

Mr. Orthodoxy, Madame Fashion and Mrs. Grundy.

BY PERCY POPE

Mr. Orthodoxy, that austere gentleman who, with dignified air and calm assurance, asserts his right to be recognized as the authoritative expression of all truth : "Madame Fashion," the frivolous creature who, tyrannizing over her votaries, leads them into countless vagaries regardless of the inconvenience her exactions inflict upon sober-minded persons : "Mrs Grundy," that vulgar individual whose meddlesome superintendence of our affairs is especially distasteful : who has not, at one time or another, been made to feel the menace of their frowns ? Whether we realize the fact, or not, they have been factors in the life history of each of us, and it may be profitable to enquire more particularly into the parts they have played and are playing therein. Such is the purpose of the present article.

Some matter-of-fact individual may here interpose : "Why ! there are no such persons." Assigning to the word person the precise value he here gives it ; there certainly are not. But is the meaning he attaches to it necessarily the only, or in this case the right one ? Words are merely symbols of ideas and fulfil the only duty they are called upon to perform if they adequately express the thought to be conveyed. Should you find occasion to say that such a man "is an ill-conditioned cur," these words may effectively set forth your meaning though the statement, if taken literally, is manifestly untrue. Words are very useful servants but make very bad masters, and many unconsciously, and more willingly, come under their domination. It is possible to frame, of them, imposing sequences, put together in accordance with the strictest rules of logic, but though the conclusions reached follow justly from the premises, they are not necessarily true, for the original ideas, the basis of the superstructure, however trustworthy they may have been in the original mental picture, if crystallized, removed from their proper connection, and built up, into new mental images, therein become mere fancies masquerading as representations of fact which but cloud the vision and confuse the understanding.

A bold image, a vague perception, however loosely expressed, may embody a measure of true enlightenment, whilst the most closely reasoned and scholarly treatise may be purely imaginative.