

## THE CONTRIBUTORS' CLUB

### THE WEAK JOINT IN THE SENTIMENTALISTS' ARMOR

THERE are surely no more noble-minded persons alive than the man and wife who point the moral of this tale. Though they live in a palace of art, surrounded by treasures which kings might covet, rarities unexcelled, unique, priceless, yet they live with an austerity which cloistered nuns would call a hardship — and all for conscience' sake. Fish? meat? They have tasted neither for many years. No gloves of leather are on their hands; no shoes of leather are on their feet; no dress of silk or wool. Nothing but cotton or linen for them. In the stern purity of their self-denial they refuse butter and eggs and milk. A plain dish of boiled carrots, some olive oil, a few nuts, a little savory relish dressed with sweet herbs, is their fare. Compassion is their creed, and in nothing that demands bloodshed or cruelty will they share. There is something so lofty in their asceticism that I cannot speak of it without admiration. It is one of the beautiful follies of the world, deserving its own shrine, to which might journey troops of pilgrims anxious to obtain the purity of heart which these two typify in their refusal to be stained with the blood of beasts, in their resolve to be free from entailing any suffering upon any creature.

And yet I find a flaw in all their self-denial, — the folly of the sentimentalist. He is a man to beware, if he be under fifty, because he always knows too little to be trusted. His judgment is not sound. His grip on facts is but a fumble, and half of his self-sacrifice is worthless because it lacks sense. The fundamental trouble with the sentimentalist is his ignorance of common facts. Why do my friends refuse milk? It would deprive the young calf of his natural nourishment and we should

get veal in consequence. Quite useless to remind them of the objectionable domestic character of most veal creatures when grown up; wholly so to remark that the remnant saved live and grow up to be thriving cows. With the actual facts they have no concern; nothing satisfies them but the total emancipation of the cow and a full regard for her rights of motherhood. (They have no children themselves.) Butter and milk are off the programme of the world's foods already, and they hasten the day of the cow released from servitude, quite free to make her own shelter in winter and browse or starve in liberty. But why are eggs denied? An egg in the course of nature hatches out into a happy, fluffy little chicken, and fried eggs for breakfast means so many little lives cut off from the joys of existence. (There are no happy little children in their home.) It is indelicate to remind my noble-minded friends of the fundamental facts of life, to hint to them that an unfertilized egg and a cold boiled potato stand an equal chance of producing fluffy little chickens. They *will* deny themselves eggs. And eggs are off the list, from simple ignorance of nature's laws. Indeed, ignorance seems to be a large part of the game. It would be quite impossible to play it so vigorously if the light were let in ever so little.

But what causes me to marvel is the complacency with which my friends dress in cotton. Cotton! Of all the blood-dyed fabrics wherewith men have invested themselves is there another so red with human woe as cotton cloth? There have been times when every yard of it was grained with the life-blood of a human being. From the slave who raised the plant to the English spinner waiting, starving for it by his idle loom, from the hectic woman breathing lint in the mill and the child robbed of health and child-

hood and hope, what a world of woe has been woven into the fruitage of the cotton loom! The wool my friends refuse to wear, the sheep would have pulled out in tag-locks on every bramble before the summer was flown; the silk they deny themselves could, at the worst, have cost only a sleeping life in the chrysalis which could never have waked to more than a brief, passionate span of searching for a mate; and, at the best, a cunning chemistry might have made it without the silkworm's help. But cotton cloth! I can but wish sometimes that, before they retired from the world, my friends of the palace of art might have seen a southern cotton mill understandingly; that they might have been, even as I have been, a dweller in northern mill towns when the price of cotton cloth was down, and the great mills first ran short time, and then closed, and want and starvation stared the worker in the face. Then they might have hesitated before the choice presented them; they might still have worn cotton, but not with complacency, and they might perhaps have come to live in a world of men and women where we face the facts the best we may and count ourselves happy if we can face them and still keep our courage. But they could never have haggled with their consciences as to the degree of wrong involved in silk and wool and cotton and leather and butter and milk and eggs; they would have known good and evil by eating of the tree of knowledge, which grows only among living men. Perhaps one of the ripest fruits of that tree, because the highest up, is the knowledge that some things, beside some others, are not worth while.

