

SPECULUM VITÆ.

Let us look in the glass for a moment,
Let us brush off the mist from the face—
The mirror of life that is broken
When Death in our ear knells the token
To crumble in space.

We must fall whether praying or pining,
Whether fearing or mocking the blow.
Brush the mist from the mirror, then, trembling:
The grave is no place for dissembling—
There vaunting lies low.

The eyes, as they gaze to earth's glory,
Peer into that mirror of pain
Where the slain of our years lies all gory,
Bent over by grim shadows hoary
Recording each stain.

Not a blot nor a blemish escapes them,
The sins of the lone and the crowd.
The crime where we pandered or paltered,
The dark things that lips never faltered
There cry out aloud.

They are there, and no tempests can hide them:
They glow with accusing and shame.
Tho' the years be all dead, they are living,
Mid the silence they cry for forgiving
With direful acclaim.

On the wreck-plank of life is there pardon
When joy is worn hollow in sin?
When the heart sees no light in the sparkle,
Nor gloom where the drowsy waves darkle
O'er foam and kin?

Then brush the world's mist from the mirror
While life in our bosom is sweet,
And turn, with a love of the purest,
O'er pathways the fairest and surest
The trace of our feet.

SWANSDOWN VILLA.

We are not rich, but we are better off than people think us, which is my idea of comfort. Live in a somewhat quieter style than your income might fairly allow, and you have a margin. Ostentation is a very nice thing for people who like it, but it necessitates pulling at your expenditure to make ends meet; and then, if the income tax is doubled or another child comes, you are worried and perplexed. We have two children and an aunt, and desire no increase to our family. On the aunt side we are pretty safe; on the child side we hope for the best, but there is no knowing. The rising generation is very perverse, and crops up occasionally in the most unexpected way.

Aunt Sarah has lived with us ever since the second year of our marriage, when she had the misfortune to lose her Fido: and being of an affectionate disposition, bound to love something, she fixed on our baby as a fit object for attachment. She has her two rooms and her own maid, and can be as independent as she pleases. Of course, the fact makes no difference in our feelings toward her or in our desire for her comfort, but I mention incidentally that her money is entirely at her own disposal, and that she has a good deal of it. She is only my aunt by marriage, but I am quite as fond of her as I could be of a blood relation, perhaps more so, for since it is notorious that a man loves his wife better than himself (or ought to), it seems to follow by analogy that he must also prefer her family to his own, especially any member of it to whom he feels grateful for what she will very probably do for him or for his children some day.

Aunt Sarah liked our home. It was close to London; yet a park where fresh, almost country, air could be breathed was within a short walk. Water, too, was visible from the drawing-room windows; and as the happiest portion of her life had been spent on the banks of the Severn, she was partial to water and liked to watch the vessels passing to and fro. It is true that our substitute for a river was but the canal in Regent's Park, but still it pleased her; and probably we should never have left the suburb of Art if we had not been pretty nearly blown out of it by the famous gunpowder explosion which created such a panic early one morning a few years ago. When the powder-barge blew up it shattered our windows and Aunt Sarah's nerves.

When my wife had assured herself that the children were safe, she went to Aunt Sarah's room, and presently her voice rose in wild alarm: "Charles, Charles! Aunt Sarah's gone!" I was much shocked, thinking she alluded to a fatal effect. "And you must go after her directly."

This was even a harder blow, for I fancied my spouse had been frightened out of her wits. "Go after her!" I exclaimed.

"Yes; the hall door is open; she must have run out into the road. Oh, do follow her at once!"

I obeyed without delay, though my costume was grotesque and insufficient; and taking, fortunately, the right turning, came presently upon the poor old lady, who was standing bewildered at a street corner, with a bed-candle in her hand. I knew her by instinct, or I should never have recognized her in her night attire, which consisted of a variety of wraps and the most portentous night-cap that imagination can conjure up. It was some minutes before I could coax her back; and when at length she took my arm and allowed me to lead her away, the spectacle we presented must have been curious.

The effect of this event upon Aunt Sarah's nerves was so serious that she could not bear to remain in the same neighbourhood. It was vain that I related to her the precaution of that legendary mathematician who, happening to be on board a frigate during a naval action, thrust his head into the first shot-hole, and remained in that position, like a nautical ostrich, till the firing was over, having made a rapid calculation of the enormous odds against two balls striking in precisely the same spot. She only replied that he was a very wicked man to tempt Provi-

dence, and for her part she would stay with the Weadles, at Tunbridge Wells, until we could get settled in a less explosive neighbourhood.

