

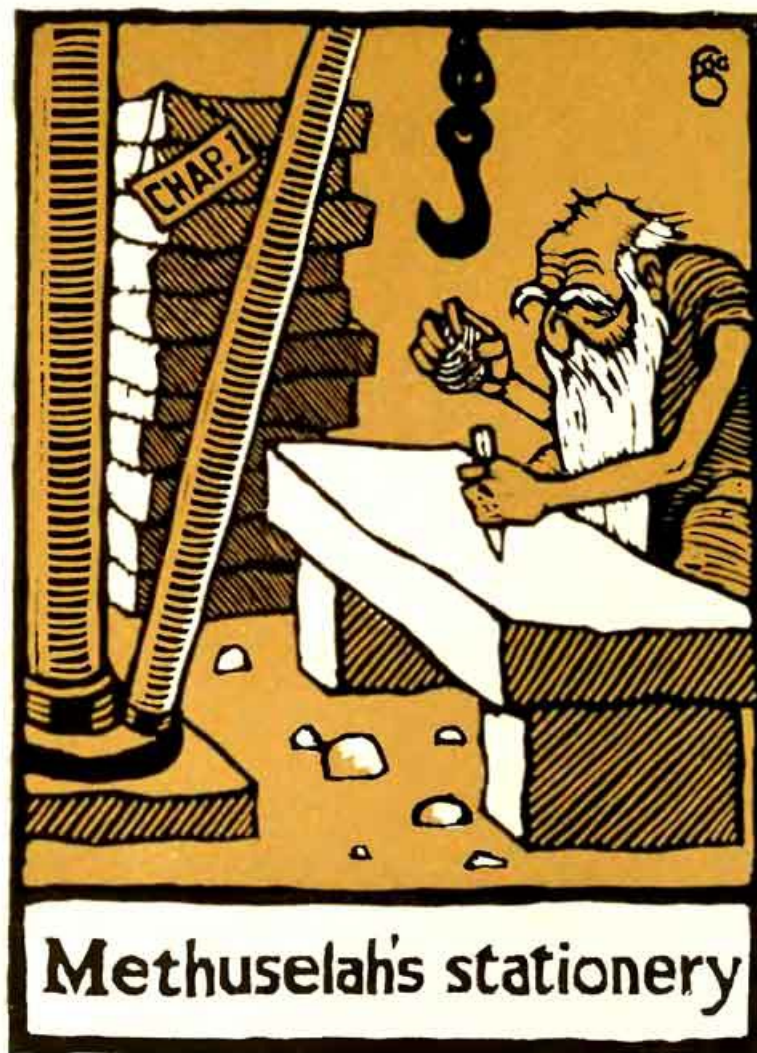
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The Autobiography
of Methuselah

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Methuselah's stationery

The
**Autobiography
of Methuselah**

EDITED BY
JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR BY
F. G. COOPER



NEW YORK
B. W. DODGE & COMPANY
1909

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FOREWORD

Having recently passed into what my great-grandson Shem calls my Anecdorage, it has occurred to me that perhaps some of the recollections of a more or less extended existence upon this globular^[1] mass of dust and water that we are pleased to call the earth, may prove of interest to posterity, and I have accordingly, at the earnest solicitation of my grandson, Noah, and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japhet, consented to put them into permanent literary form. In view of the facts that at this writing, ink and paper and pens have not as yet been invented, and that we have no capable stenographers among our village folk, and that because of my advanced years I should find great difficulty in producing my manuscript on a type-writing machine with my gouty fingers—for, of the luscious fluid of the grape have I been a ready, though never over-abundant, consumer—even if I were familiar with the keyboard of such an instrument, or, if indeed, there were any such instrument to facilitate the work—in view of these facts, I say, I have been compelled to make use of the literary methods of the Egyptians, and with hammer and chisel, to gouge out my "Few Remarks" upon such slabs of stone as I can find upon my native heath.

It ^[1]is quite interesting, in the light of the contentions of history as to man's earliest realization that the earth is round, to find Methuselah speaking in this fashion. It would seem from this that the real facts had dawned upon the Patriarch's mind even at this early period, and one is therefore disposed to regard as less apocryphal the anecdote recorded in Volume III, Chapter 38, of "The Life and Voyages of Noah," wherein Adam, after being ejected from the Garden of Eden, asked by Cain if he believes the world to be round like an orange, replies:

"I used to think so, my son, but under prevailing conditions I am forced into a more or less definite suspicion that it is elliptical, like a lemon."—Editor.



Ye scribe decides not to use Egyptian writing.

