

TO WOMEN OF THE PERIOD.

Is it because she cannot rule,
That curls her lip and a' that?
Such froward dame is but a fool,
And shames her sex for a' that!
For a' that and a' that.

She strives but for a gilded badge,
Herself the gold for a' that.

What though we will not let her vote,
"Electioneer" and a' that;
'Tis best that man should wear the coat,
The "breeches," vest, and a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
She's but a "rib" for a' that!
Man's work requires a man complete,
Not "half" a man for a' that.

She does not need Newmarket tribe,
The walking-stick and a' that;
They but expose to jest and jibe,
The cause they plead and a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
Their wrongs and rights and a' that,
The woman who respects herself,
Just looks and laughs at a' that.

"Master Henpeck," gives a lady place,
At vestry boards and a' that;
But she with bounteous modest face,
Will stay at home for a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
"Equality" and a' that,
She was not made to rush and race,
And elbow man for a' that.

The hearth and home are woman's sphere,
Her proper place and a' that;
Where she may bear, and nurse, and rear,
The "Babe of Grace" and a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
She shows most sense and a' that,
Who wins and wears the rank and name,
Of mother, wife, and a' that.

AN AESTHETIC FLIRT.

Perhaps because he was called Paul Clarkson, which, we must own, is a very romantic name, or perhaps because his family loved old china, or perhaps because he had five sisters and no brothers; from one of these causes, or from quite a different cause—what matters it, since the fact remains the same!—Mr. Paul Clarkson was without doubt an aesthetic flirt. How much of a flirt he was, perhaps he himself hardly realized; it all came so naturally to him. He was a handsome fellow, young Paul. He had a tall well-made figure, a pale but very expressive face, and a good deal of warm brown hair. No woman with such eyes could have kept from flirting; so let us not be too hard upon this man, especially as for some time he did no one any harm. He wrote poems, which his fair friends greatly admired. Ye gods, what sad poems they were! In them Mr. Clarkson flirted with Death just as he flirted with women. He sat at her feet and called her pretty names. If his stern mistress had turned round sharply, and made him take her for better or worse, I hardly imagine he would have been a very willing bridegroom; but as the grim lady just then seemed to want none of him—as lungs, liver, and heart were all they should be—this verse-flirting with death was all very nice.

Mr. Paul was apparently very much distressed at having to live. He wanted no good dinners, not he; he wanted no books—of course not; he wanted no club; he wanted no pretty woman to flirt with. What in the world did he want, then? He wanted to be absorbed into the spirit of things; he desired to grow part of the infinite; he yawned to be mingled with the heaven's blue, or to be a rose-leaf, or a cloud, or a sun-beam, or a weed; in short, anything but what he was. A very sad man was Mr. Paul Clarkson. Being so sad, was it not natural that he should turn for sympathy to the softer sex? One friend could not have satisfied his great nature; his comforters were many. Let us see now who they were.

To begin with, there was Miss Blandon, very strong on the question of women's rights—a clever, handsome, if somewhat masculine-looking woman, of whom men mostly stood in awe. Clarkson found out a tender place in her heart, and walked into it. I think she thought for quite a long time that he was going to ask her to be his wife.

Then there was the beautiful Miss Sanford, with the pale face, and the large, lovely, sad-looking eyes; was she not beauty itself, and, as such, should she not be worshipped?

Then there was Mrs. Clifford, quite young, and very nice to look at, too; and she wrote poems almost as sad as Mr. Clarkson's own. Her marriage had been a great mistake. She was thrown wholly away on the commonplace Clifford; so she resigned herself to the writing of melancholy verse. O bards, bards, what would you be without your griefs? Even as children are who have no pretty playthings.

Mr. Clarkson's grief was that he had once been engaged to a girl of whom he was really getting rather tired, when in the most unexpected manner she got tired of him and threw him over, and endowed him with a wrong. Mr. Clarkson felt very badly, or said he did. It is quite impossible to say what he did not get out of that grief of his. Of course its prime use was as a seasoning to his poems. Then it was a great help in those nice flirtations I have spoken of. A man with blighted affections may go much further in flirting than a man who is heart-whole. The dear creature comes naturally for consolation.