Now, Mrs. Weadle was another niece, an innocent woman enough by nature, but married to a designing husband, who moulded her plastic character as he willed. They had often invited Aunt Sarah to stay with them, and professed a strong attachment to her; but it is my sad suspicion that they were actuated by mercenary motives alone. It was much to be feared that they might ingratiate themselves unduly in the course of a very long visit, and their son might be fostered into that place held by our little Sarah in the will and affections of her elderly relative. It was true that Aunt Sarah preferred girls to boys; that the only child the Weadles had was masculine, while both of ours were feminine; and that she had taken a particular fancy to the little girl who was named after her. But history, biography and experience combine to teach us that ladies are occasionally fickle: Aunt Sarah might be converted to boys in general, and the Weadle youth in particular.

"It will not do to leave dear aunt long with the Weadles," said my wife. "I fear that they will not make her comfortable."

She would have expressed her meaning more clearly if she had left out the *not*, but I understood her, and acquiesced. "We will look out for a house in a neighbourhood she will like at once," I replied.

"Let it be on the banks of the Thames: she likes water, and there is none at Tunbridge Wells," continued my better half innocently. "I will write an account of our prospects of succeeding in finding a place to suit her every other day."

We had gone to Hastings directly after the explosion, which took place late in the autumn, and had spent the winter there. It was in March that Aunt Sarah went to stay with the Weadles, and that the above conversation was held. It is my firm opinion, derived from experiences in house-hunting at the time, that if a gold medal were offered for the most ingenious perversion of facts, a house-agent would win it. A desirable mansion or a picturesque villa described by one of these gentry resembles the real article about as much as a theatrical castle seen from the pit does the same erection viewed from the wings. As for suppression of truth, that I suppose is to be expected, since the law which exonerates a man from criminalizing himself may be inferred to extend to his property, and therefore to the property of other people intrusted to his disposal. But the general result of all this positive and negative deception is to give the house hunter an immense amount of trouble and anxiety, and to cure him of any blind confidence in his fellow-men forever. For three consecutive weeks my wife and I saw over twenty houses per week, so we ought to know. It is true that the great majority of these tenements, which promised well upon paper, were so obviously unsuitable to us that a glance sufficed to show they would not do. When the spacious apartments proved to be seven feet high, or the eight good bedrooms resolved themselves into five, with three cupboards, we did not waste much time, beyond that taken up by the journey to and fro. But the disadvantages of other houses were not so immediately obvious. It was only during spring-tides that the cellars and kitchens of Fluvial Lodge were under water. The faint smell which floated about Upas Villa could not be detected when windows and doors were open, and inquiries in the neighbourhood alone brought out the remarkable susceptibility of a long succession of tenants to fevers of a typhoid character. It was only when the wind lay in a southerly or easterly direction that the near neighbourhood of the Golden Guano Company's Works to the Lilacs became obvious; and we should have committed ourselves irreversibly in five years of that unique residence if a breeze had not sprung up in the quarter named, on the occasion of our third visit. We were likewise very nearly fixing ourselves in the Hermitage, so little perceptible was the throb of the water-works' engine hard by while you were moving about, talking, and interested in other matters. Yet from what we learned afterward we might just as well have taken up our abode on board a screw-steamer. Port wine could not deposit its bees-wing or ceilings retain their plaster, so earnest and unceasing was the vibration. At last, when we were well-nigh in despair, the very place we wanted turned up. My wife and I—we generally hunted in couples—were walking disconsolately, not to say sulkily, along a quiet road on our way back to the railway station, after an unsatisfactory inspection of an incipient ruin, which might have been rendered habitable by the outlay of 2,000*l.* or so, when we came to a high, dirty-white wall with a door in it, and on the door there was nailed a notice board:

"To Let. Inquire within."

"Why, here is a house in Eyotham which we have not seen!" exclaimed my wife.

"It was not down in any agent's book," said I. "I wonder what it is like!"

"A jail or a convent, to judge from this side of it, which is all wall."

"Never mind; let us look at it."