Let us hope that my story will not prove as heavy as my manuscript. It is hardly necessary for me to assure the indulgent reader that such a method of composition is not altogether an easy task for a man who is shortly to celebrate his nine hundred and sixty-fifth birthday, more especially since at no time in my life have I studied the arts of the Stone-Cutter, or been a master in the Science of Quarrying. Nor is it easy at my advanced age, with a back no longer sinewy, and muscles grown flabby from lack of active exercise, for me to lift a virgin sheet of stone from the ground to the surface of

my writing-desk without a derrick, but these are, after all, minor difficulties, and I shall let no such insignificant obstacles stand between me and the great purpose I have in mind. I shall persist in the face of all in the writing of this Autobiography if for no worthier object than to provide occupation for my leisure hours which, in these patriarchal days to which I have attained, sometimes hang heavy on my hands. I know not why it should so transpire, but it is the fact that since I passed my nine hundred and fiftieth birthday I have had little liking for the pleasures which modern society most affects. To be sure, old and feeble as I am, and despite the uncertain quality of my knees, I still enjoy the excitement of the Virginia Reel, and can still hold my own with men several centuries younger than myself in the clog, but I leave such diversions as bridge, draw-poker and pinochle to more frivolous minds—though I will say that when my great-grandchildren, Shem, Ham and Japhet, the sons of my grandson Noah, come to my house on the few holidays, their somewhat over-sober parent allows them from their labors in the ship-yard, I take great delight in sitting upon the ground with them and renewing my acquaintance with those games of my youth, marbles, and mumbledy-peg, the which I learned from my great-uncle-seven-times-removed, Cain, in the days when with my grandfather, Jared, I used to go to see our first ancestor, Adam, at the old farm just outside of Edensburg where, with his beautiful wife Eve, that Grand Old Man was living in honored retirement.

Nor have I in these days, as I used to have, any especial taste for the joys of the chase. There was a time when my slungshot was unerring, and I could bring down a Dodo, or snipe my Harpy on the wing with as much ease as my wife can hit our barn-door with a rolling-pin at six feet, and for three hundred and thirty years I never let escape me any opportunity for tracking the Dinosaur, the Pterodactyl, or that fierce and sanguinary creature the Osteostogothemy to his lair and there fighting him unto the death during the open season for wild game of that particular sort. I well remember how, in my boyhood days, to be precise, shortly after my two hundred and twenty-second birthday, I went with my great-grandfather, Mehalaleel, over into the woods back of Little Ararat after a great horned Ornythyrhyncus and—but that is another story. Suffice it to say that I have at last reached a period in my life where I am content to leave the pleasures of Nimrod to my more nimble neighbors, and that now no winged thing, save an occasional mosquito, or locust, need fear my approach, and that my indulgence in the shedding of the blood of animals is confined to an infrequent personal superintendence of the slaughter of a spring-lamb in green-pea time, when the scent is in the julep and the bloom is on the mint; or possibly, now and then, the removal from the pasture to the pantry of a bit of lowing roast-beef, when I feel an inner craving for the crackle and the steak.

Racing I have an abhorrence for, and always have had since in my early days I attended the county-fair at North Ararat, and was there induced by one of my neighbors to participate as a rider in a twenty-mile steeplechase between a Discosaurus which I rode, and a Diplodocus in his possession. I found after the race had started that the animal which had been assigned to me as a gentleman jockey, had not been broken to the saddle, and my experience during the next six days in staying on his back—for he immediately took the bit between his teeth and bolted for the woods, and was not again got under control for that time—as he jumped over the various obstacles to his progress, from thank-you-marms in the highways which were plentiful, to such mountains as the country for a thousand miles about provided for his delectation, was one of the most terrific in my life, prolonged as it has been. I had been assured that the race was to be a "Go-As-You-Please" affair, but I had not been seated on that horrible creature's back for two minutes before I discovered that it was a "Go-As-He-Pleased" affair and that "Going-As-I-Pleased," like the flowers that bloom in the Spring, had nothing to do with the case. Had I begun in the pursuit of the pleasures of the track in later years after the invention of wheels, whereby that easy running vehicle, the sulky, was brought into being, and when, by the taming of the horse, the latter became a domesticated animal with sporting proclivities, instead of a mere prowler of the plains, I might have found the joys of racing more to my taste, although in these later years of my life when a truly noble pursuit has degenerated into a mere gambling enterprise, wherein those who can ill afford it squander their substance in riotous bookmaking, I am inclined to be grateful that my first experience in this direction has led me to cultivate an unconcerned aloofness from a pursuit which is ruinous to the old and corrupting to the young.