The instance is extreme. The worth of it is that it is not too extreme to be possible. It shows the tendency of the sentimentalist, the maggot in his brain, which, like the knight of *La Mancha's*, drives him to tilt with giants whose nature he only partially perceives. It would be quite as well if he recognized the windmill by its real name. The sentimentalist rarely knows the facts; and, more-

over, he seldom cares to listen to those who do know them. But it is the uncomfortable art of the sentimentalist to make the man who differs feel that he is hard-hearted. Last winter a kind lady in Boston wrote the press that the pigeons of the city were suffering because their poor, bare little feet had no protection from the cold stones. After that, what kind-hearted man could fail to feel a trifle guilty for leaving them without stockings in the bitter weather? Freezing its feet is one of the rarest accidents that happen to a wild bird, but I never see the pigeons strutting on the cold, cold stones without noticing how red their feet look! They make me uncomfortable; I shall come to hate their bare-footed audacity some day.

After all, the only sentimentalist who carries much weight is the reformed bad character. When he can prove that he was an ardent and successful hunter or fisherman and that he voluntarily left the sport while he still enjoyed it, the world will listen to him. The man who never liked the taste of liquor is not the best advocate of temperance with the hardened sinner who does like it. Know the game, and then reform — provided always you do it while you are young. It is no credit to a man to have overcome his taste for stolen apples and watermelon at sixty; nature should have eliminated the desire long before. In like manner there comes a period in a man's life when the active hunter settles naturally into the contemplative observer. It is after dinner now in life; he has had his fill. If he becomes a sentimentalist then, it is sweet and commendable in his nature, but it does not argue that the younger man should feel the same.

While it is well to "love the wood-rose and leave it on its stalk," no man ever became a botanist by so doing. Exact knowledge cannot be obtained by traveling the sentimentalist's route. Indeed, a great part of the sentimentalist's contributions to natural history are properly filed under "Rubbish." "Better the sight of the eye than the wandering of the desire,"

said the wise old Preacher; better exact and definite information, even though the boy or man kill the beast or bird, than the slipshod accomplishment so often passed on for information. And, even as a sport, hunting and fishing are not without their uses. My own boy is of the age to go a-fishing, and with my good speed he shall go. Let him come home wet and tired and dirty, with a tiny string of witless little fish; surely they deserved to be caught by a tyro, and in learning to shift for himself he has caught something more than fish. He is a natural boy, and I know what to do with him; but if he were a sentimentalist before his teens, I confess I should despair of ever making a man of him.

#### FISHES' FACES

DID you ever stop to examine the expression on the face of a fish? I do not mean of some notoriously grotesque fish, but of just any plain seafaring fish. I confess that the fascination for me is the same, whether I stand in front of some great collection of little monstrosities like that in the Naples aquarium, or whether I sit by my dining-room window and contemplate the gold-fish in my little boy's glass bowl. People watch the monkeys at the Zoo and remark how human they are, how sly and crafty the old ones, how "cute" and playful the young ones. But for steady company give me the fish. How restful they are with their mouthings, as regular as if they were governed by a balance-wheel! How quiet, too, for not one word of murmured protest or of chattering fault-finding do they inflict upon us! How philosophical, as they bask in the sun the livelong day or seek the occasional shade of the modest sprig of greens which forms the conventional garnishing of their watery abode! How easily gratified are their simple tastes! Surely with their good manners, their quiet deportment, and their stoical bearing, gold-fish are the ideal companions of the mature man. Monkeys and dogs

and kittens may amuse the children by their tricks and antics, but only the grown man can appreciate the solid qualities of the fish's character as written upon his features.

Not long ago I turned to my old textbooks of natural history to see what the nature students had to say about the facial expression of fish. Would you believe it? There were pages about the bone structure of the creature, his scales and his fins, all having to do with his physical fitness for the peculiar kind of navigating through life that he is called upon to perform. But not one word was said about the features of his face, that racial expression of receptivity and of philosophical candor which is a constant sermon and inspiration to the thoughtful observer. I put this down as one more failure of the scientists to explain what poor humanity really wants to know. What do we care about the adaptability of the fish's body to the element for which he was created or to which he has been banished? When it comes to constructing flying-machines, we may well study the structure of the bird's wings. But did any one ever learn to swim by watching a fish? Seriously, can any one look a fish in the face and not admit that there lies the highest expression of the creature's nature? All the rest of the body is the mere machinery for getting about. One wonders why Izaak Walton, that lover of the trout and grayling, did not write one of his inimitable chapters on his little fishes' faces. Or rather one wonders how Piscator could go on catching and cooking harmless creatures who had done no harm to God or man, and whose wondering faces are a constant rebuke to the passion of their cruel captors. Doubtless our fish-mongers and cooks take good care to remove the death-head of our morning purchase before it appears on the table, knowing full well that our appetite would perish if forced to confront the cold staring eye and the mouth at last stilled in death.

But to return to the expression of the