So we stopped and pulled at a bell-handle at intervals, until a deaf char-woman let us in to very pleasant-looking premises. All the gloom was confined to the side facing the road; once through the door, all was bright and cheerful enough, especially when the shutters were opened. The rooms were of good size and height, the kitchen dry, the roof and floors apparently sound, the cupboards deep and plentiful, the

fixtures convenient. A pretty lawn, shaded by handsome trees, sloped down to the banks of the Thames, where there was a picturesque boat-house. The kitchen-garden was ample, with a good store of fruit trees in it; the stabling sufficient for our modest wants. We certainly saw all this under favourable auspices. It was the first really balmy day of early spring; the sun was shining, the birds were singing, the river sparkling, and the buds on the trees seemed to be growing greener every minute. We really thought that we had at length hit upon the very thing. Not that we were over-sanguine as we rode back to town; we had been too often disappointed not to fear some hitch or some fatal drawback.

The more we saw of Swansdown Villa, however, the better we liked it. The only reason for its being empty was the exorbitant rent demanded by the proprietor; but since that would be divided between Aunt Sarah and myself, it was not so serious an obstacle in our case. As for that estimable relative, when she saw the place she was charmed; and to cut a long story short, we happily rescued her out of the designing hands of the Weadles, and established her comfortably in her new home. Not too soon; for Weadle had gained a certain ascendancy over her, and a correspondence has been kept up with that branch of the family ever since.

For a time we were in constant expectation of some unthought-of defect coming to light in our new home; but weeks passed on without smells cropping up, or kitchen boilers bursting, or any other domestic calamities occurring, and we gradually grew easy. We boated, we fished, we made pleasant acquaintances among our neighbours, we picniced, we practiced lawn tennis, and thoroughly enjoyed the summer, which extended itself into October; Aunt Sarah being as happy as any one in a quiet sort of way, and recovering in a great measure from the shock she had received: for though I have spoken of that explosion in a somewhat light tone, the poor old lady's nerves were seriously jarred by it.

The pleasant weather died off very suddenly at last. A fog, a frost, and three days' perpetual rain closed the season effectually. The boat was hauled up into its dry-dock; the garden games were packed away carefully; and my wife and I, who are partial to theatrical entertainments, began somewhat to regret our distance from town.

At breakfast on the 3rd of November, Aunt Sarah said: "If you are thinking of having any fire-works to amuse the children on the 5th (Guy Fawkes' Day), Charles, I should like to contribute." I left an egg half-decapitated, like a victim in the hands of an unskilful executioner, so astounded was I. We had been devising how we should keep the flare of squibs, and the banging of maroons in the distance from the eyes and ears of our relative, and had arranged to have all the shutters in the house closed, and all the curtains drawn at a very early hour on the eventful evening, dreading lest any such sight or sound should recall the alarming episode of the year before.

"Why, you look quite scared, my dear," she added to my wife; "it does not do to give way to unreasonable nervousness. We are many miles away from that dreadful canal now."

I have often observed that invalids and nervous people defeat all calculation of their likes and dislikes in this way, and yet I was surprised. Not wishing Aunt Sarah to see that I thought her weaker than she was, however, I entered with alacrity into the scheme, went to London and purchased a neat assortment of pretty combustibles that very afternoon, and spent the 4th and the morning of the 5th in making arrangements for their effective display. The fussiness of these preparations was absurd enough, I have no doubt, for I had not launched out into anything elaborate, but had contented myself with very simple and familiar pieces. Still, it required some thought and study to find out how to let off even these with advantage, so inexperienced was I. However, there were printed directions in my box, and by following these carefully, I hoped to please my not too critical spectators. These were posted at the drawing-room window, which looked out upon the lawn where the exhibition was to take place; and soon after dinner on a most favourable evening, dark, dry and still, I sallied out with a box of vesuvians in my hand, and opened the entertainment by lighting the touch-paper of a neat case, which presently began to burn with intense brightness, causing the trees, the river, and all other objects to appear blue, then green, then rosy, then intensely dark; quite an allegorical representation of a human life. Next came a cluster of Roman candles, which fizzed and threw up coloured balls in a satisfactory manner enough. Then I let off a firework which was to run backward and forward along a string which I had fastened for the purpose between two trees. It started fairly enough, but stuck at the further end, and had to be stirred up with a hoe before it would fly back again. However, I alone knew that it was intended to act otherwise. Next we had a Jack-in-the-box, which terminated in a volcanic eruption of crackers darting and banging into the air.