Were the present state of literature more hopeful, perhaps I should find pleasure in reading, but I have viewed with such increasing alarm the growth of sensationalism in the literary output of my age that I have felt that I owed it to my posterity, which is rapidly growing in numbers—I believe that the latest annual report of the Society of the Sons and Daughters of Methuselah shows a membership of six hundred and thirty-eight thousand, without counting the new arrivals since the end of the last fiscal year, which, at a rough guess, I should place at thirty-six thousand—I have felt, I say, that I owe it to that posterity to set it the example of not reading, as my most effective protest against those pernicious influences which have made the modern literary school a menace to civilization. Surely if Noah's children for instance, Shem, Ham and Japhet, whom I have already had occasion to mention, were to surprise me, their venerable, and I hope venerated ancestor, reading such stories as are now put forth by our most successful quarrymen—stories like that unspeakable novel "Three Decades," of which I am credibly informed eight million tons have already been sold; and which, let me say, when I had read only seven slabs of it I had carted away and dumped into the Red Sea; or the innocuous but highly frivolous tales of Miss Laura Jean Diplodocus—they would hardly accept from me as worthy of serious attention such admonitions as I am constantly giving them on the subject of the decadence of literature when I find them poring over the novels of the day. Consequently even this usual solace of old age is denied to me, and writing becomes my refuge.

I bespeak the reader's indulgence if he or she find in the ensuing pages any serious lapses from true literary style. I write merely as I feel, and do not pretend to be either an expert hieroglyphist or a rhetorician of commanding quality. Perhaps I

should do more wisely if I were to accept the advice of my great-grandson Ham, who, overhearing my remark to a caller last Sunday evening that the work I have undertaken is one of considerable difficulty, climbed up into my lap and in his childish way asked me why I did not hire a boswell to do it for me. I had to tell the child that I did not know what a boswell was, and when I questioned him on the subject more closely, I found that it was only one of his childish fancies. If there were such a thing as that rather euphoniously named invention of Ham's who could relieve me of the drudgery of writing my own life, and who would do it well, I would cheerfully relinquish that end of my enterprise to him, but in the absence of such a thing, I am, in spite of my manifest shortcomings, compelled to do the work myself. On behalf of my story I can say, however, that whatever I shall put down here will be the truth, and that what I remember notwithstanding my advanced years, I remember perfectly. I am quite aware that in some of the tales that I shall tell, especially those having to do with Prehistoric Animals I have met, or Antediluvians as I believe the Scientists call them, what I may say as to their habits—I was going to say manners, but refrain because in all my life I have never observed that they had any—and powers may fall upon some ears as extravagant exaggerations. To these let me say here and now that there are exceptions to all rules, and that if for instance, I tell the story of a Pterodactyl that after being swallowed whole by a Discosaurus, successfully gnaws his way through the walls of the latter's stomach to freedom, I make no claim that all Pterodactyls could do the same, but merely that in this particular case the Pterodactyl to which I refer did it, and that I know that he did it because the man who saw it is a cousin of my grandfather's first wife's step-son, and is so wedded to truth that he is even now in jail because he would not deny a charge of sheep-stealing, which he might easily have done were he an untruthful man. Again when I observe that I have caught with an ordinary fish-hook, baited with a common garden, or angle worm, on the end of a light trout-line, a Creosaurus with a neck ninety-seven feet long, and scales so large that you could weigh a hay-wagon on the smallest of the lot near the end of his tail, I admit at the outset that the feat was unusual, had never occurred before, and is never likely to occur again, but can bring affidavits to prove that it did happen that time, signed by reputable parties who have heard me tell about it more than once. I make these statements here not in any sense to apologize for anything I shall say in my book, but merely to forestall the criticism of highly cultivated and truly scientific readers who, after a lifelong study of the habits of these creatures may feel impelled to question the accuracy of my statements and add to my perplexities by so advertising my book that I shall be put to the arduous necessity of chiseling out another edition, a labor which I have no desire to assume.

