

the popular novelist, and everyone read and openly discussed the questionable ways and doings of his heroes and heroines. Nobody then saw harm in reading Richardson (who, by the way, was a clergyman), nor is it probable that any great harm came of it because of that very fact. There were no "expurgated" editions of Shakespeare then, because it was held that to call a "spade" by any other than its proper name was quite unnecessary and likely to mislead. The author of "Vanity Fair" frequently draws one's attention to this change in public sentiment. For instance; "Ladies, I do not say that you are a society of vestals,—but the chronicle of a hundred years since contains such an amount of scandal that you may be thankful you did not live in such dangerous times. No, on my conscience I believe that men and women are both better; not only that the Susannahs are more numerous, but that the Elders are not nearly so wicked. Did you ever hear of such books as 'Clarissa,' 'Tom Jones,' 'Roderick Random,' paintings by contemporary artists of the men and women, the life and society of their day? Suppose we were to describe the doings of such a person as Mr. Lovelace, or my Lady Bellaston, or that wonderful 'Lady of Quality,' who lent her memoirs to the author of 'Peregrine Pickle.' How the pure and outraged nineteenth century would blush, scream, run out of the room, call away the young ladies, and order Mr. Mudie never to send one of that odious author's books again! You are fifty-eight years old, Madam, and it may be that you are too squeamish, that you cry out before you are hurt, and when nobody has any intention of offending your Ladyship. Also, it may be that the novelist's art is injured by the restraints put upon him, as many a harmless honest statue at St. Peters and the Vatican is spoiled by the tin draperies in which ecclesiastical old women have swaddled the fair limbs of the marble. But in your prudery there is reason. So there is in the state censorship of the Press. The pages may contain matter injurious to *bonos mores*. Out with your scissors, censor, and clip off the prurient paragraph!"\*

While we may believe with Thackeray, that people now-a-days are "of a cleaner conversation," we cannot close our eyes to the fact that, if we do not hear of and see so much moral uncleanness it is, to some extent, because it is disguised

\* Thackeray's "Virginians," chap. xli.

and hidden, and not because it has ceased to exist.

It is tolerated, but not recognized, or at least only recognized under certain conventional forms. Society is quite candid in this matter. One is not positively commanded not to eat of the forbidden fruit, but the meal must be taken *en règle* and respectably. Shakespeare's poems, the tales of Boccaccio, and the wonderful adventures of Gulliver "smell to heaven" and are altogether detestable—*cela va sans dire*—but, without giving offence, you may (if you judiciously avoid particulars) discuss the merits of Alexandre Dumas and Emile Zola. Or, if it happens that you have a taste for lighter literature, what popular novels will more quickly satisfy that literary appetite than the *entrées* and dessert served up by Rhoda Broughton and "Ouida?"

Nor need you pay much attention to the abuse they have received from the discontented few, for has not Madame Grundy taken these productions under her protection? Is not "socially authorized" stamped on each title-page? What right then have men like Goodell to call them "namby-pamby trash" and "printed erysipelas?"

This attitude of society towards *open* discussion of the evils that threaten to undermine the foundations of its structure, has a more practical bearing upon attempts to remedy the evils themselves than is apparent at first sight, because, while it very properly negatives gross and immodest conversation, it has always displayed an unfortunate lack of discrimination in including in the proscription agitations having for their object the eradication of the maladies.

And this absence of a becoming discernment is nowhere more marked than when the trade of the strumpet is under consideration. Here prudery might be forgiven if honest investigation were permitted. But it is not, and has not been, and we are consequently obliged to believe with Charlotte Brontë that "to such grievances as society cannot readily cure it usually forbids utterance on pain of its scorn; this scorn being only a sort of tinsel cloak to its deformed weakness."\*

Starting out then with the premise that the endeavor to solve the problem of the social evil must not be hampered either by the opinions or prejudices of the classes for whom the work is undertaken, or by the neutrality of other classes whom we might have expected to have been

\* "Shirley."