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A FEW REMARKS ON THE ADVANTAGES OF
A SINGLE LIFE.*

(Read before the Members of the Shakspeare Club.)

One of the most common objections to a single life is that it is *solitary*—that old maids and old bachelors live altogether by themselves. This is certainly a mistake. It is true that they enjoy a much greater degree of quietude than married people, but this is very different from solitude. They are relieved from the vulgar troubles of life, to be more capable of appreciating its enjoyments. They live for the world and not by the world. They contribute largely to the common stock of happiness, without drawing on the sympathies of others. Married people, on the contrary, are proverbially selfish. You never meet a Benedict but he makes a demand on your feelings. His wife has got the tooth-ache—the baby has caught a cold—or something has happened to the nurse, which has put the whole house in an uproar. If you visit him at home, the conversation is sure to turn on some matter connected with his establishment. He has imported a new kitchen stove, or he is trying some extraordinary experiment connected with the education of his children. With the bachelor, it is quite different. He has all mankind for his family, and does his best to be on good terms with the whole of them. There is a broad path to his heart, which every man may find who conducts himself like a gentleman and a Christian. His house is an hostelry, to which his friends are all welcome, and requested to make themselves at ease. The laws which govern there, are not like those of the Medes and Persians. There are no stiff rules respecting the position of the chairs, and no particular government for those independent members, the legs. A man may spit on the hearth, and not be excommunicated for ever—he may sing “jolly nose,” and yet hope to be forgiven. As to solitude, a bachelor is never alone. He has only to go into his chamber, and take down his Shakspeare, and he shall have glorious company. When he sends forth his cards, he shall have princes and lords, and fair ladies, and brave courtiers, and rare wits for his companions. He may summon the dark-eyed Beatrice from the arbour, or bring the laughter-loving Rosalind from the forest. If he is merry, there are Falstaff and Sir Andrew for the calling. If he is sad, Timon and the melancholy Jacques shall come sit at his table. He shall make love with Juliet, or weep with Cordelia—Isabella shall teach him fortitude—Hermione, endurance. He shall be chivalrous with Mercutio—compassionate with Orlando. In every humour he shall find some one to his mind—some one to keep him company.

How different is this to the married man! He has but one existence, and when he gets into the presence of his wife, dare scarcely call that his own. Whatever

his feelings may have been before marriage, afterwards their course is uniform enough. He enters upon a new career, and he is made to feel it. If he doesn't acknowledge the fearful change in words, he does by his looks. He feels himself, and every one else feels, that the spirit has gone out of him. His life is henceforth dull, slothful, spiritless, monotonous! Eggs, coffee, dry toast, curtain-lectures, gruel—slavery! One by one, every comfort is taken from him, and in a very short space of time, like the lean and slippers pantaloons of the play, he finds himself *sans* old acquaintances, *sans* wine, *sans* music, *sans* pipes, *sans* everything!

I confess that for myself, I never yet took leave of a friend on the verge of matrimony, without feeling very sorrowful. It is so very much like putting a man into his coffin, that it distresses me. It matters not that the unfortunate tells you, as he is sure to tell you—that marriage will make no difference in him, I know better—it will make a difference. It will put a chasm between us that cannot be passed over, save only by imitating his folly. It is the end of our friendship—the tale-piece of our love. From that moment, we are strangers in the world. It is true that he may not wish this, and will perhaps do all he can to prevent it, but here, as in every thing else, he will find himself the “slave of the ring.” Wives never tolerate their husbands before marriage acquaintances. Charles Lamb knew this, and most admirably has he described it in a chapter of his Essays devoted to that particular subject.

The ceremony of a wedding is to me a most melancholy spectacle. The church on such occasions looks like a temple of Juggernaut, at which a poor victim is about to be sacrificed. The bridesmaids, and the bell pullers, and the women with flowers, are all conspirators in the work, and urge on the poor doomed one as the priests in the East urge on their victim to self-destruction. If he hesitate, there is a dark-looking father, or a six foot brother, to keep him to his promise. If he strive to reason, there is the mother, with her gold-edged-china philosophy, and the young lady, with her pretty looks, to court him into folly. Turn which way he will, there is some seduction—some net spread to prevent escape. Is he poor? marriage is the royal road to economy. Is he sick? a wife will comfort him. Wants he brains? a woman's wit supplies them. In short, use what argument he may, there is some substantial reason ready why he should surrender up his happiness and his liberty.

I have, however, noticed, on the two or three occasions that I could bring my feelings to allow me to attend the funeral of a bachelor, that it is the ladies who engross by far the greater portion of the merriment. I can easily understand this feeling. Every such instance, is, of course, to them, a fresh occasion for triumph. Their own amiable thoughts tell them all that which the bride has managed to conceal from her partner. He sees in his now firmly-riveted wife, only the little delicate creature he led up to the altar—but

* Continued from page 83.