

# THE ANTIDOTE

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## OUR ACQUAINTANCES.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot? Decidedly, in nine cases out of ten, if the forgetting, and above all the being forgotten, were possible. It is one thing to grapple the friends we have and their adoption tried to our souls with "hoops of steel," and another to be grappled by miscellaneous persons whose claim on our regard and proof of theirs is found in the almanac, and only there. Why are people who are old acquaintances and nothing more to take possession of us like conscious benefactors, speaking of us, if not to us, by our fireside names; criticising us with the air of experience, being self-complacent on our success and candid on our failures, exposing our motives and lamenting our hidden beliefs? Why do they question us on our private affairs, offer us point blank condolences on the skeleton in our cupboard, jocosely blurt out unpalatable truths, find fault with our new carpet, advise us? These are the privileges of friendship, of intimacy; and they have known us so long. By the popular computation, the having been aware for a long time of each other's existence is intimacy; indifference multiplied by years is friendship. Only let a man have been acquainted with you from your childhood, and he has, by every recognized law of good feeling, the same right to take an aggressive interest in your proceedings that your relations possess by their relationship, and your bosom friends by your own conferring

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Old acquaintances have no monopoly of familiarity unmitigated by similarity of tastes or the sympathy of affection. A relation you have seen for the first time yesterday, or, in the country, the next-door neighbor of a fortnight's standing, wields a like prescriptive right of intrusion. But old acquaintances have a special authority over you

peculiar to them. They tether you to your former self; they will allow nothing for growth; what you were you are. No matter what developments, or what changes may have removed the man from the boy, for them and among them he is stationary. It is even so to himself; he cannot take his true place among them, he is clogged and hampered with all sorts of minute fetters, gradually woven round him, which he can only burst by an unseemly struggle. He feels like a lobster squeezed back into a shell some sizes ago; the thing rasps his skin, but yet it does seem to be his own proper shell and he tries to accommodate himself to it.

It is in this accommodating process that the chief mischief of the repressive influence of old acquaintances is to be found. If a man have some inure gift of genius or skill which old acquaintances ignore, because he was nothing remarkable when they knew him as a boy, the gift will eventually prove itself outside their circle, though perhaps never to them; if he have advanced himself to a social status which they are unable to admit as a practical fact because he was nobody at all when they knew him as a boy, he will hold his position in the world none the less securely for their tardiness in appreciating it. Nor can the demurs of old acquaintances close the path to success, or withhold the foot that is on the way.

Strong ability, absolute talent, compel their use and achieve their own result. The harm lies in the crippling, by comparison, of the moral side of the intellect to which the man, beset by old acquaintances, condemns himself for their sake. He knows that they have a vested interest in him, that he is responsible to them for the sobriety of his views and the gregariousness of his conduct; that to think anything they had not expected of him is to annoy them; and to differ with them in opinion is to insult them. He shrinks from disturbing the peace of mind of all these old folks who have known him so long; he has visions of squabbles, and admonitions, and backbitings, of "the old familiar faces"

lowering retributively. He tries to live and learn within the bounds prescribed him, he wishes to see no further than his neighbors in any dangerous directions; he is afraid of telling or hearing new things. He may be even driven to a sort of suppressive hypocrisy; he may have to follow out opinions he has discarded, and to indulge tastes he has forgotten; he may have to keep his deepest convictions in polite abeyance, or to slur over the expression with a faint-hearted laugh.

Meanwhile the true man is decaying within him. Having foregone the courage of his convictions, he loses first the habit and then the power of forming opinions for himself. He may never suspect the loss; he will indeed, if of a loud-voiced turn of mind, impress himself as well as other superficial observers with the notion of his being of a specially self-reliant judgment; since no persons are so positive in their opinions as those who, having received them at second-hand in a crystallized state, are free from the recollection of change and fluctuation which belong to the mind that has thought them into shape; and positiveness easily mistakes itself for self-reliance.

He may come to speak, write, teach, what his own conclusions, if he had followed them up, would have distinctly opposed, to feel a zealous anger against those who hesitate over dogmas which have never reached his inner heart, or to display himself an unflinching panegyrist of political measurers which his intellect, left to its freedom, would have condemned, and yet not to be aware of a stunted or twisted conscience. His mind is like one of the old fashioned clipped box-trees, grown and flourishing in the abnormal shape into which it has been arranged.



—His Conscience.—“Have you no conscience?” shrieked the indignant victim. “You bet I have,” answered the proprietor of the Columbian Fake House. “And what’s more, it’s jist that very conscience that would ha’nt me all the days of my life if I was to let you carry any money out of Chicago; see?” —Indianapolis Journal.