I was most doubtful about the success of the rockets. I had collected all the big door-keys in the house, and had tied them firmly to the sides of the chairs, so that the rocket-sticks might be supported in them comfortably, like canes and umbrellas in a stand. But when the box of fire-works came down no sticks were sent with it, so I had to fit and regulate them by my own private judgment, which had no experience

to guide it; only a vague impression that the rocket, when fixed to the stick, should balance an inch or two below the head. Our neighbour on the right was curious in vegetables, and glass frames were spread all over his grounds, so that it would never do to incline the missiles in that direction. In front, however, was the river, into which the sticks would fall harmlessly; and on the right was a wharf, for the lading and unloading of what merchandise I did not know—our shrubbery was planted out too thickly to get a glimpse at it; coal, probably, I conjectured. At any rate it might fairly be supposed that an empty case with a light lath attached to it would do no harm if it fell within the precincts or on to one of the barges moored off it. So I fixed the rockets with a slight inclination to the left, to make sure of avoiding the cucumber and melon frames.

It was with some doubt as to how the thing would behave that I applied a sputtering vesuvian to the touch-paper of the first. It smouldered so long that I feared it had gone out, and was just about to apply a second match when a stream of fire shot out with a suddenness which made me jump a yard back, and away soared the firework in the most satisfactory manner high into the air, where it burst, well over the river, and coloured stars floated away from it. There was a tapping at the window, to which I went. "It's beautiful," said a voice through the glass; "but we could not see it burst well. The large willow tree was in the way." To avoid this I directed the other rockets more to the left. Some behaved as satisfactorily as the first; others, in consequence, probably, of insufficient sticks, not quite so well, as they reached their apogee and turned to come back before they exploded. One, indeed, which took a most erratic course and fell in the direction of the wharf, must have been very near the earth or water when it burst, for I heard the bang, but could see nothing but a reflection above the trees on the left.

I had just dispatched two more rockets skyward when I heard a rattling and a kicking against the piling, and a deep and agitated voice called out: "Hi! for goodness sake stop those fireworks! Do you want to murder the whole parish at one go?"

"They are nearly over now," said I. "I am sorry that rocket fell in your premises; but those two are directed more to the front." Whish! whish! they went as I spoke.

The man's voice rose to a howl. "Are you mad, to send those things flying about next door to a powder-wharf? Light another, and I'll have the law of you."

"Powder-wharf!" I cried aghast.

"Aye, powder-wharf, as you must have known; and a large three-parts laden lying off it, which your rocket only missed by about a yard."

"I did not know it!" cried I; "and it was an abominable shame not to tell me. Is it likely I would have taken the house if I had known that such a thing was in the neighbourhood?"

"P'raps that's why they didn't tell ye; though there's no possible danger unless people play such mad pranks as yours."

A violent tapping at the drawing-room window was followed by its being opened, and my wife's voice inquired whether anything was the matter.

"Nothing," said I, "only it is all over. I was looking to see if I had forgotten anything."

"But I heard voices."

"O yes; a neighbour. Afraid, you know, that the falling rocket-sticks might damage his premises. Shut the window; the children will catch cold. I shall be in directly." Then rushing back to the piling, I implored the powder-man not to say anything about the erratic rocket; and fearing lest the alarm should have made him thirsty, pressed a sovereign upon him to moisten his throat with. He accepted it, observed mystically that mum was the word, and retired.

Whether in the interest of his employers or in mine, I know not, but the powder man has been faithful. Mum has been the word ever since. Yet I feel like the character in the modern novel who has committed the crime, and lives for three mortal volumes in constant dread of exposure. It is not that I apprehend any positive danger of being levitated, together with my family, for I have made enquiries, and the precautions taken at the wharf render an accident well-nigh impossible. But supposing Aunt Sarah were to discover that the barges she admires so much on a summer's evening are akin to the one which blew her into the street (as she firmly believes was the case) on a former occasion. I have got a lease of Swansdown Villa for seven years; I have underlet the other house at a loss. The Weadles have been asked to stay with us, and can not be put off. If they learn the character of the trade carried on next door, the game will be up, and Aunt Sarah lost to us forever.

CONSUMPTION CURED.

An old physician, retired from practice, having had placed in his hands by an East India missionary the formula of a simple vegetable remedy, for the speedy and permanent cure of consumption, bronchitis, catarrh, asthma, and all throat and lung affections, also a positive and radical cure for nervous debility and all nervous complaints, after having tested its wonderful curative powers in thousands of cases, has felt it his duty to make it known to his suffering fellows. Actuated by this motive, and a desire to relieve human suffering, I will send, free of charge, to all who desire it, this recipe, with full directions for preparing and using, in German, French, or English. Sent by mail by addressing with stamp, naming this paper, W. W. Sherar, 149 Powers' Block, Rochester, N. Y.