

# After Dinner Gossip.

## The Late Sir William Opherts, V.C.

"Club Chatterer," of "To-Day," tells a good story of the late Sir William Opherts:—It was in the early days of the Mutiny, and young Opherts was with a small British force which was suddenly attacked by an overwhelming force of mutinous Sepoys, and compelled to retreat into a small village, leaving its two only guns behind it. The abandoned pieces lay about two hundred yards in front of the British position, and if the British were unable to bring them in, they maintained such a deadly fire that the mutineers could not approach them. Opherts made several requests to the commanding officer to be allowed to make an effort to attempt to save the guns, but was refused each time. "Give me a dozen men and I will bring the guns in, sir," he said, at length, to the commander. "It would be no good your going," said the latter, "you would all be killed before you had pulled the guns two yards." "Well," said Opherts, "even then that would mean that about half the force here would be left. Will you let me lead the first dozen?" The coolness of the young officer so impressed the commander that he at length consented to the attempt being made, though he did not conceal his belief that the enterprise was a foolhardy one. Opherts justified himself, however, by triumphantly bringing the two guns safe within the British lines, amid the ringing cheers of his companions—cheers in which, an eye-witness used afterwards to assert, even the Sepoys joined in.

## The Newspaper Man.

One day during the campaign Bennett Burleigh, the noted English special war correspondent, was encountered a few miles outside Pretoria by that volcanic rhetorician, General Tucker. "What the— are you doing out here with that— thing?" asked the general, pointing to a kodak, which was slung round his shoulders. "Well, sir," promptly replied Mr Burleigh, "I was intending to take some photographs; but had I known that I was to have the pleasure of meeting you I should have brought out a phonograph." At this audacity it is said that even General Tucker's stock of sulphurous adjectives ran low.

## An Old "Sweet Girl Graduate."

A remarkable story of a "sweet girl graduate" is told by an American paper. She has just graduated after a four years' course in history, astronomy, literature, political economy, geometry, arts, sciences, and languages. The remarkable fact is that this "school girl" has raised a family and is a grandmother. In her youth she was denied educational advantages, and was not able to commence systematic study until she was 65 years old.

## Didn't Like Young Vanderbilt's Ways.

According to a story in the New York "Journal" the Vanderbilt family recently held a family conference and pulled in the horns of young Reginald. According to the story, Reggie lost 221,000 dollars at cards. After serious argument Reggie acknowledged the belief that he had been fleeced, and consented to give gambling dens a wide berth in the future. The young man was also called down for being too speedy with his automobile in the streets of New Haven, and rebuked for his luxurious style of living as a student at Yale. It was pointed out that his ways were bringing unpleasant notoriety upon the Vanderbilt family, and he was to conduct himself in a more dignified manner. No attempt was made to insist up-

on his giving up his luxurious apartments, but the advisability of tempering down his display in the matter of speeding his automobile was urged upon the young man, and he eventually agreed to make himself less conspicuous in that detail.

It is probable that the automobile will be allowed to rest quietly in its shed, or if it is taken out it will be run at a demure pace through the quiet university town and along the country roads, so that the townsfolk will have no cause for adverse comment.

## Reckoning the Age of the World.

One of the ways of reckoning the age of the world is that adopted by Professor Joly of computing how long a time must have elapsed for the sea, which was at first fresh, to become charged with all the salt it now contains. Guided by the amount of chloride of sodium—otherwise common salt—which, according to Sir John Murray, the sea contains, Professor Joly concluded that the earth was 80,000,000 to 90,000,000 of years old. Dr. Dubois has reported on this matter to the Academy of Sciences at Amsterdam, and he is led to dispute Sir John Murray's estimate of the amount of sodium carried to the sea by rivers, and the outcome of his examination being to reduce the age of the oceans of the world to be about 24,000,000 years. This agrees fairly well with Professor Sollas' calculation that the deposition of the geological strata, which began as soon as there was sea and land, has taken some 26,000,000 years—a million or two more or less do not matter. Professor George Darwin will not accept less than 56,000,000, since the earth threw off the moon as a needless encumbrance, and she had begun revolving on her own axis long before.

## Two Donkeys.

A cyclist in Southern France recently overtook a peasant with a donkey cart. The patient beast was making but little progress, so the benevolent cyclist, putting his left hand against the back of the cart and guiding his machine with the other hand, pushed so hard that the donkey, taking fresh courage, pulled his load successfully up to the top. When the summit was reached the peasant burst into thanks to his benefactor. "It was good of you, indeed, monsieur!" he protested. "I should never in the world have got up the hill with only one donkey."

