

MAD!

You have heard the latest scandal?
Yes? Well, isn't it sad?
Our pretty merry Meggy
Gone quite suddenly mad!

Mad as the typical hatter!
It's no mere innuendo;
No need of any Commission
Lunatico inquirendo.

She owns the soft impeachment,
Just as though she were glad;
She says to Florry and Maudie,
"I know it, my dears: I'm mad."

To her bosom-crony Mildred
Her secret she deigns to impart:
"I'm not gone off my head, my love,
Only off my heart."

This is her monomania:
Once so sober and steady,
Merry-hearted Meggy
Is madly in love with Freddy!

SYMBOLS AND SIGNS.

The world is generally estimated rather by what it appears to be than by what it is. Most persons look no deeper than the outside show. They believe in what they see, and would be quite surprised if they were told that what they do perceive is at best only so much symbol and sign—very often only so much sham and pretence. Nevertheless, this is the case. Putting aside the doctrines of metaphysicians on the subject, it is not difficult to discover that the real meanings and motives of many of our common everyday actions lie far beneath the surface. We meet a friend in the street, and shake hands with him. This is, in itself, perfectly useless and unmeaning conduct. It would do just as well for us to rub our noses together, if that were the fashion here, as it is in some parts of the world. But society has decreed that shaking hands shall be taken to indicate a certain amount of kindly feeling, and it acquires a significance accordingly.

Such practices soon become habitual, and we may readily lose sight of the real motives which prompt us to continue them. Custom is the mainspring of half the machinery of our lives. We do things because others do them, not because we like them ourselves. Why, for instance, in the name of common sense, do most of us wear tall hats and black coats? We are all ready to confess that they are inartistic, if not positively ugly. Yet on the sultriest day in summer one may see the male population of our great city toiling along its streets clad in this absurd raiment, which, under such circumstances, is not only inelegant, but utterly uncomfortable. If we examine the reasons which impel us to act like this, we may follow them quite into the depths of psychology. Our conduct proves, for instance, that we are not altogether self-regarding, but subject to a social impulse. It proves, too, not only that we think Society important, but that we care what Society thinks of us. The black coat and uncomfortable hat are the marks of a certain social grade, and we wish it to be known that we belong to that grade. We are not strong-minded enough to be indifferent to the estimate of others, and we conclude that if we copy our fellows they will approve of our conduct. We are willing to subordinate our own convenience to an opinion which we know to be founded upon inefficient or even absurd grounds. All this, and much more, is signified by our appearing in the orthodox costume of the nineteenth century.

The majority of the deeds and all the words of men are nothing but an elaborate code of signals. It is only in the lowest depths of savage existence that human actions are dictated by natural propensities. Every step in civilization leads men to disguise their real feelings, and to build up more and more completely a system of conduct which shall express their social relations fully, and at the same time leave those personal emotions which lie at the root of them unobtrusively in the background. This is natural, and indeed inevitable. It certainly would not do for every man to say all that he thought or to do all that he liked; Society could never hang together upon such a system. The more we progress in the refinements and conveniences of life, the closer and more delicate become our mutual relations, and the greater care is needed in the expression of our ideas, lest they should give offence to others. But soon arises a great danger, that in avoiding too great freedom in the conveyance of our feelings, the feelings themselves may become blunted. We may bedizen our conduct with a gorgeous array of formalities and politeness, without any soul of friendship beneath; our art may become a vapid display of legerdemain and our religion an empty ritualism. This tendency to rest satisfied with exteriors is eminently a characteristic of the present age. The finer sentiments and charities of the heart are practically, if not openly, scoffed at, and a man's conduct is judged rather by his pecuniary success, and the social status which he is able to maintain, than by standards of moral excellence and the warmth and sincerity of his affections and benevolence.

It is, then, a matter of no small importance that we should in all things seek for reality—that when any action or speech or person is brought under our notice, we should set ourselves to discover not merely what are the appearances, but what are the facts, since the two do not always coincide. In short, we are surrounded by symbols and signs, and if we wish to go through the world otherwise than mechanically, we shall find it worth while to ascertain as

far as possible what they mean. There are two things to be guarded against: first, failing to discern the meaning of a symbol; and second, finding a meaning in it which does not really exist; for it is strange to notice how a public which can perceive nothing but husks and stalks in a field of corn is so often ready to discover treason in a meal-tub. The desire of a thoughtful mind should be, not to fix some meaning upon what it reflects on, but to assign to it its true signification.

