

THE LION'S MOUTH

JACK AND JILL

BY FREDERICK L. ALLEN

I HAVE been doing some pretty heavy thinking about the intellectual differences between the two sexes. Are women, I have been wondering, born conservative, and are men born radical? In support of this hypothesis I offer you the facts with regard to a small girl, aged three and a fraction, and an even smaller boy, aged exactly two. Let us regard them as Exhibit A and Exhibit B in our investigation, and survey them with the cold eye of science.

Jill is a standpatter. She views with alarm any departure from the established routine. She must always sit in the same chair to eat her evening dish of prunes, and if apple sauce is substituted for prunes she is thrown into confusion. She stands for the rights of property; if her brother Jack appropriates her toy taxicab she raises a hubbub beside which the protests of Judge Gary at the machinations of Mr. W. Z. Foster are as nothing. She believes in discipline; the word "mustn't" is constantly in her mouth. "Mustn't go out without a coat on," she says severely to her father in the same tone of voice in which members of the Committee on Foreign Relations say, "Mustn't go into the World Court without reservations on." She prefers to have things done to-morrow as they were done yesterday. Even Senator Lodge could hardly be more insistent than she on having his customary piece of zweiback presented to him at the customary moment as he kicks off his slippers and climbs into his crib for the night. She doesn't smash the furniture or other established institutions.

We used to take upon ourselves the credit for her behavior; when other parents lamented the ink bottles spilt on the carpet by their young barbarians, we smiled indulgently and prided ourselves on the masterly training that kept Jill in the ways of peace. But now we know better. Up to the age of three at least, we have decided, the female of the species is more lawful and orderly than the male.

It was Jack who brought us to humility.

I shouldn't like to give the impression that Jack is deliberately destructive. The better word would be headlong. Like other good radicals, if he destroys things it is not from a love of destruction but merely from an excess of zeal coupled with a lack of experience. He wants to examine everything, climb over it, push it around, and test its qualities of resistance by banging it against something else. He combines the exploratory fervor of a Balboa with the indefatigability of a La Follette—except that if he ever reached a peak in Darien he wouldn't stand silent but would immediately charge full tilt for the Pacific to see if it was any good for splashing, and that, unlike the Senator from Wisconsin, he is always in uproarious humor. He does not agree with the editors of the *Nation* that the world is a bad place and reform a weary task; he is delighted to find it a place in which there are so many things right-side up that might be turned upside down by the experimental mind with undeniably comic effect. Jill holds that whatever is, is right; Jack's view is that whatever is should be taken apart to see if it is amusing enough to be right.

"Hello, hello, and what have we here?" he seems to be thinking as he comes charging into the room where I am working. "A waste basket? That's worth looking into. Curious thing, this theory that waste baskets look better right side up. Now my idea is that their contents should be spread about on the floor. Would you like to bet that there is nothing of a humorous nature in this basket? I thought so—the pictorial section of the *Times*. Such funny pictures! May I show them to you, Daddy, and leave them in your lap, after proving that the paper on which they are printed may be torn quite easily and with a pleasant sound? I wonder if it would make more noise if I beat on the mahogany desk with the ash tray or with that silver candlestick on the table. That one over there. Just a minute and I'll climb up on the arm-chair and get it. Rather a job to climb up. Now that I'm up, I think I'll just let the candlestick go for a minute and get down and climb up again about seventeen times to see if I can't find a better way of doing it. Immense sport, climbing." . . .

That is about what Jack would say during the first three minutes of a standard hour of his life if he were given to more fluent speech. Long after you have quietly left the room because the atmosphere seems uncongenial to anything so conservative as work, you can hear him climbing up the chair and down again with chuckles of appreciation, slamming the door at various velocities to study the action of the latch, falling over the waste basket that he himself left in the middle of the floor, and enjoying everything prodigiously and audibly. Yes, he is the cheerful radical: put him in politics and in thirty seconds he'd be saying, "Well, well, if here aren't a lot of coal mines. Let's nationalize them. I offer a bill to that effect. And bless my soul, if here aren't some farmers. I offer a bill to appropriate a billion dollars for the farmers. Nothing like a little experimentation.

If you don't like it we'll try something else."