Did Clarkson make the best of his opportunity? I think he did. He wrote I don't know how many poems to his faithless lady;

these poems he recited to other fair ladies; he plunged into all sorts of dissipation, not because he was naturally addicted to such things, but because he was so extremely unhappy. He was a very desperate man, and cynical; why, he believed in nothing, always excepting friendship between men and women.

I have mentioned three of his friends; let me not forget Miss Kinlake, who played so beautifully, and, besides, composed such wonderful music.

The amount of friendship with women, and the amount of good wines Mr. Clarkson's grief required to console it, were most surprising; but we all know how bad is an affair of the heart.

It chanced one night that Mr. Clarkson met, at a reception, Miss Hilda Ford. She was not a girl. She was about thirty; she was very pretty, and not at all æsthetic. She had a good intellect, though, and loved poetry genuinely. Her voice was unusually low and sweet; it had a strange thrilling music in it. She lived with her mother in the country; but they made frequent visits to London.

Now when Clarkson saw her he fell in love at first sight. He loved everything about her: her full beautiful figure, her sensitive face, with the deep dark blue eyes, the red passionate mouth, the long slender hands, the way she carried herself. He was quite bowled down. His love-grief—that had seen so much service; had been paraded, O, in how many poems! had been talked over, sighed over, laughed over, with what awful laughter—was put away! Mr. Clarkson no longer wished to die, he wished to marry Miss Ford.

He loved his dear friends; but there had been, till now, no one that he had quite wanted to marry. Truth to say, he was rather hoping that some one in whom he could take a very decided interest would turn up; when lo, she appeared upon the scene! I think a man should respect a really useful grief more than Clarkson did. He thrust it away without a tear—what do I say!—without even a farewell sonnet! Heart and soul he went in for his new love. O bards, bards, are ye not an ungrateful lot!

Paul Clarkson, then, loved Hilda Ford; and what is very much to the point is, that the kind feeling he entertained for her she entertained for him. So, why not say at once that he proposed, and was accepted?

"Hilda," he cried, looking into her eyes passionately, "tell me how much you love me!"

She pressed his hands and said, "I love you with my whole heart. Your love is the crown and glory of my life; it is my supreme rapture and my supreme rest."

And then, perhaps, because her face flushed so, she leaned it on his shoulder, while he kissed her thick gold hair.

All this was very nice, and just as it should be; but troubles came. As it happened, most unfortunately, Miss Ford had a jealous temperament, and she got to find out about Paul's flirtations, to which she very much objected. Of course, nothing would have been easier than for Paul to have given up such flirtations; to which I think Miss Ford was quite right in expecting. Only that was just what he did not do. Easy, I said; no, far more difficult than we dream of.

To be in love, and to play at being in love, are two very different things; and, in their own way, they are both pleasant enough. Playing at being in love is a very fascinating game; and like most games, it takes at least two players. This game Miss Ford liked not; a fact which he could not tell to these dear co-players.

"When our engagement is made public," he said to himself, "I will knock all these affairs on the head."

So he very wrongly—wishing at the same time to have and eat his pie—told his beloved that he would forswear the close friendships that so much troubled her; and all the while he privately indulged in them. She found him out once. He rushed down to her house in the country; where, as can be easily imagined, a scene took place.

It was the beautiful Miss Sanford that Hilda specially objected to. He promised faithfully that he would see her no more; but the old habit was so strong that, as soon as he returned to London, he went back to his Platonic worship of her. He kept, however, his proceedings very dark indeed, I can tell you; but, as we all know, murder will out.

As ill or good luck would have it, an intimate friend of Miss Sanford went to visit some friends who were neighbors of the Fords. To the pleasure of all parties concerned, it turned out that Mr. Clarkson was a mutual friend. Then came the question from our friend's friend.

"Was Mr. Clarkson going to marry Miss Sanford?"

Every one knew what a flirt he was; still his attentions in that quarter were extremely marked.

"Perhaps so," said Hilda quietly.

She wrote a few words to Paul that night, asking him to come down and see her.

Jam was nice when we were young, but was it nice to be detected in the act of priggish it; when we thought every one was far away, to hear a door-handle turn sharply, and be faced by a father, a mother, or an old servant sure to tell! It is with feelings similar to those then experienced that Paul read Hilda's letter. It contained only a few words, asking him to come down; but he had instantly a sense of something being wrong; he suspected the truth that his sin had found him out.

The Fords lived in a remote country village. It was a hot June evening when he found him-

self walking up the long garden that surrounded their house.

