

The Family Circle

IF

If little girls were little boys
They'd always go to bed
When mother told them to, and not
Say 'wait awhile,' instead.
They'd come into the house like mice,
So quiet and polite,
And after they had eaten tea,
Get up and say 'good-night.'

If little boys were little girls
They'd not be 'fraid of things,
Like katydids and hoppers
And hats with ugly wings.
They wouldn't yell when they were teased,
And run and tell on you,
Like all the little girls in town
Most always want to do.

If we were little girls and boys,
Instead of folks grown old,
We'd never want to spank ourselves,
Nor bullyrag or scold.
We'd never wish to grow again,
But just in childhood stay,
As innocent as we were when
Our childhood went away.

SOLDIER WHO STOOD GUARD

'Wead to me, Mummy; wead to Baby.' The invitation card for the Christmas Eve reception slipped through her fingers. The brief desire to accept its summons slipped away as softly. She looked at her boy. Her great eyes were eloquent. She lifted the book, and began where the postman's arrival had interrupted the story of Field's 'Little Boy Blue':

'And the soldier was passing fair.'
'W'at's a soldier, Mummy; w'at's a sojer?'
'One who keeps watch over his nation; one who guards.'

He was silent while she read:
'But the little toy friends are true!
Ay, faithful to Little Boy Blue they stand;
And they wonder, as waiting these long years through
What has become of our Little Boy Blue!' Her voice grew tremulous at the period.

'Me want sojer, Mummy; Baby want sojer!' She sought out this cap and cloak, and pinned on her own hat with sudden resolution. Car fare and a new ruching—she couldn't wear the old one again—would swell the expense of that holiday reception to the price of the toy her child craved. Besides, it was almost Christmas.

'We will get the prettiest soldier man we can find,' she promised, smiling in deep content.
It was an event, buying the soldier. And they took turns to carry him home. The boy set him on a chair and repeated the line from the poem—

'Now don't 'ou do till I come!' 'Wa't do Baby's sojer guard?' came the solemn question, the new word rolling trippingly from the moist, red lips. 'Mamma's world,' said the woman. 'Mummy's world,' he repeated, wonder-eyed.
'Mamma's world—her boy's love!' and she clasped her son in passionately possessive arms.

The grey-haired woman went over the house again. Her young son's bride was coming to enter into possession to-morrow—the day before Christmas. They were on their wedding journey now. She, the mother, was to live with her widowed sister far away.

'Your wife will be happier so,' she had said, and—oh, bitterness!—was uncontradicted.

This was her last day as mistress in the home where her boy was born, where she had known so much of joy and sorrow, where the cradle had rocked and noiseless wheels had seemed to roll across her heart as they bore away her husband's body under its burden of flowers.

She closed the blinds against the brilliant winter sunshine pouring in the parlor, and picked a thread from the new carpet.

Up the stairs the trembling limbs toiled; the mistress glanced from room to room. A cloud had suddenly dulled the sunlight and a depressing grayness seemed to veil the familiar objects in gloom. There was one drawer she had not yet cleaned out because it stuck. Perhaps it would yield to her shaking fingers yet, if she persisted. She would have gone yesterday but for this drawer that her sick heart made a pretext of to linger on in the home no longer hers.

She knelt before the old nursery bureau. The drawer gave way. At first it seemed empty. Then out of the shadows gleamed a glint of blue. She put in her hand and—alone kneeling—drew back to light the little leaden soldier, bought at this very season, just before Christmas,

so long ago—the soldier that was to guard a mother's world, the love of her joy! But the musket of the soldier was broken, and rust had eaten into the iron standard down to his leaden feet.

She knelt with the toy on her pain. 'Will it ever hold the same old place?' she mused.

Then, as one who tempts an omen, she tried to stand the Guard of her World on the nursery floor. The little soldier wobbled, trembled, and, as her cold, thin fingers left him, stood erect!

A burst of sunlight, as from gates sprung ajar, illuminated the window, beyond which wintry splendor sparkled in a long perspective. The canary in his cage at the window broke into song. Wheels creaked on the frozen gravel and stopped at the door.

'Mother!' A man knelt beside her and clasped the drooping figure in strong, young arms. 'Mother, Louise and I have been talking over your strange desire to leave, and we shortened our journey to come home and tell you it won't do. It would be too hard on your spoiled boy, and just at Christmastide, too, mother.'

'I'm sure it would,' chimed in the sweet voice of the bride, 'and I need you so, too. I thought if we both begged hard you'd stay.'

The woman looked from one face to the other with swimming eyes.

'What is this?' and the new wife knelt by the rust-eaten toy. 'Oh, oh! it's one of Harry's old playthings! See how bravely the little fellow stands—he almost seems like a sentinel—a sentinel on guard over something very precious!'

'It is,' said the mother, holding fast to her stalwart son; 'oh, it is! I'll tell you both some day how the toy has watched over my world.'

PURITY OF SPEECH

Purity of speech means something more than the omission of vulgar phrases that ought not to be used by any self-respecting person. A young woman should carefully avoid falling into slangy or careless modes of speech. You can shut your eyes and tell whether the woman next to you is a lady by listening to her conversation. There has been in recent years a reaction against the word 'lady,' because it has often been misapplied. There is really no reason why we should not use it in describing an attractive, agreeable woman. A charming writer has given the definition of lady as woman in a high state of civilisation. I am sure you prefer to be considered highly civilised to being thought savages and barbarians. When a woman says: 'Gee whiz!' 'It was something fierce,' or 'You're up against it,' you need nothing more to convince you that she is not altogether a lady. She may be a good-hearted, well-meaning woman, but, friends, she proclaims to the universe that she is common. Nobody wants to be stamped as common. To say to anyone that she is kind-hearted, good-natured, willing to serve a friend, and that she honestly pays her way, is to say that she is a respectable member of society, but to add to this that she is common and ordinary is to indicate a fatal defect. Purity of speech requires the omission of slang and silly, superfluous phrases. The latter, while perhaps not profane, are often not refined, and show that one's association have been with ill-bred persons.

THE SNAKE AND THE MONGOOSE

A contributor to the *Ceylon Times* relates a true 'jungle tale'—the story of a fight between a great snake, a four-foot cobra, and a famous snakekiller, the mongoose:

On first catching sight of the cobra rikki tik (as Rudyard Kipling calls the Indian mongoose) quietly smelt its tail and then hung around awaiting events with curiosity. But he had not long to wait, for the cobra spread its hood, hissed out its death sentence and prepared to dart from its coil at its natural and hated enemy.

Now commenced a most interesting and deadly battle—of feint and counter-feint by the mongoose and strike and lightning-like recovery by his adversary, who was also on the defensive, all the time watching for the opportunity to get in his properly aimed bite.

Time after time rikki tik squirmed slowly up to within reach of those terrible fangs, belly on ground, with every grey hair of his body erect with anger and excitement, his eyes glaring from his head, which, by the way, he invariably held sideways during this approach and attack, but the moment the cobra struck in a flash back sprang master mongoose, and although often it appeared as if impossible that he could have escaped the dreaded fangs, not a scratch harmed him, and there he would be again, wearing the cobra out and pressing his advantage inch by inch.

At last, with a growl and sharp rikki cry, the plucky little beast flew in, avoided the strike, and seized the snake behind the head, never for a moment getting under its mouth, but right at the nape of the neck and head, which he scrunched with a loud, cracking sound, despite the struggles and twisting and turning of the cobra. Again and again rikki returned to the now writhing reptile, and bit its head and body until it lay dying.