When Jill sits beside me in the flivver she is all for caution and safety first. "Put your other hand on the wheel," she admonishes when she sees me endangering private property by driving with one hand. Jack's vocabulary to date contains only such more vital words as "Daddy," and cannot express his true feelings; but I am sure that if he were as voluble as she, he would be crying. "Faster! Faster! Why use any hands on the wheel at all? How long do you suppose we'd stay in the road? I say five seconds; do you say more or less? Here's a corner—wouldn't it be more fun if we ran over the traffic officer instead of going round him?"

Sometimes I try to imagine what Jack will be like when he grows up. But my imagination is unequal to the task. A minute ago I spoke of him as he might behave as a Senator. But in my mental picture he insists on rushing jovially about the Senate Chamber, banging the desk, scattering public documents, climbing upon the Senatorial chairs and jumping off them; and I realize that as I visualize him he is wearing a little blue print suit buttoned about his waist with large white buttons, and is only just two years old and not a Senator at all, and that my imagination has accomplished nothing.

Perhaps he will have exhausted all the joys of experiment long before he reaches years of discretion, and will become a sedate conservative who prefers a reliable business administration, low surtaxes, and no entangling alliances; while his sister, weary of a youth of regularity, will scandalize him by sympathizing with the Soviet Government and voting the Farmer-Labor ticket and coming out openly for prunes and apple sauce on alternate nights. But there, you see, my imagination has gone back on me again. I can't do more for my hypothesis about the intellectual difference between the sexes than offer my evidence about these two small children as they are to-day.

Let's leave them so for the present. Only let's not leave Jack in the same room with anything breakable unless Jill is there to say "mustn't," as all good conservatives say to all good radicals.

THE HIGHBOY

BY PHILIP CURTISS

MY wife must have heard a sound of some kind, for she looked up from her book in distinct irritation.

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded.

"That wasn't a laugh," I replied. "That was a sigh—a sigh of artistic satisfaction. I have just evolved a perfect work of art, an absolute *bijou*, flawless in form and profound in conception."

With an air of somewhat ostentatious martyrdom, Maude turned down the page of her book and laid it beside her on the table.

"What is this masterpiece, this absolute *bijou*?"

"It is a short story," I replied, "a short story *par excellence*, not to say *ne plus ultra*. It has all the compactness of Chekov, plus the sardonic truth of de Maupassant, plus the little flick at the end of O. Henry."

"All that?" asked Maude dully. "Well, carry on."

"The story," I explained brightly, "is this: The hero—we'll call him John Jones—is a struggling young author who has lived for eight years with his wife in a little white house in the country."

My wife looked at me suspiciously, but she made no remark.

"They are just like Darby and Joan," I continued, "this Jones and his wife. For eight long years they have lived together without the slightest ripple on the water. To be sure, they have no money—"

"I gathered that about two sentences back," remarked Maude. "You said he was an author."

"Old stuff!" I retorted. "Just for that I'll make him a bond salesman. I

seem to know a certain young lady's brother who is a bloated broker in Wall Street, yet has no compunction about letting a poor author pay for the seats every time they go to the theater together."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed my wife. "It happened only once."

"Three times," I corrected, "not to mention train fare between New York and Stockbridge and a telephone bill of nearly twenty dollars at the New Brighton Hotel."

"But, goodness gracious!" admitted Maude, "if you are going to keep an exact dollars-and-cents account of your social life with your friends—I thought you said this was a short story."

"I did," I replied, "and it is if you'll let me tell it. This, then, is the plot in two words: Here you have this Jones and his wife, two honest lovers, living a quiet, self-sacrificing life in the country. He is wrapped up in his work—"

"And what is she wrapped up in?" demanded Maude quickly.

"Well, she's wrapped up in him," I had to confess. "I know it isn't ideal but there they are—both in their original wrappers. Now will the listener kindly keep in mind that for eight long years they've never had an unpleasant moment. If his work has met with rebuff and defeat, she has always taken him to her arms and consoled him. On the other hand, if she herself has ever wanted anything: jewels, fine gowns, horses and carriages, she has never said anything about it—just stifled it."

I looked up cautiously at that, expecting a swift return from the net, but my wife was apparently not listening. I spoke a little louder.

"She stifled it," I repeated. "If she wanted fine gowns or horses and carriages, she stifled it."

"Oh, I heard you the first time," answered Maude, wearily. "To my mind, she's a simp."

"At any rate she was a great help to Jones."

My wife looked up suddenly, with