One word more as to the language I have chosen for the presentation of my narrative. I have chosen English as the language in which to chisel out these random recollections of mine for a variety of reasons. Most conspicuous of these is that at the time of this writing no one has as yet thought to devise a French, German, Spanish or Italian language. Russian I have no familiarity with. Chinese I do not care for. Latin and Greek few people can read, and as for Egyptian, while it is an excellent and fluent tongue for speaking purposes, I find myself appalled at the prospect of writing a story of the length of mine in the hieroglyphics which up to date form the whole extent of Egyptian chirography. An occasional pictorial rebus in a child's magazine is a source of pleasure and profit to both the young and the old, but the autobiography of a man of my years told in pictures, and pictures for the most part of squab, spring chickens, and canvas-back ducks, would, I fear, prove arduous reading. Moreover I am but an indifferent draughtsman, and I suspect that when the precise thought that I have in mind can best be expressed by a portrait of a humming-bird, or a flamingo, my readers because of my inexpert handling of my tools would hardly be able to distinguish the creature I should limn from an albatross, a red-head duck, or a June-Bug, which would lead to a great deal of obscurity, and in some cases might cause me to say things that I should not care to be held responsible for. There is left me then only a choice between English and Esperanto, and I incline to the former, not because I do not wish the Esperantists well, but because in the present condition of the latter's language, it affects the eye more like a barbed-wire fence than a medium for the expression of ideas.

At this stage of the proceedings I can think of nothing else either to explain or to apologize for, but in closing I beg the reader to accept my assurance that if in the narratives that follow he finds anything that needs either explanation or apology, I shall be glad to explain if he will bring the matter to my attention, and herewith tender in advance for his acceptance any apology which occasion may require.

And so to my story.

George W. Methuselah.

Ararat Corners, B. C. 2348.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF METHUSELAH

CHAPTER I

I AM BORN AND NAMED

The date of my birth, occurring as it did, nine hundred and sixty-five years ago, is so far removed from my present that my recollections of it are not altogether clear, but Mrs. Adam, my great-grandmother seven times removed, with whom I was always a great favorite because I looked more like my original ancestor, her husband, than any other of his descendants, has given me many interesting details of that important epoch in my history. Personally I do remember that the date was B. C. 3317, and the twenty-third of June, for the first thing to greet my infant eyes, when I opened them for the first time, was a huge insurance calendar hanging upon our wall whereon the date was printed in letters almost as large as those which the travelling circuses of Armenia use to herald the virtues of their show when at County Fair time they visit Ararat Corners. I also recall that it was a very stormy day when I arrived. The rain was coming down in torrents, and I heard simultaneously with my arrival my father, Enoch, in the adjoining room making sundry observations as to the meteorological conditions which he probably would have spoken in a lower tone of voice, or at least in less vigorous phraseology had he known that I was within earshot, although I must confess that it has always been a nice question with me whether or not when a man expresses a wish that the rain may be dammed, he voices a desire for its everlasting condemnation, or the mere placing in its way of an impediment which shall prevent its further overflow. I think much depends upon the manner, the inflection, and the tone of voice in which the desire is expressed, and I am sorry to say that upon the occasion to which I refer, there was more of the asperity of profanity than the calmness of constructive suggestion in my father's manner. In any event I did not blame him, for here was I coming along, undeniably imminent, a tempest raging, and no doctor in sight, and consequently no telling when my venerable sire would have to go out into the wet and fetch one.

In those primitive days doctors were few and far between. There was little profit in the practice of such a profession at a time when everybody lived so long that death was looked upon as a remote possibility, and one seldom called one in until after he had passed his nine hundredth birthday and sometimes not even then. It may be that this habit of putting off the call to the family physician was the cause of our wonderful longevity, but of that I do not know, and do not care to express an opinion on the subject, for socially I have always found the medicine folk charming companions and I would not say aught in this work that could by any possibility give them offense. Not only were doctors rare at that period, but owing to our limited facilities in the matter of transportation, it was exceedingly difficult for them to get about. The doctor's gig, now so generally in use, had not as yet been brought to that state of perfection that has made its use in these modern times a matter of ease and comfort. We had wheels, to be sure, but they were not spherical as they have since become, and were made out of stone blocks weighing ten or fifteen tons apiece, and hewn octagonally, so that a ride over the country roads in a vehicle of that period not only involved the services of some thirty or forty horses to pull the wagon, but an endless succession of jolts which, however excellent they may have been in their influence on the liver were most trying to the temper, and resulted in attacks of sickness which those who have been to sea tell me strongly resembles sea-sickness. So rough indeed was the operation of riding in the wagons of my early youth that a great many of our best people who kept either horses or domesticated elephants, still continued to drive about in stone boats, so-called, built flat like a raft, rather than suffer the shaking up which the new-fangled wheels entailed. Griffins were also used by persons of adventurous nature, but were gradually dying into disuse, and the species being no longer bred becoming extinct, because of the great difficulty in domesticating them. It was not a hard task to break them to the saddle, and on the ground they were fleet and sure footed, but in the air they were extremely unreliable. They used their wings with much power, but were not responsive to the reins, and in flying pursued the most erratic courses. What was worse, they were seldom able to alight after an aerial flight on all four feet at once, having a disagreeable habit of approaching the earth vertically, and headfirst, so that the rider, unless he were strapped on, was usually unseated while forty or fifty feet in the air, with the result that he either broke his neck, or at least four or five ribs, and a leg or two, at the end of his ride. When we remember that in addition to all this we had no telephone service at that time, and that the umbrella had not as yet been devised, my father's anxiety at the moment may easily be realized.