The subject of dress affords a noticeable instance of symbolism. One aspect of it has been above referred to in passing; but not only is adherence to fashion a sign of certain general tendencies in the human mind, but the dress of individuals is no slight indication of personal characteristics. The maxim of Polonius on the subject is too trite for quotation; but Thackeray goes farther than Shakespeare, and shows that in some cases the apparel altogether constitutes the man—or at least that which passes for the man. This is how he describes a prince known in his day as the "First Gentleman in Europe."

"This George, what was he? I look through all his life, and recognize but a bow and a grin. I try and take him to pieces, and find silk stockings, padding, stays, a coat with frogs and a fur collar, a star and blue ribbon, a pocket-handkerchief prodigiously scented, one of Truefitt's best nutty-brown wigs reeking with oil, a set of teeth, and a huge black stock, under-waistcoats, more under-waistcoats—and then nothing."

It is to be hoped that not many men have such empty hearts and brains as Thackeray gave George IV. and Louis XIV. credit for; but it is well to clear our minds of the fictitious importance which is so apt to invest a man along with gorgeous garments, and try to pierce alike through robes of state and jackets of fustian to the very commonplace and ordinary human beings they serve to clothe.

But sometimes when dress affords no indication of personal characteristics it has historical associations. A City Marshal at a Lord Mayor's Show, for example, may be a very sensible man, although he looks like an effigy of Guy Fawkes which has escaped the general cineration of the 5th of November. He and the pageant of which he forms a part are alike relics of a bygone age. The absurd "watermen carrying banners," and the preposterous gilded coach, with the sword-bearer and common crier solemnly poking the municipal insignia out of the windows, in no way reflect the personal tastes of the chief magistrate of London. They are symbols of antiquity, and carry our minds back to times when the privileges of the City were greater than they now are, and when its dignitaries not only feasted at the Guildhall, and attended with the City keys at Temple Bar and received knighthood, but were a real and important power in the State. The popular ideas about dress, as about most things, were very different then from those entertained now, and a Lord Mayor's Show at the present day is less a puerility than an anachronism.

As in dress, so in manners, outward forms may cover a variety of inward meanings. In general, politeness implies nothing more than a recognition of social duties. A man in writing to an equal, or even to an inferior, signs himself "your obedient servant," not for a moment meaning that he is anything of the sort, but simply wishing to be civil. But in this way a thin layer of small niceties of behaviour often passes muster for kindness and generous feeling. It may mean nothing; the man himself may be selfish and heartless, and his manners only the result of educational circumstances—the mere polish upon veneer.

Nor is it in domestic matters alone that the meaning of outward forms is liable to be misunderstood. Mr. Fitzjames Stephen, in his book on *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, lately published, calls attention to many popular misapprehensions on social and political questions. It is often supposed, for instance, that "equality" can be produced by the mere planing-down of social differences, whereas such a process only gives rise to a new class of distinctions. The man who is strongest will always rule, whether his strength consist in wealth, in social position, or in intellectual ability.

"The rank is but the guinea-stamp;
The *man's* the gold for a' that."

The progress of democratic institutions is not a symptom of the abolition of force, but only of a change in its direction and application. Then, again, politics would be a much more satisfactory subject to contemplate, if people could be prevailed upon to consider public measures on their merits, instead of looking at everything as a party question. The first object of a statesman should be the good of the State, but how often is this ideal realised in fact? Measures are brought forward, ticketed with the trademark of a party, and are praised or censured solely with reference to the quarter from which they proceed. Anybody may see that this is so by glancing through the reports of our parliamentary proceedings. As soon as a bill is brought forward on the Ministerial side of the House (no matter on what subject), up start members of the Opposition to criticise and condemn it, and *vice versa*. This may perhaps be, to a certain extent, natural, and therefore pardonable, in men who are striving for authority, and who regard themselves as the fittest depositaries of power; but unfortunately the same system is carried into private and literary political discussion. No greater mistake can be made than to suppose that a political creed al-

ways brings forth public measures of corresponding excellence; and the principle which gives all the praise to one side, and all the blame to another, without discrimination, is not only a very foolish, but a very dangerous one. The name of the great political parties in this country are marks of distinctions more apparent than real. Many Liberals and Conservatives have no greater difference between them than that one is pledged to vote for all that Mr. Gladstone may bring forward, and the other to invariably support Mr. Disraeli. But even if these names are the symbols of certain theories of government, it by no means follows that they betoken corresponding practices.

