

LONDON LETTER.

FROM beneath tattered volumes of *The Complete Angler* and Coleridge's *Table Talk*—fit companions—lying all unheeded on a bookstall in Clare Market, I was fortunate enough to unearth this morning a fine, clean copy of the well known-etching of Charles Lamb ("Scratched on copper from Life in 1825 by his friend, Brook Pulham," says the inscription), spoken of by Barry Cornwall in his memoir of Elia. "'Tis a little sixpenny thing, too like by half, in which the draughtsman has done his best to avoid flattery," writes Lamb in a letter to Bernard Barton; "there have been two editions of it which I think are all gone, as they have vanished from the window where they hung—a print shop, corner of Great and Little Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields." A gentle wind has blown one of these queer pictures only a short distance from its original home. I have, as Mr. Guppy would say, but to "cut along" Little Queen Street, forever sacred to the memory of the mother of Mary Lamb, so through a twisted bye road to my stall (do you, like Branwell Brontë, know your way about our town even though you may never have been here?) and there I find drifted amongst the company this most cared-for one of these very portraits which it pleases me to think his kind humorous eyes may have glanced at as it hung behind the narrow panes of the Holborn shop. This little caricature is, as a work of art, I suppose worth nothing; yet there is something in the look of the old-fashioned figure, dressed in garments after the design of that corbeau suit of which Bridget tells in *Old China*, some quaint lines that, even allowing for exaggeration, ill drawing, and a silhouette flat effect, strike one as being perfectly truthful: and consequently this scratching on copper has a value of its own. With his hand thrust into the breast of his coat (there is a difficulty in sketching fingers, you see: and this is a lazy trick Rowlandson as well continually treats us to), he stands as Mr. Pulham saw him in the sitting room of Colebrooke Cottage, and we may be sure that amongst Mary's treasures a proof of this small portrait was tenderly laid. In turning his head he shows a profile a little resembling Maclise's parcel pen and ink parcel pencil likeness in the South Kensington Museum, but ludicrously unlike Hazlitt's, Cary's, or Meyer's attempts. (By the way the sketch drawn by Maclise for Forster, and autographed by Elia, differs from that done by the same artist for the Fraser Gallery inasmuch as the unstoppered decanter in the latter finds no place in the former, but the position of the student and the characteristic upward glance are practically the same in both.) Here are the gaiters we know so well, and the dress coat with its rolled collar. Here the thin, keen, shrewd face of the man for whom every one with the least tincture of letters has the same sort of affection which Lamb himself felt for the writers of those darling folios, hugged to his heart. And from the Clare Market bookstall, to the tune of the Boulanger March whistled by every small boy I met, I threaded my way to Colebrooke Row, which exists still in the heart of Islington but no longer deserves the name of "Petty Venice," given it I think by Barry Cornwall, for the New River which still runs in the centre of it has for years been covered in. Such a delightful old-world street is this, in the oddest quarter of Town, a quarter which even a genuine Londoner knows little or nothing of. The pretty red brick houses, built in the time of Queen Anne, must once have had a gay outlook across the gray water to the village street beyond (the High Road into Essex), dotted with lumbering waggons, and clumsy chariots, and picturesque stage coaches: but now a much more modern terrace has gradually come between them and their view, and the silence which has fallen on the Row is the result of this odious invasion. In trim narrow gardens at the back pale-pink almond blossoms tint black branches with a Japanese scheme of decoration and have fragrantly flushed into life exactly as if the country were still within sight; while here and there a Normandy poplar unfolds its yellow buds, and from the low twisted laburnum and May trees, with their tufts of light green leaves, starlings and thrushes are calling to each other as though Islington were still a village, and not a land overflowing with trains and omnibuses—with stucco villas and their middle-class inhabitants, the hated of Mr. George Moore. Very peaceful, almost rural, is this view, and lively enough with bushy trees and birds making ready for the summer, but the front of the Row, though it would engrave excellently as an illustration to an Islington article, and though to a visitor of half an hour it cannot fail to be suggestive and full of pleasantness, after a time would certainly be monotonous and depressing. Exactly as I see this terrace of beautiful old houses so did Lamb see it as he looked up from his writing—from *Amicus Redivivus* for instance—in that upstairs sitting-room, hung with ebony framed Hogarths, of that corner cottage at the threshold of which I am now standing, for following the directions given to his correspondents sixty years ago I have found the white house, but no longer detached, and shorn of its flower-stocked garden. It has been re-fronted since Elia's time, says the present owner, and the steps used to turn differently, but the inside is much the same, though the outside door no longer opens straight into the parlour. From the window through which the maid saw George Dyer disappear into the River a little child nods its bright head and laughs, and as I idly speculate on the faces upon which the firelight from these small grates has flickered—Mary and Charles with their hosts of friends, from Martin Burney to Talfourd, from Emma Isola to Sarah Hazlitt—the child's voice echoes along the narrow passages. I should like best to have seen these sunny rooms, now undergoing a vigorous spring cleaning, silent and empty, then into their places would slip the straight-backed chairs and round table which seem, so well does one know them, to have belonged to oneself: the book-shelf full of the many-sized volumes, octavo and quarto, with cobbler-mended, unlettered covers, which would stand against that wall; here would hang *The Lady Blanch*,

gained for himself the privilege while on earth of chaperoning three hundred dames in paradise. Unfortunately thus philanthropic a husband, should he die first, leaves, of course, three hundred widows behind him to live hated, despised, persecuted till death.