## By Order of the Czar: A Curious Wedding.

An English merchant resident at St. Petersburg desired to marry a Russian lady, which cannot be done without a special edict from the Emperor. He had given up all hope, when one evening, a friend, happening to find the Emperor in a good humour, represented the matter to him, and desired his permission. "Let Miss A. and Mr. B. be married immediately," he ordered. The ukase was signed at 6 p.m.; by ten it had passed through the office of registry, whence, by eleven o'clock, it was in the hands of the Synod; and by midnight the police were trudging the streets to put in execution without delay. Mr B. was fast asleep, when a thundering knock at the door awakened him with a fright. Visions of the knout and the like floated before his half-wakened brain, when the bearded soldiers burst into his chamber, and ordered him to dress and follow. "In God's name, what have I done?" he exclaimed. "Where am I to go?" "Must I be dragged off at this hour?" "We have a warrant for you, which must be executed immediately," said the chief, and he proceeded to read, "By the grace of God, the Autocrat of the Russias, etc., orders the marriage of Mr B. to Miss A. to be solemnised immediately." "You see, he admits of no delay," said the officer gravely, "and we are forced to obey orders." The astonished mer-

chant was then hurried off to a priest, and then, in company with this functionary, to the house of the lady, who was thundered up in the same manner, and, ere her eyes were fairly opened, and her deshabille half arranged, the twain were made one. The clergyman attested the execution of the sentence, and abruptly left with the officers, leaving the astonished couple to get over their confusion the best way they could.

## The "Patrician" Nose.

The moulding influences alluded to which render the patrician nose to some extent a product of culture seem mainly traceable to a close association which exists between certain muscles attached to the more flexible parts of the nose and those in the immediate neighbourhood. Nowhere is the lasting mark of dominant mental habits more plainly seen than in the muscles about the mouth. They are continually in action when we exercise the will—either in self-control or in attempts to control other men or things—and every time they come into play they give a chastening tug at our noses. Finally, it may be said that for the maintenance of a patrician nose at its best, a well balanced mind is almost as necessary as carefulness in outward behaviour. Its chastity of tint and outline is endangered not only by high living and low thinking, but also by the habitual and unrestrained indulgence of emotions generally deemed innocent, and even laudable. These through their strange secondary influence upon the nerves which regulate the circulation and nutrition of the skin of the face, are quite capable of inducing a certain coarseness of expression curiously akin to that induced by indulgence in vicious pleasures. Herein, perhaps, may be found some sort of crude and general recipe for an aristocratic nose—which is offered, in all good faith, but with no absolute warranty—to everyone with good powers of mental assimilation.

There can be no doubt that the ordinary plebeian nose, with its somewhat low bridge, concave profile, and wide nostrils, is, above all others, the nose which is proper to mankind. All other types are developed from it. Even now the whole human species, of whatever race, possesses it in early infancy.

## Extraordinary Kleptomania.

One of the strangest cases of kleptomania ever brought to light was heard of in Paris. A certain lady had such a passion for smoking and colouring meerschaum pipes that she had been for a long time stealing pipes of this description from shops. In the flat which she occupied there were found no fewer than 2600 pipes, not one of which, it is believed, she had paid for. They were neatly arranged on racks, and thirty-nine were well coloured. The Court before which she was indicted would listen to no excuse, but sent her to prison for eight months.

## Figuring It Out.

The "little Johnny" of the following story may never have heard that

"Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em,  
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum."

but his method of reasoning is analogous. He had been gazing thoughtfully at his book of animal pictures, when suddenly he called out:

"Say, pa, does it cost much to feed a lion?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Oh, a lot of money."

"A wolf would make a good meal for a lion, wouldn't it, pa?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"And a fox would be enough for the wolf, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, yes."

"And a fox could make a meal off a hawk, eh, pa?"

"I suppose so."

"And the hawk would be satisfied with a sparrow?"

"Of course."

"And a big spider would be a good meal for the sparrow, wouldn't it, pa?—wouldn't it, pa?"

"Yes, yes."

"And a fly would be enough for the spider?"

"Of course."

"And a drop of treacle would be all the fly would want, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, stop your chatter!"

"But wouldn't it, pa?"

"Yes."

"Well, pa, couldn't a man keep a lion more'n a year on a pint of treacle?"

## First Actress on Record.

A London paper says the first woman to act on the stage in a play made her appearance in 1600. Previous to that time all female parts were taken by boys or men in very much the same way as in these days the principal boys in the pantomimes are played by girls. There is a legend that before the year mentioned, Anne, the wife of James I., assumed the female part in a play produced at the court theatre before her royal husband. But the fact is not authenticated. The character enacted by the first actress in England was Desdemona, but the name of this intrepid adventuress has not been preserved, and it is believed that she was a foreigner, for most records state that the first English actress was a Mrs Colman, who appeared in Davenant's "Siege of Rhodes" as Ianthe in 1656. Charles II. is said to have first encouraged the public appearance of women upon the stage, and this is certainly very probable.

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