Popular views on these subjects afford an instance of the supposed discovery of meanings which do not exist; we need not go far to find an example of the opposite error. How much ridicule has been lately flung at the Comte de Chambord for his pertinacity in refusing to give up the traditional white flag of his family! How much eloquence has been employed in daily newspapers about the absurdity of quarrelling over a bit of rag, and so forth! The fact has been overlooked, that the white and tricolor flags are each symbols of many important things. The one implies the divine right of kings and paternal—i.e. absolute—government; the other signifies the principles of the great Revolution, with its threefold creed, and all that is involved in it, democracy included. Henri V. could not have accepted the tricolor, without accepting with it the principles of which it is the token—without violating every tradition of his race, and casting away every rule which had hitherto served to guide his conduct. The nation could not have accepted the golden lilies without acknowledging its unqualified subjection to its king, and begging him of his graciousness to do with it whatever might seem good to him.

The misplaced ridicule which has been so freely bandied about in reference to recent French politics finds its parallel in the popular practice of making merry with English Church "Ritualism." It is very easy to talk about "man-millinery," and to quote Pope's sarcastic lines:

"Some to church repair,
Not for the doctrine, but the music there."

But there is not much cause for laughter, when it is considered that the gorgeous robes, the multitudinous lights, the incense, the genuflections, and the music, are all symbols of doctrines which, if true, ought to influence our daily lives and colour the current of our inmost thoughts. The symptoms are of comparatively little consequence; what we want to know is, whether they are the tokens of incipient disease, or the signs of returning health. A curious parody of late ecclesiastical proceedings in this country was recently enacted at the Cape of Good Hope. The Supreme Court at Cape Town was for some time occupied with a suit in which a certain congregation of Mohammedans sought to eject their priest, or "Imaum," on the ground of his non-compliance with the orthodox standard of their ritual. One of the principal charges against him was, that he took the "tonka" (which appears to be a sort of pastoral staff) into his own hands, and with it ascended the "mimbar" or pulpit, instead of first going into the mimbar, and there reverently receiving the tonka from the "Belal" or deacon appointed to the office. At first sight, all this seems trivial enough; but on looking a little closer, it appears that there are two Mohammedan sects known as the "Hanafees" and "Shafees," and that the neglect of certain rites and ceremonies, and the adoption of others, though trifling facts in themselves, may indicate heretical views on subjects which to a Mohammedan are of vital importance. In all such cases it is the doctrines that should be investigated, but they should be allowed to develop themselves in any suitable manner.

Rushing to extremes, as the public generally does, it has lately excited itself greatly on the subject of the proposed erection, in one of the London churches, of a baldacchino—a contrivance which seems to have no signification whatever, except from an architectural point of view. Whether it is a legal ornament for a church is another question, but that question should not be complicated with doctrines which have nothing at all to do with it.

The elaboration of ecclesiastical architecture is certainly a sign that increased importance is attached to religious worship, and that it is felt that if we believe in the value of religion at all, it should affect not only our moral but also our intellectual and aesthetic susceptibilities. It is a recognised fact, that a practical theology which enters into common things and ordinary pursuits is sure to draw to itself also the imaginative powers of the human mind. All the greatest art which the world has hitherto seen has been produced under the influence of some form of religious belief. The keen perception of vital form which characterised art amongst the Greeks was a reflection of the physical perfectness they attributed to their gods, and strove to cultivate in their own lives. The contemplative and introspective religion of the middle ages produced Angelico and the pre-Raphaelites. If art is worth anything at all it is symbolical and expressive, and the greatest art is that which expresses the greatest ideas. Unfortunately, at the present day its main function is too frequently overlooked altogether. The influence of Dutch art has, in this respect, been almost without exception bad, and has led to the prevalence of greatly exaggerated notions as to the value of mere manipulative skill. Teniers' pots and pans and drunken bores are