Mrs. Ford greeted him very warmly:

"I'll go and send Hilda to you," she said, in her kind cheerful voice.

She left the room, and a few minutes after Miss Ford came in. He heard her dress whispering as she walked.

"Good-evening," she said, "it was kind of you to come when I asked you."

She sat down in a low chair, her hands clasped loosely in each other.

"But I shall not," she resumed, "have to tax you again in this way."

"Have I done anything to displease you?" he answered, turning very pale. "Tell me at once, and let me have it over."

"What I have to say is," she rejoined, that everything between us must be over, now and for ever. If it is hard for you, it is harder for me; you meant my all of life."

"Some one has been telling lies about me," he burst out.

"It is you who have not told the truth," she said, with perfect quietude.

He turned on her desperately, seeing that she knew everything.

"Hilda," he cried, "I have acted meanly to you; but this shall never happen in the future."

"For us two together," she answered, there will be no future."

"You can't mean that!"

"What else should I mean? I love you, Paul; but I would never trust my happiness in the hands of a man who could deceive me twice. I forgive you, love you, but I trust you no more."

Outside the birds sang on through the still evening; the air of the room was heavy with the scent of roses.

"You must take back these words," he said; "you don't begin to know how I love you."

"Perhaps not," she answered; "but I mean what I have said."

"Hilda, till I meet you it seems to me that I really never lived; you must show me some pity."

He threw himself on his knees before her, caught her hands and kissed them.

"Vain, vain," she cried. "It is done, and it cannot be undone."

"Do you really mean what you say?" he asked, his voice trembling. The man was in earnest at last.

"Yes," she answered sadly and unwaveringly, "I mean it most absolutely."

"Then I must abide by your decision," he said, rising, a certain pride in his voice. "Good-bye, then."

He had got as far as the door when she called him back.

"Don't be too angry with me," she said, laying her hand in his; "kiss me."

He did kiss her long and very passionately; then he left the room, left the house, left the village, and reached London by a late train, bringing a real grief in his sham grief's stead.

Resolved on doing something desperate, he cast himself at the feet of the beautiful Miss Sanford; but to his surprise she did not appreciate her happiness.

"I never believed all the fine things you said," she remarked. "I knew you to be a flirt; but you amused me, and for that I am grateful."

He went away very considerably humbled. The real grief, unlike the sham one, was totally useless. It inspired no poem; it stimulated to no pleasant flirtations; it lay at Mr. Clarkson's heart a great, heavy, unremovable weight. Like a wounded animal, he shunned his fellows. He thought grimly to himself as he roamed about the London streets, now grown to him so dreary, that at last he knew what the real thing was.

In the course of a month or two, there came to him a desire in some way to do something which might at least lighten the gloom that wrapt him round.

"I've spoilt my own life," he mused, "still it might turn to some good account for others; I have money, and great sympathy with the people, and they need both. To spend my life helping them is what Hilda would approve of if she knew it, and that is what I will do."

The very next day he carried out his good resolution; for he was perfectly in earnest. Still the man had been so in the habit of posing that he could not help at first surveying himself with a little melancholy satisfaction as the people's helper, given to them by a great sorrow. When he got really into his work, however, he ceased this sort of exhibition upon the stage of life with himself as spectator. Things seemed to him too serious to incline him to strike an attitude before them. For the first time he forgot himself, in view of other people's calamities.

Truly his labors were not light; and he felt no disposition to toy with his work as once he had toyed with love. Daily he risked his life, sometimes from interfering to protect some woman from the drunken violence of her master, sometimes through long night watches beside a wretch ill of some frightful contagious disorder.

He held not his own life dear unto him, and perhaps it was for that reason that he came alive out of every peril. Often, before the world was well awake, he would return home from a night passed beside the dying, only to snatch a little sleep and go forth again to his self-imposed tasks.

He saw sights and heard sounds before which a less-determined spirit would have quailed; but his strong purpose upheld him.

Among his many friends at the East-end was a family of the name of White. Mrs. White was a widow. She let cheap lodgings. Her eldest child, Sara, added to their small income by playing humble parts at East-end theatres.

She was a good girl, this Sara, with laughing blue eyes, a prettily-shaped sensitive face, and a great deal of fair hair.

Mrs. White would exclaim:

"It's not, sir, because some folks never look where they are going and drag their skirts through every puddle they can, that others can't walk in clean places."

