General Grant and his Cigar.

Dear General,—Public men we regard as public property; hence their public acts are legitimate subjects of public animadversion. Newspaper reporters, who chronicle your movements from Dan to Beersheba, identify you with your Cigar, and find pleasure in proclaiming, far and near, that you are a great Smoker as well as a great General. Whether they report you in one battle or another,—in the siege of Richmond or the capitulation of Lee, receiving the homage of fair women or the noisy applause of men,—they “ring the changes” on “Grant and the inevitable cigar.” You conquered, General, in spite of your cigar; but had you conquered by its virtues, as Constantine conquered by the sign of the Cross, Reporters could have given it but little more prominence.

We address you, General, with sincere respect and gratitude. Still, be it understood, that, whilst we meddle not with your private habits, we make no apologies for assailing a Vice which you persistently obtrude upon public notice. The war we wage is simply defensive.

Your habit is contagious, and, associated with your powerful name, is doing irreparable mischief in the great community. It sanctions the common use—the public use—of a narcotic which ruins millions physically and mentally, and which has done much to ruin nations once splendid and mighty. No man of science attempts to deny that Tobacco is a Poison,—a poison in relation to human organism,—a rank poison, baneful and destructive. It has no assimilation with the processes of nature,—furnishes no blood, no muscle, and no bone,—and when left to its legitimate action, is completely destructive of the life-principle. Its poisonous effects are not always visible. It may seem to lie torpid in the system, as a viper in winter. Indeed, its effects may never be so visible in the immediate user as in his posterity, for, like a sea-monster, plunging deep, moving out of sight and coming up in the distance, so, in its malignant effects, this poison may appear in the second and third generations. Many a devotee, who now sports with the idea that he is injured by the “weed,” will curse the world with homely, scraggy, half-idiotic grandchildren, totally ignorant of the cause. German doctors are telling the world to-day that it is next to impossible to heal the children of great tobacco-users, when beset with diseases otherwise curable.

Its action is insidious in relation to both individuals and nations. It sometimes shows its malignity in a cancer, a paralytic stroke, or a
sudden death; but its chief strategy is the sapping and mining process, narcotizing individuals and whole Nations whilst unconscious of it. It must do execution somewhere! To reason otherwise is a solecism, and ignores the whole doctrine of cause and effect. Hence, when one of our Governors of noble bearing, Gov. Andrew, said, "I dropped Tobacco because it injured me, or I thought it injured me, and if it did not, it failed to do its duty, for it is a rank poison," he merely uttered a dictate of common sense. When a British peer, on the floor of Parliament, said, "My Lord, in view of all the injuries Tobacco has inflicted upon Europe, it is doubtful whether the discovery of America, which gave us that plant, has been a blessing or a curse," he presented a problem worthy the study of the philosopher and historian.

We address you, General, in relation to an immense evil, and we ask you to give it the sanction of your great name no longer.

I. We pray you to abandon your cigar in behalf of Young America. Example sways the multitude. That Washington was a Free Mason, that Washington was a slaveholder, has been urged a thousand times in vindication of the Masonic institution and slavery; and that you, exalted to the pinnacle of fame, are a smoker, is urged by ten thousand young men in vindication of the habit, who copy your vice, but fail to copy your virtues.

Our boys, General! What shall we do with these expanding millions? We teach them that Tobacco is wont to go hand in hand with Strong Drink, Profanity, and every vice and crime. We have led half a million of these dear young heroes to the altar, and there, in Hannibal style, they have pledged an eternal war upon this nauseous, noxious abomination. What shall we do with our Bands of Hope, and our gallant Cold Water Armies, and your example? Cigar-makers, impelled by cupidity and pandering to morbid appetite, brand their productions with your insignia, and "Grant cigars," and "Grant meerschaums," are becoming the order of the day with hosts of our young countrymen. We had a sufficiency of young volcanoes before, but your example, running like wildfire, has kindled up ten thousand more.

Dear sir, our nation is inflammable. Be careful of your fire. When you stepped upon that wharf, with a cigar in your mouth, and the faithful sentinel said, "General, these are combustibles; no smoking is allowed here," and you said, "Right, sentinel, right," and destroyed your cigar, you did just what we ask you to do for Young America—combustible as powder! Every patriotic man and woman should be a sentinel for the Republic; and whenever you smoke in their presence, and in the presence of their children, they should remind you that you smoke amidst combustibles!