His temper was only momentary, however, for I recall that I was very much amused at this critical moment of my career by another observation that I overheard from the adjoining room. My grandfather, Jared, who was with my father at the time looking out of the window made the somewhat commonplace observation—

"It's raining cats and dogs, isn't it?"

"Cats and dogs?" retorted Enoch, scornfully. "It's raining Diplodocuses!"

This was naturally the first bit of humor that I had ever heard, and coming as it did simultaneously with my *début* as a citizen of Enochsville, perhaps it is not to be wondered at that instead of celebrating my birth with a squall, as do most infants, I was born laughing. I must have cackled pretty loudly, too, for the second thing that I remember—O, how clearly it all comes back to me as I write, or rather chisel—was overhearing the Governor's response to the nurse's announcement of my arrival.

"It's a boy, sir," the good woman called out as she rushed excitedly into the other room.

"Good, Dinah," replied my father. "You have taken a great load off my mind. I am dee-lighted. I was afraid from his opening remarks that he was a hen!"

It was thus that the keynote of existence was struck for me, one of mirth even in the dark of storm, and that I have since become the oldest man that ever lived, and shall doubtless continue to the end of time to hold the record for longevity, I attribute to nothing else than that, thanks to my father's droll humor, I was born smiling. Nor did the good old gentleman ever stint himself in the indulgence of that trait. In my youth such things as comic papers were entirely unknown, nor did the columns of the newspapers give over any portion of their space to the printing of jokes, so that my dear old father never dreamed of turning his wit to the advantage of his own pocket, as do some latter-day joke-wrights who shall be nameless, lavishly bestowing the fruits of his gift upon the members of his own family. Of my own claims to an inheritance of humor from my sire, I shall speak in a later chapter.

I recall that my first impressions of life were rather disappointing. I cannot say that upon my arrival I brought with me any definite notions as to what I should find the world to be like, but I do know that when I looked out of the window for the first time it seemed to me that the scenery was rather commonplace, and the mountains which I could see in the distance, were not especially remarkable for grandeur. The rivers, too, seemed trite. That they should flow down-hill struck me as being nothing at all remarkable, for I could not for the life of me see how they could do otherwise, and when night came on and my nurse, Dinah, pointed out the moon and asked me if I did not think it was remarkable, I was so filled with impatience that so ordinary a phenomenon should be considered unusual that I made no reply whatsoever, smiling inwardly at the marvelous simplicity of these people with whom destiny had decreed that I should come to dwell. I should add, however, that I was quite contented on that first day of my existence for the reason that all of my wants appeared to be anticipated by my guardians, the table was good, and all through the day I was filled with a comfortable sense of my own importance as the first born of one of the first families of the land, and when along about noon the skies cleared, and the rain disappeared before the genial warmth of the sun, and the neighbors came in to look me over, it was most agreeable to realize that I was the center of so much interest. What added to my satisfaction was the fact that when my great-uncle Zib came in and began to talk baby-talk to me—a jargon that I have always abhorred—by an apparently casual movement of my left leg I was able with seeming innocence of intention to kick him on the end of his nose.

An amusing situation developed itself along about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, in respect to my name. One of the neighbors asked my father what my name was to be.

"Well," he replied with a chuckle, "we are somewhat up a tree in respect to that. We have held several family conclaves on the subject, and after much prayerful consideration of the matter we had finally settled on Gladys, but—well, since we've seen him the idea has been growing on us that he looks more like a James."

