickly learned the current view of woman. They think her very desirable as a housewife, to get their dinners and mend and wash their clothes; but when it comes to practical living, life as it is among men, of course the mother is not good authority. If the bread-winner is revered and respected as he should be, he is the pattern that his son copies and should copy. If he is a habitue of saloons, the mother's remonstrances are tolerated when the son becomes a regular saloon visitor; but from the point of view of the son as an understudy to his father, her views are prejudiced and womanish. The boy who has begun to visit the saloons earlier than his father never reaches his father's stature of usefulness and dignity.

The saloon tempts a boy where he is most vulnerable: his fear of ridicule and his liking for the society of his own sex and age. Whiskey is an acquired habit. Gregariousness, love of popularity and dread of ridicule are an inheritance from the most ancient of ancestors. When one youth says to a group of his comrades, "Have this with me," it is conventional for every youth to be host and guest in turn. Every boy's father has been in the same situation and the boys have observed their fathers' generosity and acceptance of the old custom. Almost before they know it the boys are drunk and noisy and quarrelsome and have started on a lifelong career of uselessness and of absolute social and economic bankruptcy.

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Frank Stockton

There are authors whose books we read and admire without feeling the slightest desire to know the men who wrote them. There are other authors we hone to know, after reading their stories. Heaven is a place not paved

with gold and entered through gates of pearl hung on gold hinges with diamonds for knobs. Gold, diamonds, cats-eyes and opals are not food to the spirit. They are principally of value on the earth because only a few possess them and their ownership confers a kind of distinction. Lincoln women go to Omaha to get print dresses and other kinds because they do not wish to meet the same pattern on the street or be met by a woman who has a gown of the same pattern at home. There is some excuse for this. By the same token it is the naïf custom of our merchants to buy the same pattern in all shades and by the five hundred yards. The feminine desire for exclusive weaves and patterns is unrecognized, or at least it is ignored and the woman who can, goes to Omaha or the next largest city within reach of her purse in order to satisfy a want to which the dry-goods merchants are indifferent. The grocer's wife or the banker's wife will continue to patronize Omaha shops in spite of the reciprocal relations of the grocer and the banker because the local merchants ignore the universal longing for distinction of however trifling a sort.

The desire for association with rare spirits is the desire for distinction, for a view just a little bit above the heads of the multitude, for isolation from the vast herd of seventy-five million people who now occupy the plains and wooded uplands of America in place of the buffalo and mountain lions which we have exterminated. Hundreds have felt while reading Frank Stockton the desire to know him. He could find a pearl in nearly every oyster he examined. He was not looking for rare types but for the native nobility of every human being. It is his quality of recognition that made the commonplace man and woman, still conscious of a jewel concealed, long to know him, to come within the rays of the kindly light of his spirit. His lips were touched with a coal from the hearth of a god. It glowed again with a human warmth. Kipling is of the elect, but who of those who have read his camp poetry, his tales of Simla and of his own boyhood at school wish to know him personally? He is of the elect, but his point of view is the point of view of a reporter who would not hesitate to make a good "story" out of his own grandmother's misfortune.

Frank Stockton was not so great a writer as Kipling, but his reserve and gentleness have made him perhaps the best-beloved American author. His humor is of the sort that everyone enjoys. He does not make a butt of this one or that one. Kipling's humor is coarser fibred. He is a practical joker and enjoys another's discomfiture. And the man with no sense of humor whatever is further along in the course of evolution than the man who plays practical jokes.

Frank Stockton was not an effusive, insistent democrat; but he loved the finely composed temperaments and minds of what we call the common people. His heroes and heroines do not wear purple and fine linen; they are men and women of courage, reserve force and resource in extremity. Without saying anything about the abstract virtues, his heroes and heroines are chaste, honest, brave, loyal, modest, unself conscious. And in the homely clothes that most of us wear, meeting the emergencies of life that all are called upon to face and overcome or be conquered by, his men and women are stimulating examples of how to live and make the world better for our lives.

It was when he wrote "The Lady or the Tiger," ten or fifteen years ago, that the world began to talk about him; but long before that lovers of the good short story, of the virile and the wholesome, of the indescribable gentleness that was his, knew Frank Stockton and gave the preference to his stories in the magazines. Greater writers have passed away in the last decade, but none more truly regretted or with a wider and fonder circle of readers than Frank Stockton.

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