

CHAPTER VI

SMART ALECKS

Way out in Wisconsin, where Grandfather used to teach, there was a curious variety of kid which the natives called a smart aleck. Now, before Grandfather attempts to define a smart aleck for you, he ought to stop to tell you the difference between a kid and a man. Literally a kid is a young goat. When you get a chance, you watch a young goat. The young goat just jumps up and down in sheer joy, but doesn't attempt to go anywhere in particular. So when a human being just jumps up and down in sheer joy with no thought of starting for somewhere, he is called a kid.

You see that the definition says nothing about size or age. Some people just never get over being kids. All their lives they just hop up and down without starting for somewhere. On the other hand, some boys and girls when quite young get a serious purpose and strive to attain a goal. So some old folks are just kids and some young folks are really men and women.

Now it was one variety of kid Grandfather started to write you about - the kind that out West they called a smart aleck. Well, the special mission of this variety of kid was to prevent other people from attending to business. If the job on hand was study, his mission was to prevent everybody from studying; if the job was to play football, his special mission was to prevent others from playing football well. Whatever anyone tried to do seriously, the smart aleck's role was to make a joke out of it.

Now Grandfather observed that there was one smart aleck to every room - why not put all the smart alecks together and then all the rest of the rooms would be fine. But when Grandfather tried that, he found that a new smart aleck was likely to develop in a room which did not have one - in

other words, that in every room there was an opportunity for someone to attract attention to himself by disturbing others, and that some kid was likely to nominate himself for the opportunity.

If, then, we must of necessity have so many smart alecks, Grandfather began to wonder what he could do with them to make them useful. They were a nuisance in the classroom; the coach would not let them on the athletic field. A bright idea - the smart aleck should be the clown in the school play. But shortly the teacher in charge of the play fired the smart aleck and said he needed a serious-minded lad to make a good clown.

So Grandfather was never able to find what a smart aleck was good for - as a matter of fact, as Grandfather observed the smart alecks grow up, he noticed that the smart alecks never did find a solution for themselves. A mischievous boy sometimes overcame his bent for mischief and made a real accomplishment, but the smart aleck kept on laughing at folks who tried to be serious and never got anywhere himself.

If you ever find a job that a smart aleck is good for, be sure to write some educational journal and tell them, for every school has a lot of smart alecks, and no school principal has any idea what to do with them.

If you ever happen to be in a schoolroom that lacks a smart aleck, don't nominate yourself for the job. Whoever takes that job is lost.