And indeed this question as to my name became a most serious one as the days passed by, and at one time I began to fear that I should be compelled to pass through life anonymously. There was some desire on the part of my father, who was of a providential nature, to call me Zib, after my great uncle of that name, for Uncle Zib had been forehanded, and was possessed of much in the way of filthy lucre, owning many cliff-dwellings, a large if not controlling interest in the Armenian Realty Company, whose caves on the leading thoroughfares of Enochsville and Edensburg commanded the highest and steadiest rents, and was the chief stock-holder in the Ararat Corners and Red Sea Traction Company, running an hourly service of Pterodactyls and Creosaurus between the most populous points of the country. This naturally made of Uncle Zib a nearer approach to a Captain of Finance than anything else known to our time, and inasmuch as he had never married, and was without an heir, my father thought he would appreciate the compliment of having his first-born named for him. But Uncle Zib's moral character was of such a nature that his name seemed to my mother as hardly a fit association for an infant of my tender years. He was known to be addicted to pinochle to a degree that had caused no end of gossip at the Ararat Woman's Club, and before he had reached the age of three hundred he had five times been successfully sued in the courts for breach of promise. Indeed, if Uncle Zib had had fewer material resources he would long since have been ostracised by the best people of our section, and even as it was the few people in our neighborhood to whom he had not lent money regarded his social pretensions with some coolness. The fact that he had given Enochsville a public library, and had filled its shelves with several tons of the best reading that the Egyptian writers of the day provided, was regarded as a partial atonement for some of his indiscretions, and the endowment of a large stone-quarry at Ararat where children were taught to read and write, helped materially in his rehabilitation, but on the whole Uncle Zib was looked upon askance by the majority. On the other hand Uncle Azag, a strong, pious man, who owed money to everybody in town, was the one after whom my mother wished me to be named, a proposition which my father resisted to the uttermost expense of his powers.

"What's the use?" I heard him ask, warmly. "He'll get his name on plenty of I. O. U.'s on his own account before he leaves this glad little earth, without our giving him an autograph that is already on enough over-due paper to decorate every flat in Uncle Zib's model tenements."

The disputation continued with some acrimony for a week, until finally my father put his foot down.

"I'm tired of referring to him as IT," he blurted out one night. "We'll compromise, and name him after me and thee. He shall be called Me for me, and Thou for thee, Selah!"

And so it was that from that day forth I was known as Methouselah, since corrupted into Methuselah.

CHAPTER II

EARLY INFLUENCES

Boys remained boys in those old days very much longer than they do now. The smartness of children like my grandsons, Shem, Ham and Japhet, for instance, who at the age of two hundred and fifty arrogate to themselves all the knowledge of the universe, was comparatively unknown when I was a child. To begin with we were of a different breed from the boys of to-day, and life itself was more simple. We were surrounded with none of those luxuries which are characteristic of modern life, and we were in no haste to grow old by taking short cuts across the fields of time. We were content to remain youthful, and even childish, taking on ourselves none of the superiorities of age until we had attained to the years which are presumed to go with discretion. We did not think either arrogantly or otherwise that we knew more by intuition than our parents had been able to learn from experience, and, with a few possible exceptions, we none of us assumed that position of high authority in the family which is, I regret to say, generally assumed by the sons and daughters of the present. For myself, I was quite willing to admit, even on the day of my birth, that my father, in spite of certain obvious limitations, knew more than I; and that my mother in spite of the fact that she was a woman, was possessed, in a minor degree perhaps, but still indubitably possessed, of certain of the elementary qualities at least of human intelligence. As I recall my attitude towards my elders in those days, the only person whose pretensions to superior attainments along lines of universal knowledge I was at all inclined to resent, was my maiden aunt, Jerusha, my father's sister, who, having attained to the kittenish age of 623 years, unmarried, and having consequently had no children, knew more about men and their ways, and how to bring up children scientifically than anybody at that time known to civilized society. Indeed I have always thought that it was the general recognition of the fact that Aunt Jerusha knew just a little more than there was to know that had brought about that condition of enduring spinsterhood in which she was passing her days. Even her, however, I could have viewed with amused toleration if so be she could have been induced to practice her theories as to the Fifty-seven Best Ways To Bring Up The Young upon others than myself. She was an amusing young thing, and the charming way in which even in middle age—she was as I have already said 623 years old at the time of which I write—she held on to the manners of youth was delightful to contemplate. She always kept herself looking very fit, and was the first woman in our section of the world to wear her hair pompadour in front, running to the extreme psychic knot behind—she called it psychic, though I have since learned that the proper adjective is Psyche, indicating rather a levity of mind than anything else. It should be said of her in all justice that she was a leader in her set, and as President of the Woman's Club of Enochsville was a person of more than ordinary influence, and it was through her that the movement to grant the franchise to all single women over three hundred and forty, resulted in the extension of the suffrage to that extent.



"It's a boy, sir!"

Incidentally I cannot forget the wise words of my father in this connection. He had always been an anti-suffragist, but when Aunt Jerusha's plan was laid before him he swung instantly around and became one of its heartiest advocates.

"It is a wise measure," said he. "Safe, sane and practical, for no single woman will confess to the age of qualification, so that in passing this act we grant the prayers of our petitioners without subjecting ourselves to the dangers of women's suffrage. Remember my son, that it always pays to be generous with that which costs you nothing, and that woman's suffrage is as harmless as the cooing dove if you only take the precaution to raise the age limit high enough to freeze out the old maids."

