

THE BABIES

A Humorous Reading

by
Mark Twain



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Mark Twain
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From a speech by the author at a banquet given by the Army of the Tennessee at Chicago, Illinois, November 13, 1879, in honor of General Grant on his return from his trip around the world. He responded to the toast: "The Babies: As they comfort us in our sorrows, let us not forget them in our festivities."

"The Babies!" Now, that's something like. We haven't all the good fortune to be ladies; we have not all been generals, or poets, or statesmen; but when the toast works down to the babies, we stand on common ground--for we've all been babies. It is a shame that for a thousand years the world's banquets have utterly ignored the baby, as if he didn't amount to anything! If you, gentlemen, will stop and think a minute--if you will go back and recontemplate your first baby--you will remember that he amounted to a good deal--and even something over.

You soldiers all know that when that little fellow arrived at family headquarters, you had to hand in your resignation. He took entire command. You became his lackey, his mere body-guard; and you had to stand around, too. He was not a commander who made allowances for the time, distance, weather, or anything else: you had to execute his order whether it was possible or not. And there was only one form of marching in his manual of tactics, and that was the double-quick. He treated you with every sort of insolence and disrespect, and the bravest of you did not dare to say a word. You could face the death-storm of battle and give back blow for blow; but when he clawed your whiskers and pulled your hair, and twisted your nose, you had to take it. When the thunders of war sounded in your ears, you set your faces toward the batteries and advanced with steady tread; but when he turned on the terrors of his war-whoop, you advanced in--the other direction, and mighty glad of the chance, too. When he called for soothing syrup, did you venture to throw out any remarks about certain services being unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman? No; you got up and got it!

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