

Gypsy Smith's Trousers

[Gypsy Smith (1860-1947) was a very well-loved evangelist who often told the story of his childhood life in a gypsy wagon. Here is an extract from his autobiography *Gipsy Smith: His Life and Work*.(1904)]

As I grew older I became **ambitious of something better and greater** than a smock-frock, namely, a pair of trousers. My father did not **give an enthusiastic encouragement to that ambition**, but he told me that if I was a good boy I should have a pair of his. And I was a good boy. My father in those days stood nearly six feet high, was broad in proportion, and weighed fifteen stone. I was very small and very thin as a child, but I was **bent on** having a pair of trousers. My father took an old pair of his and cut them off at the knees, but even then, of course, they had to be tucked up. I was a proud boy that day. I took my trousers behind the hedge, so that I might put them on in strict privacy. My father and brother, enjoying the fun, although I did not see it, waited for me on the other side of the hedge. When I emerged they both began to chaff me. "Rodney," said my brother, "are you going or coming?" He brought me a piece of string and said, "What time does the balloon go up?" And in truth, when the wind blew, I wanted to be pegged down. I did not like the fun, but I kept the trousers. I saw my father's dodge. He wanted me to get disgusted with them and to go back to the smock-frock; but I knew that if I went on wearing them he would soon get tired of seeing me in these **extraordinary garments** and would buy me a proper pair.

A day came when we were the guests of the Prince of Wales at Sandringham; that is, we pitched our tents on his estate. One day I helped to catch some rabbits, and these trousers turned out to be very useful. In fact, immediately the rabbits were caught, the trousers became a pair of fur-lined garments; for I carried them home inside the trousers.

At length my father bought me a pair of brand-new corduroys that just fitted me, but I was soon **doomed to trouble** with these trousers. One day I found a hen **camping out** in a ditch, and there was quite a nestful of eggs there. I was very indignant with that hen for straying so far from the farmyard. I considered that her **proceedings were irregular and unauthorised**. As to the eggs, the position to me was quite clear. I had found them. I had not gone into the farmyard and pilfered them. On the other hand, they had put themselves in my way, and I naturally thought they were mine, and so I filled my pockets with them. I was sorry that I had to leave some of these eggs, but I could not help it. The capacity of my pockets in my new trousers was **less generous** than in the old ones.

My next difficulty was how to get out of the ditch without breaking any of the eggs. But I was a **youngster of resource** and managed it. And now I had to take my way across a ploughed field. This meant some **very delicate pedestrian work**. Then I heard a man shout, and I thought that he wanted me, but I did not **desire to give him an interview**. So I ran, and as I ran I fell; and when I fell the eggs all cracked. I got up, and, looking round, saw nobody. The man whom I thought was pursuing me was only shouting to a man in another field. It is truly written, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." I thought I had found these eggs, but my conscience found me. I have never found eggs again from that day to this.