

SATIRE AND PERSONAL GOSSIP.

The vile taste for satire and personal gossip will not be eradicated, I suppose, while the elements of curiosity and malice remain in human nature; but as a fashion of literature; I think it is passing away; at all events it is not my forte. Long experience of what is called "the world," of the folly, duplicity, shallowness, selfishness, which meet us at every turn, soon unsettles our youthful creed. If it only led to the knowledge of good and evil, it were well; if it only taught us to despise the illusions and retire from the pleasure of the world, it would be better. But it destroys our belief—it dims our perception of all abstract truth, virtue and happiness; it turns life into a jest, and a very dull one too. It makes us indifferent to beauty, and incredulous of goodness; it teaches us to consider self as the centre on which all actions turn, and to which all motives are to be referred. While we are yet young, and the passions, powers and feelings, in their full activity, create to us a world within, we cannot look fairly on the world without; all things then are good. When first we throw ourselves forth, and meet burrs and briars on every side, which stick in our very hearts; and fair tempting fruits which turn to bitter ashes in the taste, then we exclaim with impatience, that all things are evil. But at length comes the calm hour when they who look beyond the superficies of things begin to discern their true bearings; when the perceptive of evil, or sorrow, or sin, brings also the perception of some opposite good, which awakens our indulgence, or the knowledge of the cause which excites our pity. Thus it is with me. I can smile, nay, I can laugh still, to see folly, vanity, absurdity, meanness, exposed by scornful wit, and depicted by others, in fictitious light and brilliant. But these very things, when I encounter the reality, rather make me sad than merry, and take away all the inclination, if I had the power, to hold them up to derision. Your professed satirists always send me to think upon the opposite sentiment in Shakespeare, on "the mischievous soul sin of chiding sin." I remember once hearing a poem of Barry Cornwall's (he read it to me) about a strange-winged creature that, having the lineaments of a man, yet preyed on a man, and afterwards coming to a stream to drink, and beholding his own face therein, and discovering that he had made his prey of a creature like himself, pined away with repentance. So should those do, who having made themselves mischievous mirth out of the sins and sorrows of others, remembering their own humanity, and seeing within themselves the same lineaments—so should they grieve and pine away, self-punished. I abhor the spirit of ridicule, I dread it, and I despise it. I abhor it, because it is in direct contradiction to the mind and serious spirit of christianity; I fear it, because we find that in every state of society in which it has prevailed as a fashion, and has given the tone to the manners and literature, it has marked the moral degradation and approaching destruction of that society; and I despise it because it is the usual resource of the shallow and the base mind, and, when wielded by the strongest hand with the purest intentions, an inefficient means of good. The spirit of satire, reversing the spirit of mercy which is twice blessed, seems to me twice accursed! evil in those who indulge it—evil to those who are the objects of it.—*Mrs. Jameson.*

LADIES IN AMERICA.

So much more has naturally been observed by travellers of American manners in stages and steam-boats than in private houses, that all has been said, over and over again, that the subject deserves. I need only testify that I do not think the Americans eat faster than other people, on the whole. The celerity at hotel-tables is remarkable; but so it is in stage-coach travellers in England, who are allowed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour for dining. In private houses, I was never aware of being hurried. The cheerful, unintermitting civility of all gentlemen travellers, throughout the country, is very striking to a stranger. The degree of consideration shown to women is, in my opinion, greater than is rational, or good for either party; but the manners of an American stage-coach

might afford a valuable lesson and example to many classes of Europeans who have a high opinion of their own civilization. I do not think it rational or fair that every gentleman, whether old or young, sick or well, weary or untired, should, as a matter of course, yield up the best places in the stage to any lady passenger. I do not think it rational or fair that five gentlemen should ride on the top of the coach—where there is no accommodation for holding on, and no resting-place for the feet—for some hours of a July day in Virginia, that a young lady, who was slightly delicate, might have room to lay up her feet, and change her posture as she pleased. It is obvious that, if she was not strong enough to travel on common terms in the stage, her family should have travelled in an extra, or staid behind, or done any thing rather than allow five persons to risk their health and sacrifice their comfort for the sake of one. Whatever may be the good moral effects of such self-renunciation on the tempers of the gentlemen, the custom is very injurious to ladies. Their travelling manners are any thing but amiable. While on a journey, women who appear well enough in their homes, present all the characteristics of spoiled children. Screaming and trembling at the apprehension of danger are not uncommon; but there is something far worse in the cool selfishness with which they accept the best of every thing, at any sacrifice to others, and usually, in the south and west, without a word or look of acknowledgment. They are as like spoiled children when the gentlemen are not present to be sacrificed to them, in the inn parlour, while waiting for meals or the stage, and in the cabin of a steam-boat. I never saw any manner so repulsive as that of many American ladies on board steam-boats. They look as if they supposed you mean to injure them, till you show to the contrary. The suspicious side glance, or the full stare, the cold, immovable observation, the bristling self-defence the moment you come near, the cool pushing to get the best places, every thing said and done without the least trace of trust or cheerfulness, these are the disagreeable consequences of the ladies being petted and humoured as they are. The New England ladies, who are compelled by their superior numbers to depend less upon the care of others, are far happier and pleasanter companions in a journey than those of the rest of the country.—*Miss Martineau.*

GOOD TALKERS.