thoroughly appreciated, and his imitative powers at once recognised; but the quaint conventionalism of Carlo Crivelli and Giovanni Bellini is to most people a complete bar to the perception of the thought and purpose displayed in their pictures. It is much easier to understand Gerard Douw's hares and cabbages than to appreciate a landscape of Turner's. The principle, however, upon which the majority of persons estimate works of art is a mistaken one. They attempt, as a rule, to criticise the technical qualities of the painting or sculpture, and in the few cases where they possess sufficient sense to see that they are incompetent to do this without some special education, they consider that they are precluded from forming opinions on the subject at all. But surely art must be of little value if it speaks of nothing but the deftness of the artist's fingers, and merely display a skill which only the initiated can comprehend. That it has a technical side cannot be denied, but its technicalities are no more than the medium through which its universal message may be conveyed. This message we ought all to be able to receive. Each painting, each sculpture, should be a vehicle of high and noble thought, which may minister some help and hope amid the thousand forms of the modern worship of materialism. At the least a work of art should be an outward sign of that inner grace and beauty of the world around us which we are so apt to neglect, perceiving in a green field only so much pasturage, and in a forest tree only so much marketable timber.

If we choose to follow out the principle of symbolism to its fullest extent we may even invade the regions of science. With all our boasted knowledge we have discovered no more than certain laws of relation and succession. We are still as far as ever from understanding the true nature of even the material world. The elements which we see around us, much more the notions of them which we attempt to convey, are but the tokens of vast and hidden forces ceaselessly at work, but ever eluding our grasp. We talk about electricity, heat, light, but who knows what they are? We are conscious of their effects, but there our knowledge ends. We may at least learn humility from the inquiry how far our vaunted science is the knowledge of the universe, and how far it is the mere sorting of symbols whose meaning we can only guess at.

We find, then, that symbolism is carried into almost every department of human life. Half the errors which arise in the world are due to mistaken ideas about the meaning of the facts. Certain effects are perceived, and people try to deal with them without first ascertaining the causes which are at work to produce them. It is as if a physician were to attempt to cure jaundice by the application of rouge. If there is any truth in the views briefly sketched above, there would seem to be much reason to doubt the wisdom of some modern codes of thought. It is true that every one professes to deal with realities throughout his life, but it is generally assumed that these realities are spread open around us, instead of lying as they do beneath a cloak of symbolism, under which very often no outline of their true form can be discerned.

If men ever learn to go to the root of subjects which they have to deal with, and—hating all shams and stripping off, as far as possible, all disguises—to seek only for the simple truth within, a better and happier age than the nineteenth century will dawn upon the world.

AN INQUIRING MIND.

A prototype of the famous Mulikite boy, J. Arkansaw, lives here in Duluth. After returning from church last Sunday he sat in a very thoughtful attitude for a while and then asked:

"Pa, didn't the preacher say that he that believeth shall be saved and he that believeth not shall be damned?"

"Yes, my son."

"Wasn't he swearing fur 'im to say so?"

"Oh, no!"

"Why, wasn't it?"

"Because the word used in that connection is not to be regarded as profane."

"If I was to say that you would be damned if you didn't believe, would it be swearin'?"

"Not at all—but don't ask so many questions."

"Would it be swearin' if I'd say damn you if you don't?"

"There, there, my son; you are carrying it too far. Be quiet now, for heaven's sake!"

"Will ma be damned if she don't believe?"

"Certainly."

"And me, too?"

"Of course."

"And the dog, too?"

"Oh! for goodness sake hush! You drive me crazy!"

"Say, pa, would Jack, the crazy man, be damned if he didn't believe?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Now hush!"

"Then he'd be like Oscar Wilde, wouldn't he?"

"No, he wouldn't."

"Yes he would!"

"He would not, and now if you don't dry up I'll thrash you!"

"But he would, pa."

"How would he?"

"Why, didn't I hear you say that Oscar Wilde was a damned idiot, and if crazy Jack was to be—"

But before he could conclude the sentence a concussion remote from his talking machine claimed his immediate attention.