II. We beg you, honored sir, to drop this habit, and obey the honest
dictates of your own mind. Many a rich cigar-huckster, who lays box after box of "Havanas" at your feet; many a coxcomb, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, and drenched in its profane stench, will laugh at me for attempting to convert you; but you will not, for, thank God, our General-in-Chief has common sense. Gentlemen of your type, when brought into close quarters, are but little disposed to fight for this nuisance. They subscribe to the sentiment of Dr. Franklin, who, on being asked why he never smoked, said, "Sir, I have seldom seen a man in health, and possessed of good sense, who would seriously maintain that it did him any good; pray, why should I smoke?"

In March, 1865, certain Philadelphia gentlemen waited upon you, in front of Petersburg, and, in a style excessively polite, presented you with a costly meerschaum. Your reply was characteristic: "Gentlemen," you said in substance, "it is true I smoke, but it is a bad habit, and I purpose to drop it. You have presented me with this pipe. I can do no less than thank you for it.

We have been misinformed, General, if President Lincoln, who detested tobacco, did not again and again ask you to give up your cigar, and if you did not as often condemn the habit, and gratify his great and friendly heart with the assurance that you would as soon as the exigencies of war should end.

We can understand, General, how, as a smoker, in the act of planning a battle, you had better smoke than not smoke. We can understand how any commander, which delirium tremens has made a coward, at the head of his corps, might fight better with a rum-bottle than without it; but now that the roar of war is hushed, what is their to justify the one or the other, with any officer, in any position? Our Admirals, such as Foote and Hudson,—old heroes on the stormy ocean,—used neither in the stormiest times; and should you, and brave officers about you, bless the nation with a like example, struggling reformers, battling more destructive Evils than the Rebellion, would thank God and take courage.

III. We ask you to renounce the habit, General, on the score of patriotism,—a motive as sublime as that which impelled you to fight for the Union. We admit that America may not be manifestly injured by this enervating poison at once; it has required centuries to demonstrate its effects on Mexico, Turkey and Spain, and, being young and vigorous, we can withstand its sapping and mining enginery for some time. Its effects on nations, however, must be ultimately destructive. The dikes of Holland, the bog-mires of Ireland, the mountain-scenery of Scotland, and the opium of China, all go to manufacture national character; and shall we be told that a Poison, fatal to all animal life, may come into common use, and in no way affect the health, strength, cour-
age, and glory of a nation? Turkey was once mighty,—the tramp of
her armies shook a continent; so was Spain. These nations have been
drunk on Tobacco, century after century, and the historian who fails to
record this CAUSE, among other causes, of their comparative degrada-
tion, will be chargeable with an unpardonable blunder. Gibbon tells
us of splendid cities, palaces, and temples, laid waste by Goths and
Vandals; some future Gibbon, more profound and acute, may tell the
world of this insidious Satanic enginery of tobacco in achieving mis-
chief on a broader scale—A glorious Republic, laid low!

Medical staffs in English armies have not been totally blind to
the effects of this poison on the character of soldiers. Says one, dis-
tinguished in rank, “Had the Turks never indulged in tobacco, they
would not have required the assistance of the French and British in the
Crimean war; they would have been as powerful as in the days of an-
cient Sultans.” Says another, “A Spaniard is never without a cigar in
his mouth, and during the Peninsular war, Spanish officers passed their
days in smoking, and never existed men sunk in such apathy. Says O.
A Flaherty, “I have known men who, previously to using tobacco,
were the finest marksmen, but who, after becoming smokers and chew-
ers, could hardly send a bullet into a hay-stack, a hundred yards dis-
tant!” “I am convinced,” says Mr. Anton, “that a soldier who is an
inveterate smoker is incapable to level his musket and take steady aim.”
That gallant soldier, General Markham, never smoked himself, nor
would he allow any of his personal staff to do so, so strong was his
opinion of its injurious effect on the soldiers’ character. The history of
military schools in France is instructive. Dividing the young gentle-
men into smokers and non-smokers, it is shown that the smokers have,
in competitive examinations, appeared far inferior to the others. The
evil, it is said, became so glaring, that the Emperor, though a smoker,
interposed his authority to arrest its progress.

You, honored, General, and the sturdy portions of your staff, may
withstand the insidious assaults of this poison many years; but how our
attenuated, lilliputian cadets, how our pale, furloughed lieutenants, who,
in the guise of officers and disguise of gentlemen, meet us at every cor-
ner and on every omnibus, and puff their foul smoke in our faces, are to
withstand it, become men, and ably head an army, is a problem which
no sagacity can solve.

Dear General, we ask you to set a better example to our military
and naval schools,—to our army and nation. You have conquered a
city; the world calls it a great achievement. We ask you to conquer a
despotic habit, perhaps as invincible as Richmond, and God’s Word
will justify us in calling it a greater achievement.

Fitchburg, Mass., 1866.

GEO. TRASK.
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