

A FEW REMARKS ON THE ADVANTAGES OF A SINGLE LIFE.

(Read before the Members of the Shakespeare Club.)

IN casting my eyes over the city papers a short time back, I saw an advertisement announcing that a Lecture was to be delivered before the members of the Mechanics' Institute, on the subject of Matrimony. I must confess that I was a little annoyed on reading this, for I knew very well what it meant. I felt at once that it was an attack on that pure and delicious state, in which many of the wisest and best of both sexes have thought it right and proper to remain. A Lecture on the Advantages of Matrimony must, as a matter of course, be a reflexion on those who are not married. It would be a means, and certainly not a powerless means, of ticketing *them* as inferior articles in the great market of society. It would stick them up to be gazed and giggled at by every bull-calf who had coined an ugly image of himself out of the creative materials of nature. It would be to offer a premium for "babbies" and curtain-lectures, at the expense of the wise, reflective, and single. It would be, in short, to send abroad the monstrous idea, that man does not possess in himself all the materials of happiness, and to set up a doctrine which is positively denied by every day's proof and experience.

It is very strange, said I to myself, when I had read the advertisement of which I have spoken, that they will not let the old maids and the bachelors alone. Why should they always be having a fling at them? God knows they do little harm in the world, and it is very strange that they cannot be allowed to pursue their solitary course, without being reminded every now and then of their peculiarity. Not indeed that they care much about it, as far as the allusion itself is concerned, for they know the advantages of their position; but then it shows a nasty provoking spirit in their married brethren, which isn't amiable. There is no such immense victory, after all, in being the owner of a dowdy wife, and six fat children, that such a terrible noise should be kicked up about it. Deduct the wet-nursing and the squalling, and the schooling, and how much felicity remains? Take into consideration the horrors of the cow-pox, small-pox, scarletina, and the measles, and the credit side of parental blissfulness will be rendered very small indeed. Calculate the chances of a scolding wife, and the possibility of a noisy house, and then say in what respect Matrimony possesses such immense advantages, even on the score of comfort and convenience?

But this is the most superficial view of the question. There are other considerations of far greater importance, which it is desirable the world should know. If we merely took the amount of material comfort or discomfort that marriage presents, we on the celibacy side of the question, might be content to make it a drawn battle. We would positively consent to set off the inconveniences of marriage against the conveniences! We would allow that the discomfort of being called out of bed to breakfast at so unreasonable an hour as eight o'clock, was *partially* compensated by the fact that the breakfast was very nicely arranged when we did get it, and that the intense annoyance of being bullied into wiping your feet upon the door mat, was rendered just endurable by the regularity and order with which some other matters connected with domestic economy were ordered. This we might be inclined to admit; but this would not decide the question. There are other matters of much deeper importance connected with it, which the matrimonialists altogether keep out of sight. Their arguments are all drawn from the cupboard, and are most essentially vulgar. If it is a married woman who speaks, she

points to her husband and says "See how fat and clean he looks!—that is all my doing! It is I who feed him up with chicken-pie, mend his shirts, and turn him out like a gentleman. He was a perfect brute before I knew him. He used to tie up the holes in his stockings with pack thread, and didn't know what darning meant. Now he is kept comfortable. I've cured him of all his bad habits. He doesn't take wine—it don't agree with him. He has left off smoking—it was sending him to his grave. He doesn't know any of his old acquaintances; they were a bad set, and imposed on him horribly. In fact, he's quite an altered person altogether." Now I am content to allow this version, as far as it goes. We will admit that marriage improves a man's wardrobe, and adds marvellous variety to his dwelling. We know that it is favorable to what is called order, and that it is a sentence of banishment to tobacco. It brings a great amount of furniture into a man's dwelling, and arranges it with tormenting precision. It puts legs on broken tables, backs to chairs, and won't permit the spit to be turned into a poker. It has a great aversion to broken windows, and very soon ejects all the dogs from the parlour. It is most fastidious on matters of carpeting, and is decidedly favorable to bees-wax and rubbing. But, we would ask, whilst it does all this, does it render man a more useful or more social animal? Is it favorable to great literary efforts? Does it assort well with philosophy? These are the questions which it is really important to decide.

If we go to the histories of eminent persons of both sexes, we shall find that a large number never married at all, and that of those who did, too many, alas! married to regret it. Poets have seldom assorted well with their wives. Even Shakespeare—our own revered Shakespeare—seems to have made but a sorry business of it. He married Anne Hathaway, and there is every reason to suppose that the union was not a happy one. In his will, he dismisses her with a cold and brief notice. "I give unto my wife my second best bed, with the furniture." Was this the kind of bequest an admiring husband would have made? Originally, too, he had forgotten her altogether, and the insertion of the bed and furniture was an after-thought. Will any one undertake to say that Shakespeare had not the materials for a good husband? Is it possible that the fault was on his side? I, for one, will not believe it. No doubt he had loved her in the bright days of their youth, and loved her as such a mind as his must have loved—with intensity. How did it happen, then, that he treated her so carelessly at last? Probably she was a scold, and gave her poor husband no rest;—such a one as Katherina was, before Petruchio tamed her. Or she may have been a gossip, and when the mind of the poet was occupied with deep thoughts, would tittle-tattle scandal of her neighbours. Think of her interrupting the bard in the midst of one of his soliloquies, to tell him some idle story of the day! That he did not love her is evident. She was eight years older than her husband, and may have grown coarse and vulgar. Whatever it was, there is the fact, and the matrimonialists must get over it as they can.

If we go to the writings of Shakespeare, we shall find him speaking on both sides of the question, according to the situation of his mouth-pieces. Now he is found to lean towards matrimony—now to go butt against it. Perhaps one of the most forcible arguments in its favor is that given by Benedict—"the world must be peopled." Against the silly passion itself, he has, however, exhausted his richest raillery. Thus it is that Rosalind describes love as a madness, which deserves to be punished, and gives as the reason why it is not so punished and cured, that the lunacy is so ordinary, that those who should use the whip are in love too. Again, the same inimitable lady raises her voice against the popular fallacy that men have ever died for love.