

### Comment--and Discomment

These are hard days for plain kids, with mischief in their minds. There's a conspiracy on the part of cops, teachers, parents and preachers to keep their little noses ever to the grindstone and their feet in the straight and narrow path. Pranks and practical jokes that would win a twenty-year-old undying fame in college are looked upon as evidences of a vile and wicked nature when a lad is ten years younger. Boys don't have any fun now, unless you count the opportunity to dangle dead mice in front of little girls' faces and other harmless things.

The news dispatches (that's a nifty way to refer to a bit of grapevine telegraph stuff) tell the story of an Omaha boy who was sent to the reform school for a term of several years for breaking up a community center meeting at some school house. All he did was to ring the firebell, and a mob of men, women and children rushed to the door. No one was injured, but all of them were pretty badly scared. And when the excitement had died down, every one of those people, instead of being grateful that it had turned out to be a false alarm, proceeded to set up a howl against the boy. And, to use a dainty little French phrase, they got his goat.

Boys, like Mr. Kipling's "single men in barracks," don't sprout wings. They're thoughtless little heathens, and they like to have good times. Very often, it's true, their ideas of a good time don't conform to those of other people—but isn't it the fault of other people for not teaching them better ideas? When we hear of little boys in a town who don't like Sunday school, but prefer to go fishing, we don't immediately jump to the conclusion that something is wrong with the boys or their parents. Occasionally it happens that something is lacking in the Sunday school. Or maybe the fishing is exceptionally good.

This sixteen-year-old high school boy who will go to the reform school will come out of it with a much worse reputation than he deserves. He'll find that his record will be against him for pretty near the rest of his natural life. It won't be quite as much of a detriment as though he had served a term in the penitentiary, but it will have a bad influence the rest of his life—and he may live to be pretty old. Enemies will whisper it behind his back, and some of them may say it to his face. Employers will be careful not to trust him too far. In later years, people will forget just why he served a sentence in the reform school, and there'll be a lot of wild things that folks will believe he did.

The lord high executioner, in "The Mikado," you will recall, had the proper idea. In the little song with

which he introduced himself, he suggested that he always tried to "make the punishment fit the crime." With all due deference to the superior judgment of the Omaha juvenile judge, we think he's a trifle severe. A terrible crime, of course, to cause a panic among men older than he was, to say nothing of the women and children—but we had thought that the court occasionally considered the intent. Judge Tash, a week ago, took this into consideration when he let four youthful house-breakers off with a fine—and then suspended the fine.

If this particular Omaha judge had been given the opportunity to sit in judgement on several cases of which we have intimate knowledge, the state penitentiary would probably be full of college lads. Back in 1910, when we entered the University of Nebraska, we recall several stunts that furnished us a good deal of amusement, did some damage, and were never discovered. Of course, we weren't mixed up in any of them. That's understood—or we wouldn't be telling about it. We have ever been studious. It is our chief drawback. But sometimes, of an evening, when Smoke and Stoney and the gang would borrow one of our pipes and smoke our good tobacco—they sold good tobacco in those days—we listened and learned. One can always learn if he listens at the right time and the right place.

We were rooming at 1449 S Street, with Tommy Stratton, Mrs. Stratton and Ashby. We lived on the third floor, far away from the piano in the parlor and the lady-like boarders on the second floor. Stoney and Smoke had a room together on one side, we had the room at the front of the house, and a tall youth, built like a drink of water, had the room on the other side of the hall. Down at the other end was a Bohemian lad of promise and promises. It was a good gang, and a studious one, just before exams.

Up on the third floor we were just like brothers, save that we didn't quarrel as much. When one of the boys was initiated into the Spikes, the rest of us bound up his wounds and bought arnica for his bruises. When another one, in the shower bath, backed up against a red hot radiator and was striped like a zebra for three months, not a one of us laughed—where he could hear it. And once—but that's another story.

It began, as we recall, with the dago popcorn vender. Every night he drove out in the residence section with a boxed-up wagon, and his stand was just half a block away from the house. In those happy days, butter wasn't ninety cents a pound, and when that dago would get a batch of corn freshly popped, covered with butter, and the odor would come drifting up to the third floor, we went down. Just what this popcorn vender did to arouse their wrath has been forgotten, but it was the sort of a thing they thought he shouldn't do to good customers. And so war was declared.

The next night, when they heard

the tinkle of the little bell that heralded his coming, they went down. Three of them besieged the windows—one on each side of the cart—and the rest proceeded to tie his hind wheel to a telephone post. When this was done, they walked away, and suddenly half a brick took that old plug in the side. He jumped forward, the rope held the wheel, and the popcorn, the popper and the stock in trade and the dago were jumbled together in the bottom of the cart. They never could do it again. He was always looking on all four sides after that. And one day someone conceived the idea of buying an air rifle.

There's a real tale connected with the air rifle and the use to which we put it the next three weeks, before it disappeared mysteriously. Personally, we think that Tommy Stratton still has it. But maybe the six-foot Danish student, who couldn't see a joke, was the guilty party. Some day, we're going to tell it all, after we're certain that Smoke is out of the state. Afterward, he became an airman, and has some of those German planes to his credit. He never brought down enough to rank as an ace, but he did pretty well for a roughneck. Stone also has a pretty fair war record, and so, oddly enough, did the studious Bohunk. It wasn't our fault that we didn't kill half the Germans in the war. We might have done so if it hadn't been for a gentle government sending us to Newport and Block Island, Providence and Boston to serve the war.

Before we got started on reminiscences, we had the germ of an idea, and even thoughts of 1449's air rifle crew won't let it get clear away. There ought to be other and less severe punishment for boys who do

foolish things with no intent to become criminals. Boys hear tales of practical jokes and devilry from older boys and from men—the papers are full of them—and only one out of a thousand ever gets caught. Why should the one who is caught be made to suffer for all the sins of other young heathens? Why shouldn't justice be tempered with mercy? Why couldn't a juvenile court have a rattan whip, and order the parent to use it where it will have the greatest effect? In these days, when people are sentimentally slopping over hardened criminals, why is it that only a few people take interest in boys, who, with might little encouragement, may grow up to believe they are outlaws? We're missing one of our best.

—Girls wanted at Alliance Steam Laundry.

#### TEXAS TWINKLERS

Probably the funniest sights on the streets of this town are women wearing cloth shoes and leather coats.

Personally we have had our share of manly ambitions, but we don't recall ever having aspired to be a corsair.

It has just about got so in this country that as soon as a widower begins sewing on his buttons without starting a fuss he gets married again.

Considering her snagged teeth, we don't understand why Emma Goldman was so opposed to going where there is nothing to eat but soup.—Dallas news.

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