

The Science of Shopping

A LECTURE FOR THE LADIES.

The love of the chase, a ruling passion of the Anglo-Saxon, is not confined to the hunters in leather breeches and top-boots.—There is hunting in petticoats and crinolines also, and the town shares with the country the excitement of the national pastime.—Bargain-hunting is the civic and feminine form of the propensity. This is to our woman-kind what deer-stalking or fox-hunting is to their husbands and brothers. There is the Regent-street hunt, and the Oxford-street hunt. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones beat up Soho, and Miss Brown and Miss Robinson have a fine run, every good hunting-day, from Charing-cross to Cheap-side, for it may be observed that our sportswomen usually hunt in couples. At this time of the year there is often a close resemblance between the game of the streets and the fields; if it is not the wild animal itself that Mrs. Smith is trotting after, it is commonly the fur in the shape of a cheap muslin, or a wonderful prize of a boa. Darlings of shawls, however, and loves of bonnets, are bargains always in season. Tally-ho after a cashmere for a quarter of its value, or a French silk for next to nothing. The great preservers of this sort of game are the shops of those gallant and self-devoting tradesmen who make no secret of their dismal resolution to ruin themselves for the benefit of Mrs. John Bull and her daughters. Several shops may be seen at this moment in the principal trading streets, placarded from the ground to the attics with inscriptions in glaring capitals, proclaiming that each shop is kept open for no other purpose but to beggar the shopkeeper and enrich his customers. The proprietor of one is a Curtius, who announces his inflexible determination to jump into the insolvent Court, reckless what becomes of himself, provided Mrs. Smith obliges him by only paying a guinea for a velvet which has cost him five. On the opposite side is a Spartan furrier, who, not to be outdone by the Roman, has made up his mind to sell the finest genuine ermine at the price of rabbit-skins, though bankruptcy stares him straight in the face. Not far off is a desperate mercer, who was on the point of hanging himself with his own ribbons; but on second thoughts it occurred to him to offer them to the wives of the cockneys at 70 per cent. under what he paid the manufacturer for them. Some of these romantic tradesmen assign no motive for deliberately choosing the road to ruin. They are resolved—there is no more about it. Others, however, seem to feel that such a method of shopkeeping requires some little explanation; and accordingly they have a stock of reasons on hand. One alleges dissolution of partnership, or domestic tribulation; another is on the point of emigrating; a third is about to open a vaster establishment in another part of the town; a fourth (this is the newest excuse we have noticed) is going to improve and decorate his premises; the painter and gilder are to go to work on a particular day, and before that day every inch of muslin in his shop and every yard of linen must be disposed of, without hesitation or reserve; in fact his goods must be flung into the street, if the City Madams refuse to come and take them at the ridiculous figures with which they are docketed. But the funniest tale, flimsy as the trash sold in shops of this character, is sufficient to ensnare the bargain-hunters. The shops that monopolize their favours are the very shops which persons with a grain of common sense would carefully shun, correctly

inferring fraud within from the audacious falsehoods blazoned without. "Wonderful!" cries Mrs. Brown. "How absurdly cheap!" exclaims Mrs. Robinson. "How can they do it?" asks simple Mrs. Jones, or Mrs. Smith. It never occurs to any matron or spinster of the whole field that the thing said to be done cannot be done at all; that there is nothing wonderful or ridiculous in the transaction, but that there should be such gross ignorance to be found in muslin or dunty as to be imposed on by such bold and transparent trickery. The usual acuteness of the sex deserts them before a shop pasted all over with lies as gross as mountains. The very circumstances that ought to rouse all their feminine suspicions strike them stone-blind. Humbug one would suppose, ought to be more easily known to be humbug, when advertised in letters of pantomimic magnitude; and the female mind most unenlightened on the science of economy might at least be expected to "smell a rat," when a shopkeeper professes to carry on his business on the principle of turning himself. Our countrywomen may be well assured that in transactions with such traders, the ruin or the loss is altogether on the side of the purchaser. The self-sacrificing Mr. Titmouse is the victimiser, not the victim. He is doing Mrs. Smith, and not undoing himself and his little Titmouse. He sells nothing but trash, and makes a very handsome profit by selling at the price he puts on it, which in nine cases out of ten is a much higher price (compared with the intrinsic worth of the article) than the honest dealer next-door charges for a corresponding honest commodity. The truth is that the goods sold in these roguish establishments are manufactured expressly for them, from the vilest materials, fabricated with knavish skill to counterfeit genuineness, and enable the retailer to palm them upon the simple ones as prodigies of cheapness. Even those who are content with indifferent articles ought to beware of the shops where they are offered as the best that can be made, at prices sufficient of themselves to prove the cheat. Low as the sums asked may be absolutely, they would be lower still, if either the tradesman was not a swindler, or his customer not a goose. The bargain-hunting *mater familias* is therefore a most extravagant person. If she really wants a good thing, she goes to counters where good things are not to be had. If she wants an inferior commodity, she still frequents shops where she is certain enough to be satisfied in that particular, but where, in all human probability, she pays exorbitantly "dear for her whistle." We hope they do not neglect instruction on these points in those Ladies' Colleges which are one of the curious characteristics of the times. Surely no woman ought to be suffered to graduate in the female arts without at least being taught that a fair silk is only to be had for a fair price, and that there is no honest or profitable dealing except upon terms of mutual advantage to buyer and seller.