No man since Sheridan has actually been a good converser. A mere man of anecdote may be amusing, but he is not a good converser, he is a walking jest-book, an edition of Joe Millar in coat and breeches; a reciter of scraps out of Dryden or Pope, with now and then a stanza from Byron to show that he has not grown too old for the rising generation, is not a good converser, but a walking commonplace book, a mutilated copy of "the elegant extracts." A repeater of the reminiscences of the last century who plagues the table still with newspaper paragraphs, new fifty years ago, assumes a superiority for having lived in the days of the departed great, though he lived no more connected with them than a rat in one of their stables; the man who rises in his chair, and settles all questions by, "Sir, I saw Mr. Fox, nay, saw him frequently; he was a short man, with a round stomach and a large head; I heard him speak, sir, and I shall never hear such eloquence again, though the one-half of his speech was lost in his own sputtering, and the other half in the applause of the house." This reminiscent is not a good converser, but a walking turnpike, through which the great and the little pass alike, and leave nothing but halfpenny tickets behind. But incomparably the most alarming of the whole tribe, the *bore par excellence*, is the academic, whose life, between the college and the churchyard, seems to be one great gulf, the world a nohentity, and no image in his mind but the absurdities of some head of a college, dead, &c. fifty years ago, and as obscure in his life as ever he was in his grave. The quoter of Horace, to prove that a venison-pasty is not a plum-pudding, deliberately talking Aristotle over his sherry, and in his moments of confidence mouthing the last half dozen lines of the *Iliad*; this man is

not a good converser, but a public nuisance, and ought to be extinguished by petition to the two houses of the legislature; he is a fly leaf of Lilly's Grammar, scratched over with the autographs of booby scholarship.

Sir James Mackintosh was an ambitious converser, and therefore not a good one. He overdid his work, had a prodigious memory, with prodigious quotations, ticketed like an attorney's pigeon-holes, and between long recitations from Dryden, and forgotten fragments of the *Edinburgh Review*, was among the most innocent and intolerable men of his time. Sir Walter Scott was clever in all things, and therefore in conversation. All his recollections were Scottish, and though amusing and characteristic, Englishmen were but slowly brought to give up their souls to the memories of the Hopes, the Blairs, and Mac-kenzies of Auld Reekie. Yet there was a perpetual animation about Sir Walter, a readiness to be happy, and make everybody else happy; an absence of all discoverable sense of self, and a kind of conversational goodwill to all round the table, that made him always pleasing. He had the true conversational temper. No affectation of superiority, no harshness of remark, no severity in looking at men or times, no occasional sullenness. He was always in the vein, and never without some pleasant anecdote, just of the right length, and just odd enough to amuse. It is a thousand pities that in the latter years of his life he did not write his *recollections*. It would have been one of the most amusing pieces of nature and eccentricity in the world. But he was no wit. His pleasantries were of the memory, and except by the quaintness which seems to be impressed on the Scottish idiom, and the dry humour, which seems equally national, he seldom "set the table in a roar."

The Marquis Wellesley would be a good converser, except for the misfortune of his having gone to Eton. The "fifth form" rises before him as the Weird Sisters before Macbeth. It perpetually molests, mystifies, and masters him. He quotes all through his walking hours. If he drops asleep, which he does of late, in the best company, he slides from a discussion on Perigord pie into a sarcasm from Juvenal, or an episode from Silius Italicus. His walking hours are rendered unhappy to himself and mankind by alternate citations from Martial and the "Marrattah war." But, of all men, living or dead, Sheridan was the best converser. Poor Richard! poor, indeed! thy life was an old "almanack," a catalogue of sunrises and sunsets, fasts and feasts, and all not worth a penny when the year was done. * * * He was the wit of wits after all; and the departing genius of conversation, crushing together the bones and brains of all the conversationists before or since, ought to build a monument of them over the spot where this pleasant and unhappy, powerful and feeble, brilliant and extinguished luminary of the table, the Commons, and the stage, is wedded to the worm. "Sheridan, too, had his conversational faults. *Nemo omnibus horis.*" Which, being interpreted, is no one can be always telling the best stories, and saying the most sparkling things in the world. He was uneven. He was either all cloud or all sunshine. But from the cloud sometimes shot a flash that was more brilliant than all sunshine.—[From the shrewd and entertaining *World we live in*,—*Blackwood's Magazine.*]

FAITHFUL ELOQUENCE.—The eloquence of the pulpit shone conspicuously in the introduction of a sermon by the celebrated Massillon before Louis XIV. king of France, from the words of the Redeemer, Matt. v. 4; "Blessed are they that mourn." The preacher began—"If the world addressed your majesty from this place, the world would not say, Blessed are they that mourn." The world would say, 'Blessed is the prince who has never fought, but to conquer; who has filled the universe with his name: who, through the whole course of a long and flourishing reign, enjoys in splendour all that men admire—extent of conquest, the esteem of his enemies, the love of his people, the wisdom of his laws.' But, sire, the language of the gospel is not the language of the world."