I should add too that Aunt Jerusha had a way with her that was not without its fascination. To look at her you would never have supposed that she was more than four hundred years old, and the variety of eyes that she could make when there were men about, was wonderful to see. I noticed it the very day I was born, and when I first caught sight of that piquante little glance that now and then she cast in my direction out of the tail of her eye, I began rummaging about in the back of my subconscious mind for the precise words with which to characterize her.

"You giddy old flirt!" was the apostrophe I had in mind at the moment, but, of course, having had no practice in speech I was compelled to forego the pleasure of giving audible expression to the thought.

Unfortunately for me Aunt Jerusha equipped with that intuitive knowledge of what to do under any given circumstances that invariably goes with the status of maiden-aunthood in its acute stages, now assumed complete control of my destinies; and for a time it looked as though I were in a fair way to become what the great Egyptian ruler, King Ptush the Third was referring to in many of his State papers as a "Meticulous Mollcoddle." To begin with, Aunt Jerusha was a strong believer in the New Thought School of Infantile Development, and when I was barely six weeks old she began strapping me on a board like an Eskimo baby, and suspending me thus restrained to a peg in the wall, where, helpless, I was required to hang and stare while she implanted the germs of strength in my soul by reading aloud whole chapters from the inspired chisellings of the popular seer Ber Nard Pshaw, who was to the literature of that period what King Ptush was to statecraft. He was the acknowledged leader of the Neo-Bunkum School of Right Thinking, and had first attracted the attention of his age by his famous reply to one who had called him an Egotist.

"I am more than that," he answered. "I am a Megotist. The world is full of I's, but there is only one Me."

Upon this sort of thing was I fed, not only spiritually but physically, by my Aunt Jerusha. When, for instance, I found myself suffering from a pain in my Commissary Department for the sole and sufficient reason that my nurse had inadvertently handed me the hard cider jug instead of my noon-day bottle of discosaurus' milk, she would rattle off some such statement as this: *Thought is everything. Pain is something. Hence where there is no thought there can be no pain. Wherefore if you have a pain it is evident that you have a thought. To be rid of the pain stop thinking.*

Then she would fix her eye on mine, and gaze at me sternly in an effort to remove my sufferings by the hot poultice of her own mushy reflections instead of getting the peppermint and the hot-water bag. When night came on and I was restless instead of wooing slumber on my behalf with soft and soothing lullabies, or telling me fairy-stories such as children love, she would say: *The child's mind is immature. His conclusions, therefore, are immature. Whence his decisions as to what he likes lack maturity, and consequently to give him that for which he professes to like is equivalent to feeding him on unripe fruit. So we conclude that what he says he likes he really does not like, and to please him therefore, it becomes necessary to give him what he professes to dislike. Ergo, I will read him to sleep with the seventeenth chapter, part forty-nine of the works of Niet-Zhe on the co-ordination of our æsthetic powers in respect to the relative delights of pleasure and pain.*

I will do my Aunt Jerusha the credit of saying at this point that her method of putting me to sleep was efficacious. I do not ever remember having retained consciousness past the third paragraph of her remedy for insomnia.



Aunt Jerusha as a disciplinarian.

I tremble to think of what I should have become had this fauntleroy process of rearing been allowed to continue unchecked. There were prigs enough in our family already without afflicting the world with another, and it rejoices me to this day to recall that just as we were reaching the point when it was either an early and beautiful demise in the odor of sanctity as a perfect child, or my present eminence as the most continuous human performance on record for me, my father stepped in, reasserted his authority and rescued me from the clutches of my Aunt Jerusha. Returning one day from business, he discovered Aunt Jerusha sitting in a rocking-chair in the nursery before me reading aloud from her tablets, whilst I, as usual, hung strapped and suspended from a hook on the picture moulding. It was my supper-time, and she was feeding me according to the New Thought method of catering. The substance of her discourse was that hunger was an idea, nothing more. She was proving to her own satisfaction at least that I was hungry only because I thought I was

hungry, and as father came in she was trying to persuade me that if I would be a good boy and make up my mind that my appetite had been appeased by a series of courses of thought biscuits, spirituelle waffles, and mental hors d'œuvres generally I would no longer be hungry.

