

The Birth of a Smile.

BY A PHOTOGRAPHER.



SOME people wonder why a photographer charges extra for taking infants in arms. They imagine, perhaps, that a photographer should conduct his business on the principle of the railway companies, and charge nothing for infants and half-price for children under twelve. But if the railway companies had as much trouble with children as the photographer has, they would charge double first-class fare for those under twelve, and make the infant in arms take a special train.

I am a photographer myself, although on mature consideration I think I should prefer

that he visits the dentist—minus the terror. He is so determined to see the thing through with inflexible rigidity of countenance, that the overwrought muscles of his face either combine to give him an expression of intense suffering, or else break down under the strain and smudge the picture. It is always a doubtful experiment to ask a boy to smile—you never know what the result will be. Most boys don't seem to know what a smile is. It is best, instead of asking the boy to smile, to provide something likely to make him do it, and then have him photographed quickly before the smile gets too wide for the plate.

Many old photographers will remember Signor Berneri, a most admirable operator, for many years with Messrs. Elliott and Fry. Signor Berneri was an Italian, and his English vocabulary was small. His invariable direction to his sitters was, "Now, if you please—good express!" There was a certain want of definite clearness about this request, but by the time the worthy Signor had taken a ruinous number of negatives without achieving the "express" he was aiming for, his comic distress and inability to convey a precise notion of what he required usually worked their own cure, and the sitter was



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to be a railway company. Of infants in arms I prefer not to speak here—there might even be a difficulty about printing some of the things I should say. Suffice it to say that I have a theory that Herod was a struggling photographer in his young days, and had his revenge when he came to the throne. Intelligent children of half-fare age are bad enough, but babies are beyond description. Girls are not always satisfactory, but boys are much worse. A boy turns up at a photographer's in much the same frame of mind



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smiling as widely as anybody could ask. An actual illustration of these persevering attempts of Berneri is to be seen on these pages, and a gradually dawning perception of the photographer's intention is observable—and on the face of a boy. The boy's original conception of a "good express" is in the nature of a compromise wherein frowning determination mingles with a guarded defiance.

After Berneri's usual "No good! Bad express!" the boy modifies his original notion, and stirs in a little dignified truculence with the facial ingredients he used at first. "Ah, no good—no good! Bad express—more badder express!"—as one can now almost hear the excitable Berneri shouting. The boy abates his truculence, and without altogether abandoning the frown, tries a look of half-amused and quite uncomprehending inquiry, which is, perhaps, justified by the circumstances. This, again, is "no good express," and by this time the operator has grown impatient and amusing; the boy begins actually to smile; and at last there is a *real* smile—some might say it verged on an amused grin. This boy, by-the-bye, is now Mr. Elliott, jun.—still of Elliott and Fry, and six feet six inches high.

Beneri has betaken himself to a well-earned retirement in Italy—he retired, in

fact, some years ago. But, excellent operator as he was, he will be remembered in the profession for some time—if only because of his wildly despairing entreaties for "Good express—now, if you *please*—good express!"

But it is bad enough when your English is of full vocabulary. Why is it no part of our English boy's education to know what a naturally pleasant expression of countenance is? Why can he see no middle course between an aspect of warlike grimness and a self-conscious grin? I am thinking, seriously thinking, of cultivating Signor Berneri's man-

ner and speech for special use—with boy sitters. I may even spoil more plates than I do at present—although that is scarcely possible—but the smile—or grin—which I extract will, at least, be intelligent, because it will have a definite object—myself.



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