

THE AIR OF THE "WHISTLING OYSTER.")

In "The Bab Ballads," a humorous chapter titled "THE AIR OF THE 'WHISTLING OYSTER,'" narrates the unusual story of an elderly prophet, aged seventy-three, and his young, beautiful bride of just eighteen. Despite the vast age gap and the peculiarity of their union, the couple surprisingly had a child—a boy whose early penchant for adult indulgences astounded everyone. From the moment of his birth, the child was not only born with a metaphorical pipe in his mouth and a glass in his eye, symbolizing an unnaturally mature demeanor, but also exhibited behaviors far beyond his years, showing disdain for infantile things and expressing himself in a manner strikingly old for his age.

The boy, described as a "horribly fast little cad," rejected typical childhood pleasures and attire, preferring instead the company and activities of far older individuals. His advanced disposition and shocking precocity proved to be a challenge for his parents and nurse, leading to their eventual distancing. His father attempted to connect with him through traditional nursery tales like "Little Bo-P," only to be met with skepticism and ridicule from his son, who surprisingly had the wit and attitude of a grown man, critiquing his father's stories and even calling him a "shocking ole fox."

The chapter wittily explores themes of incongruity between appearance and age, the unexpected outcomes in relationships of significant age differences, and the humorous yet distressing consequences of having a child who behaves more like a seasoned adult than an innocent infant. The lyrical, playful language and the absurdity of the child's precocity serve to both entertain and subtly critique societal norms regarding age, maturity, and family dynamics.