

I have witnessed some ridiculous and almost incredible instances of these defects. It appears to me that nothing can be better contrived to defeat its legitimate end than a large dinner party in the London season—sixteen, for instance. The names of the guests are generally so announced that it is difficult to hear them, and in the earlier part of the year the assembling takes place in such obscurity that it is impossible to see. Then there is often a tedious and stupefying interval of waiting, caused perhaps by some affected fashionable, some important politician, or some gorgeously-decked matron, or it may be by some culinary accident. At last comes the formal business of descending into the dining-room, where the blaze of light produces by degrees sundry recognitions; but many a slight acquaintance is prevented from being renewed by the chilling mode of assembling. In the long days the light is more favorable, but the waiting is generally more tedious, and half the guests are perhaps leaving the park, when they ought to be sitting down to dinner. At table, intercourse is prevented as much as possible by a huge centre-piece of plate and flowers, which cuts off about one-half the company from the other, and some very awkward mistakes have taken place in consequence from guests having made personal observations upon those who were exactly opposite to them. It seems strange that people should be invited, to be hidden from one another. Besides the centre-piece, there are usually massive branches to assist in interrupting communication; and perhaps you are placed between two persons with whom you are not acquainted, and have no community of interest to induce you to become so, for in the present overgrown state of

society a new acquaintance, except for some particular reason, is an encumbrance to be avoided. When the company is arranged, then comes the perpetual motions of the attendants, the perpetual declining of what you do not want, and the perpetual waiting for what you do, or a silent resignation to your fate. To desire a potato, and to see a dish handed to your next neighbor, and taking its course in a direction from you, round an immense table, with occasional retrograde movements and digressions, is one of the unsatisfactory occurrences which frequently take place; but perhaps the most distressing incident in a grand dinner is to be asked to take champagne, and, after much delay, to see the butler extract the bottle from the cooler, and hold it nearly parallel to the horizon, in order to calculate how much he is to put into the first glass to leave any for the second. To relieve him and yourself from the chilling difficulty, the only alternative is to change your mind, and prefer sherry, which, under the circumstances, has rather an awkward effect. These, and an infinity of minor evils, are constantly experienced amid the greatest displays, and they have from sad experience made me come to the conclusion that a combination of state and calculation is the horror of horrors. Some good bread and cheese, and a jug of ale comfortably set before me, and heartily given, are heaven and earth in comparison. I must not omit to mention, among other obstacles to sociability, the present excessive breadth of fashionable tables for the purpose of holding, first, the cumbrous ornaments and lights before spoken of; secondly, in some cases, the dessert, at the same time with the side-dishes; and, lastly, each person's cover, with