Clarkson became very fond of Sara—not at all in a sentimental way; he had quite done with that. He regarded her more as a father might regard a pet child. She believed in him too; and that was nice. Often, on fine Sundays, would he come and take her off to Richmond or Kew, or somewhere where she could gather wild flowers, if it were in the season of them. To see her pleasure always pleased him.

Mrs. White herself was not at all an ill-meaning woman. She was shockingly untidy though in her appearance; and she had a temper of her own.

One gray October Sunday afternoon Mr. Clarkson found himself, after a two months' absence on his summer holiday, again near Mrs. White's house.

It was a depressing day, and at its most depressed time—between three and four o'clock. As he walked down the dingy streets, with the dirty houses on either side of him—houses that had a look of grim content about them, as if they had now grown proud of their dirt, and would not, if they could, be different—I say, as he walked along, smoking a very good cigar, he heard the melancholy cry of "Water-cresses; fine water-cresses!"

In front of him, with a short clay pipe in his mouth, a man was forcing a reluctant donkey drawing a barrow, the contents of which the driver roared out, from time to time, in a voice suggesting that he would speedily do violence to the passers-by if they did not purchase his nuts and apples. "Tang, tang" kept on all the time from what, to judge by the sound, must have been a very cracked church bell.

Mrs. White resided at 19 Upper Poplar-row. I wonder if, at any time, any poplar had grown there or thereabouts?

Nineteen was the dingiest house in the row. It certainly was, thought Clarkson, as he once more came in sight of it. The bell-handle was off; the knocker had long parted from the door. Clarkson applied his walking-stick. Mrs. White's voice could be heard within.

"Go down-stairs, do, Bob, you had boy; you're enough to kill me, that you are! Take that now, and be off!"

And very evidently Mrs. White's hand came in contact with her offspring's face. Then followed a howl—perhaps, under the circumstances, not wholly unjustified—a sound of feet hastily retreating to lower regions; then the door opened and disclosed Mrs. White. It cannot be said that her face was clean. Her dress was in holes; it was fastened at the throat by a tawdry brooch. Once, however, she must have been quite a pretty woman.

"La, air, is it you? I'm glad to see you back. Such worries as I've had—these people in the first-floor not paying their rent. I'll tell you what that man is, sir. He's a nasty, low, good-for-nothing, rum-drinking fellow. And as for beer, he was at home one day, and it was nothing but send, send that young Bob to the King's Head round the corner for pints of half-and-half, till the child got that tipsy with the sips he took going, that I assure you I put him to bed in a really disgraceful condition. As for his wife, she's no better than he is. She's the kind of woman that I wouldn't trust for five minutes with sixpence of my money—no, nor a penny neither!"

With this Mrs. White, who had spoken at a breath, paused. What she had said had been delivered in the passage, probably for the benefit of her first-floor lodgers.

"Now, sir, come down. You aren't too proud, I know, to come into my kitchen. It's not tidy. I thought I should get to cleaning it yesterday, but no; and my children worrit me so. It's my impression, air, that they would like to see their mother dead and in her coffin; young Bob would, I know!"

His mother always called him young Bob; though the truth is, that he was a singularly old-looking child for his age, with a very crafty expression. They were, by this time, in the kitchen, which certainly was, as the landlady had described it, in no nice state. She cleared a chair for her visitor, then rushing to the window addressed a boy smaller than Bob, who was examining with grave interest the contents of the dust-hole.

"Well, my son, you are a nice clean, little boy, aren't you? Upon my word, you are. I wouldn't leave off, if I were you. Look long enough, and you'll be sure to find something—a roast shoulder of mutton with baked potatoes under it, perhaps. Or, I shouldn't at all wonder, a fine turkey and a plum-pudding."

Then finding her withering irony produced no effect on Master Tommy, who continued just as gravely, and just as silently, his careful inspection of the dust-hole, the enraged mother darted from the room and swooped down upon him with a heavy hand, and an impressive admonition.

"There! take that for being a bad dirty little boy, and for not doing what you're told; and look you, my young gentleman, every time I find you out here playing with dirt I'll serve you just the same."

At this alarming prospect of annihilation on the one hand and of punishment on the other, the hero of the dust-hole roared louder than ever.

"I see, my dear Mrs. White, that you are a