Under British rule, Ramabai says:—"Doubtless many improvements have been introduced into India, but to these woman owes nothing, nay, they take away even the few consolations she once had. That life which becomes unbearable after her husband dies, she may now no longer offer up honourably on his funeral pyre. Since there are now water pipes and gas in the city houses, the poor little child widow is deprived of the gossip at the well, or of the trip to some neighbour's to borrow a light." The Pundita then described with that rapidity and sarcasm and simple refinement, peculiar to her, all the ghastly degradation to which women are subject. They have ever the meanest apartments. They must only eat what their husbands leave, and never walk before him. They are even beaten; but, it is a satisfaction to learn, the wife sometimes proves the stronger in such frays, and then the right of might is exercised to quite an unlimited degree.

Ramabai's descriptions of Hindu girls' high schools, which, by the way, no orthodox young damsels would be permitted to attend, was worthy of Voltaire. The Indian students' text books are enriched by an account of the proclamation of 1858, the fable of "The dog and the piece of meat," a British version of the Siege of Lucknow, and "how we are devils to the English and they are angels to us; and how we are deceitful."

When invited to attend the Educational Commission in England, Pundita Ramabai said that she wanted secular schools for India. But, alas! it seems many, whose zeal for the Church quite swallowed up by their charity for humanity, fought shy of subscribing to any scheme which was not going to make good Churchwomen of at least one-half the Indian female population. On the whole the Pundita found Britishers as lavish with advice as they were chary of their shekels. Then her passionate prayer that we should not send out missionaries who believed however slightly in woman's inferiority was original, pathetic, and bold enough to make conventional gentlemen of St. Paul's ideas tremble again. Why should man be spoken of as the head of the woman? Why the story of the fall? Why might women not administer the sacraments? (Ramabai's time in the States was well spent). Finally we were asked to give money, not advice. There is an advisory committee in India.

The Pundita's scheme seemed so just, so broad, so far above the petty sectarian enterprises, that I begged her to tell me something more about it. She responded most cordially. In a simple gown of black and white, and with closely cut hair, she seemed almost child like, but for her firm, proud face. Between the eyes is the mysterious caste mark, a tiny circle tattooed in blue with a line drawn through it longitudinally. Prof. F. Max Muller beautifully describes her as one "who has tasted well nigh every bitterness that human life can present to a woman's lips, but who is as courageous as ever, and determined, so long as her frail body can hold her strong soul, to fight the battle of her sisters against native intolerance and English indifference."

"For whom is the school chiefly intended, Ramabai?"  
 "For the child-widows. You see at twenty-one they have a right to dispose of themselves as they please."

"To the poorer and middle class women missionaries may gain access, but they are rigidly excluded from intercourse with those of the high caste."

"I want \$25,000 for the building of a school, and the annual payment of \$5,000 will meet the current expenses. I intend taking two lady professors from the States with me; one has already been engaged. Yes, I shall teach myself in the school."

"How was your scheme received in England. Weren't the people averse to so thoroughly secular an enterprise?"

"O! the English were very kind, but of course many would not support me because the school was not under the Anglican Church. One gentleman in particular, very well known for all good works [and here was named too prominent an individual nowadays], refused me aid on account of this. Yes, the Americans are certainly less conventional, and from them I have had much encouragement. Since you write to Toronto, you may tell the good people there they can aid me by the formation of circles."

Now a circle, I learn from the printed papers Ramabai gave me, is formed by a small number of people who pledge themselves to give annually for the space of ten years, a certain fixed sum of money, to be transmitted to the "Ramabai Association." This association has for president, the Rev. Edward E. Hale, D.D.; and for vice-presidents, among others, the Rev. Phillips Brooks, and Miss Frances E. Willard.

Surely to day, when in the multiplicity of creeds there is distraction, we must feel relieved to discover work whose end may be found neither in synagogue nor mosque, basilica nor meeting hall, church nor chapel, but simply in aiding human beings. It seems best and safest after all when we can say: "For the deed's sake have I done the deed."

LOUIS LLOYD.

BULGARIAN peasant-women are extremely robust and hardy, though they are, as a rule, short of stature. They are thickly set, their chests well developed, and their limbs muscular from constant toil in the open air. Their Tartar origin shows itself in their high, projecting cheek bones, short snub noses, and little twinkling eyes. Social life among this class of the population differs from that of the Greeks chiefly in the position of the women. A Bulgarian bulka, or goodwife, takes an almost equal share with her husband in the bread-winning, and consequently her word has considerable weight in the family council. Like all women in the East she is sober and thrifty, keeps at least the inside of her house clean and tidy, cooks palatable food, spins, weaves, knits, and sews all the clothes for the family.