"Fill your spirit stomach with the food of thought, Methy, dear," she was saying as my father appeared in the door-way. "Make up your mind that it is stuffed with the crackers and milk of the spirit; that your spiritual bread is buttered with the oleomargerine of lofty ideals, and sugared with the saccharin of your granulated meditations, and you will grow strong. You will become an intellectual athlete, like the great King Ptush of Egypt; a winner in the spiritual Marathon—"

"What are you trying to do with this kid, anyhow?" demanded my father at this point. "Turn him into a strap-hanger, or is this just a little lynching party?"

"Hush, Enoch," protested Aunt Jerusha. "Do not project an unsympathetic thought wave across our wires. I am just getting little Methy into a receptive mood. He is having his supper."

"Supper?" roared my father. "You call that stuff supper? Why, the child is getting thinner than a circus lemonade—"

"In the grosser sense, yes," replied Aunt Jerusha, calmly, after the manner of maiden ladies who are sure of their position. "But look at those eyes. Do they not betoken a great and budding soul within that is hourly waxing in strength and beauty?"

"My dear Jerusha," said my father, unhooking me from the wall and handing me a ripe red banana to eat, "all that you say is very lovely, and I have no doubt that under your administration of affairs the boy will sooner or later become a bully idea, but I hate a man whose convexity of soul has been attained through a concavity of stomach. What this boy needs at this stage of the game is development in what you properly term the grosser sense, I might even go so far as to say the butcher sense as well as the grocer sense. Ham and eggs is what he needs."

And with that he sent out and had a *diplodocus carnegii* killed, and fed me himself for the next ten days on dainty morsels cut from the fatted calf of that luscious bird. It was thus that I escaped the fate of the over-good who die young and became a factor in the world of affairs rather than a pleasant memory in the minds of my family.

As for my education it was limited, and I may say desultory. In this my Aunt Jerusha was allowed a greater authority than in the matter of my diet, and she early made up her mind that the great weakness of the educational system of the day was the tendency of the teachers in our schools to cram the minds of the young.

"There is no hurry in days like these when people live to be eight or nine hundred years old," she observed to my mother. "There is not very much to be learned as yet. Science is in its infancy, very little history has been made, and as for Latin and Greek, it is entirely unnecessary for Methy to study those languages, because as yet, nobody speaks them, and with the possible exception of that tramp poet, Homer, who passed through here last week on his way West, nobody is using it in literature. Teach him the three Rs and all will be well. Taking the alphabet first and learning one letter a year for twenty-six years he will be able to read and write as early in life as he ought to. If we were more careful not to teach our children to read in their childhood we should not be so anxious about the effects of pernicious literature upon their adolescent morals. If I had my way no one should be taught to read until after he had passed his hundredth year. In that way, and in that way only can we protect our youth from the dreadful influence of such novels as 'Three Cycles, Not To Mention The Rug,' which dreadful book I have found within the past month in the hands of at least twenty children in the neighborhood, not one of whom was past sixty."

It was thus resolved that my education should proceed with due deliberation and even as Aunt Jerusha had suggested, I was taught only one letter a year for the first twenty-six years of my life, after which I took up addition, multiplication, short and long division and fractions. My father would not permit me to learn subtraction.

"It is a waste of time," said he. "Children subtract by intuition. Put in all your time teaching Methy how to add and multiply."

My history was meagre, because as Aunt Jerusha had said, history itself was meagre. There had not even been a flood, much less a first, second, or third Punic War. Nobody in my time had ever heard of Napoleon Bonaparte or George Washington or Julius Cæsar, or Alexander, save a few prophets in the hills back of Enochsville, in whose prognostications few of their contemporaries took any stock; as was indeed not unnatural, since when they attempted to prophesy as to the weather they showed themselves to be rather poor guessers. If a man prophesies a blizzard for tomorrow and to-morrow comes bringing with it the balmy odors of Spring, no one is likely to set much store by his prognostications concerning the possible presidential candidacy of a man named Bryan six or seven thousand years later. Consequently the only history with which I took the trouble to familiarize myself was that which antedated my birth, and even that was somewhat hazy in the minds of historians. My predecessors in the patriarchal profession were a reticent lot, inherited no doubt from our original ancestor Adam, who could never be got to talk even to members of his immediate family on the subject of his early years. True, it is generally believed that he had no early years, and that he was born on his fifty-ninth birthday, but even as to that he would not speak. I shall never forget the look on his face when I asked him at a Thanksgiving dinner one year if he had ever been a monkey with a tail. He rose up from the table with

considerable dignity, and leading me out into the wood-shed turned me over on his knee and subjected me to a rather severe course of treatment with a hair-brush.

"There, my lad," he observed when he had done. "If I had had a tail that is about where I should have worn it."

I never referred to the subject again.

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