

## MIND THE PAINT.

BY ARTHUR MURSELL.

THE plainest lessons are those that demand the most frequent and emphatic enforcement. We need to be reminded of common truths quite as much as to be instructed in new ones. We require to be told what we *do* know, as well as what we *don't* know. Now, there is nothing suggested by this title which is not well enough known and understood. But the moral of the subject is one our familiarity with which has tended to breed contempt for it. "Mind the paint." Take care of mere outsiders. Don't be too readily captivated by appearances. Examine before you decide. Taste and try before you buy. Keep your judgment awake as well as your eyes open. Don't be made a fool of. These are the homely maxims embodied in the phrase. Very commonplace; but on that account too often neglected and forgotten.

Mind the paint! It is a comprehensive injunction. It touches an immense surface in these artificial times. Nearly everything is more or less painted. Mammas paint their daughters with artificial graces, and paint themselves with artificial cheeks, artificial hair, artificial teeth, artificial pretensions. Nothing is considered "finished" till it is painted. And so boys and girls are sent to finishing schools, where a little veneer is put on to enable them to pass muster in the world. This process of finishing consists in peppering the memory with a few French phrases, and educating the fingers to play two or three show pieces, and getting up the valse to perfection, and generally smothering nature under a counterpane of art, as completely as the little princes were smothered in the Tower. Tradesmen paint their wares in colours which are the reverse of "fast"; young men paint themselves in colours which are very fast indeed. Walk down the street, and at every lamp-post some fresh sham confronts you. Here is a brawling dun inviting you to a mock auction: Mind the paint. Here is a Cheap John selling cutlery and customers both at once, and making merchandise of trash and trust in one transaction. Mind the paint. Here is the little urchin dancing before you with his "fuseses a halfpenny a box." Try before you buy; for I once got an empty box. Mind the paint. Here is a mysterious-looking lout who pokes a hand-bill into your hand, in which some quack doctor undertakes to heal the sick, and almost raise the dead in three days. Mind the paint. There is the sailor who has never seen the sea, with his coat-sleeve pinned up to his breast, and his right arm either shot off at Trafalgar, or else stuck snugly down inside his shirt, and a placard full of piteous appeals fastened on his stomach. Mind the paint. There is a shop window where they are selling at an "enormous sacrifice," and where the things in the window are ticketed with the shillings in very large figures, and elevenpence three farthings in very small ones, and where they don't sell you the article you ask for, but another exactly similar inside. Mind the paint. Here is the canarybird man who offers you a brilliant canary, which from some cause or other loses its colour and note in its first bath. Mind the paint. Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut as you rub shoulders with the world; for if you "shut your eyes and open your mouth" you may be sure what "Jack will send you" will be the reverse of agreeable.

It is a thankless thing to be always putting folks upon their guard against each other, and to stir up suspicion amongst the livers in one street. But there are some sort of "friends" of whom wise men will be very chary and shy. Those very sudden friends, those love-at-first-sight sort of people, who are ready to lay down their lives for you before you have had time to lay down your umbrella, these men are best avoided. Mind the paint, for it is a thin lacquering of sham, and only means mischief.

And mind the paint in social habit. There's many a house much too near your own, perhaps, more gaily painted than your cottage. A handsome lamp gleams over the door. Perhaps a great glass vat is hung up at the entrance, and the attractions of "Kinahan's LL," and somebody's else XX, and Dublin stout, and Burton ale, and Lorne whisky, and London gin, and Cognac brandy, and "early purl" and "milk punch," and "cordial bitters," and I don't know what else are paraded in golden characters all over the house. There is a snuggerly within, and choice spirits and fragrant fumes to make it snugger still. Oh, mind the paint! Leave the LL and the XX and all the rest of it alone. Don't take those "cordial bitters," or you may find it but a "bitter cordial"

in the long run, and, like Romeo at the tomb of Capulet, where the bones of Juliet's ancestors "lay pack'd," may say:—

"Come bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide,  
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on  
The dashing rocks thy sea-sick, weary bark."

Home may look humble and dingy by the side of these blazing stows, where brains are stolen, hearts steeled, and manhood stupefied; but it is better painted than that place, in *faster* colours for endurance if not so flashy for the moment. Painted with the light of loving eyes, and the red of tender lips, and the gold of rippling smiles, it shows the truest hues, the spectrum of hope's sweetest rainbow. Would that our young men prized a home evening, with sisters round about them, more than a saturnalia amidst smoky billiard-rooms, with the jargon of the castanet of "flukes" and "hazards," and the monotone of busy "markers" as their only music. Many a maternal heart-ache would be spared by such a choice.

Let the last warning of this topic be borne to our young people by a little bird from the twigs of the tree of knowledge and of wisdom. Young man! when you hear a shuffle on the stones behind you as you walk under the lamps at night, be deaf to the sound; and when you see an ambling syren sidle up to whisper in your ear, pass on; mind the paint, for it is laid on thick—"Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." Young woman! when yonder dandy lecher comes and months his slattery to your pride, and seeks with liquorish phrase and sugary arts to jeopardise your honour, bid him begone. Mind the paint, and spurn him with the kindled ire of virtue citadelled and garrisoned in an honest woman's soul. Young men and maidens; old men and children! Be true! true to self, to each other, and to God. Let all your flowers be nature's flowers, touched by her pencil and chastened by her sun. And aim to be *overlaid* and *inlaid* with that grace by which all false paint is chased away; and the true colour shall show upon your brow when you come forth in Christ's rising light and risen likeness!

[This article, with several others by the same author, will shortly appear in book form, under the title of "Random Sketches," forming one of a very attractive series of illustrated sixpenny books being issued by Mr. Longley.]

## BALM.

Dreamily drifting downward,  
The apple blossoms come,  
In the flush of the golden evening,  
As the little birds fly home;  
Softly, softly falling,  
Falling to the ground,  
The air is pink with the blossoms,  
Drifting like spirits around.

Freshly the fragrance floateth  
Out on the sunset air,  
Softly the light breeze wafts it  
In at the window there;  
Where softly, softly sleeping,  
In a slumber long and deep,  
Lie a mother and her baby,  
And o'er them none to weep.

Freshly the breeze comes, waiting  
In at the window there,  
A shower of scented snow-flakes  
On the woman's hair—  
On to the snowy bosom—  
On to the baby's cheek—  
Like a sign of pardon and healing  
To the erring and the weak.

Oh, heart so warm and weary,  
Walking the ways of life;  
The world shall not judge thee longer,  
Nor be with thee at strife.  
Thou hast found the balm of healing,  
God's rest is upon thee now  
And His fragrant benediction,  
In the blossoms on thy brow.