Candlemas Day.

It is recorded of that responsible "cattle lifter," Rob Roy, that though, out of respect to the noble family of Perth, he, towards the close of his mind-boggling curriculum, became reconciled to the Church of Rome, he never attempted to justify all the rites and tenets of that communion. In particular, to the last moment he upheld a testimony against the usage of extreme unction, as involving a prodigal waste of oil, or oil. On the same principle, we should hope, that the Glasgow ladies had settled at an early age, and to the number of thousands, the

faithful, (as our friend Bruyere hath it,) commemorated, and in some places still do commemorate, this second day of February. We cannot question that the thirty freebooter denounced the obese canonical expenditure of candles, which has given the popular designation to the "feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary."

Like many other wrinkles of Romanism, the use of "dips" and "moulds," on the festival in question, took its origin in heathen times. We are in the English Festivals all interested to the the subjoined purport about the priests.

"Sometime when the Romans by great might and royal power conquered all the world, they were so proud that they forgot God, and made them divers gods after their own lust. And so among them all they had a god that they called Mars, that had been afore a notable knight in battaille; and so they preyed to him for help, and for that they would speed the better of this knight, the people prayed and did great worship to his mother, that was called Februa, after which woman much people have opinion that the month February is called. Wherefore the second day of this month is Candlemas Day. The Romans this night went about the city of Rome with torches and candles burning in worship of this woman Februa, for hope to have the more helpe and succoure of her sonne Mars. Then there was a Pope that was called Sergius, and when he saw Christian people drawn to this false maumetry and untrue belief, he thought to nudo this foule use and custom, and turn it to God's worship, and our Lady's. He gave commandment, therefore, that all Christian people should come to church and offer a candle burning, in the worship that they did to this woman Februa, and do worship to our Lady and to her sonne our Lord Jesus Christ. So that now this feast is solemnly hallow'd throwe all Christendome. And every man and woman of convenable age is bound to come to church and offer up their candles, as though they were bodily with our Lady, hoping for this reverence and worship that they do to our Lady to have a great reward in Heaven."

In ancient times the mothers of England used to carry tapers when they came out to be "churched." Camden in his "Remains" tells us a "right merrie" story bearing upon this custom. William the Conqueror, having for a protracted season kept his chamber by reason of sickness, it was sneeringly observed by the French Monarch—"The King of England lieth long in child-bed." This having come to the ears of William, he exclaimed—"By the rood, when I am churched, there shall be a thousand lights in France! which I eat 'he performed,' says Camden—"within a few days after, waiting the French territories with fire and sword."

Much virtue was attributed to candles blessed upon Candlemas day, as appears from the following passage in the "hallowing" prayer.—"Oh Lord Jesus Christ, bless thou this creature of a waten taper, that as that as thou hast granted it unto man's use for the expelling of darkness, it may receive such a strength and blessing throwe the token of the holy crosse, that in what places soever it be lighted or set, the Devil may avoid out of those habitations, and tremble for feare, and fly away discouraged, and presume no more to inquiet those that serve thee."

Up to a very recent period the school boys of Scotland were wont on this epoch to present the pedagogues with donations of money, receiving in return doles of oranges, apples, and comfits. A correspondent informs us that in his "green and suld day," he frequently paid Candlemas tribute to a well-known Glasgow dominie named Andrew Bankier. The aforesaid Andrew, our informant adds, looked upon the offering more as exigible tax than a "benevolence," and used to apply the "laws" to such pupils as he had reason to suspect kept back a portion of the coins, which men (patron) had destined for the replenishment of his exchequer.

Our ancestors were wont to attach some importance to the wickerwork of the day. The burning of the wicker was a solemn and a doubtless