

Woman and Her Work

The time honored joke about woman being unable to hold her tongue originated some time before the deluge, I fancy, and it has been in active service ever since. When Gutenberg discovered the art of printing somewhere in the middle of the fifteenth century and triumphantly completed the first printing press the initial sentence that he set up was a neat little epigram he had heard his grandfather get off about the inability of lovely woman to keep her tongue; he set it in leaded bourgeois, and it came out so well in the proof that he knew his invention was a success, and rejoiced accordingly. I don't think that joke has ever been out of print since, though the original copy has long been lost.

Of course there are scores of women in the world who are quite as well qualified for holding their tongues as men, we have all met them, and can vouch for the fact that they are almost too silent. I myself have known two women in my life time, who carried their dislike of useless conversation to such an extent, that on my first acquaintance with them, I really believed they had been deprived of speech by nature. But the trouble is the world will not believe in the existence of taciturn woman no matter how strong the evidence of her existence; it has grown fond of the moss grown jokes; it has been hearing for so many centuries, and clings to them as old folks cling to traditions of their youth. We frequently read of individual cases of women who have voluntarily given up speaking for ten, twenty and even forty years, either in fulfillment of some vow, or as a means of self mortification, but perhaps the most forcible reputation of all the slanderous sayings about woman's unruly member, is the existence in France of a sisterhood of which singularly little seems to be known, but which resembles the order of the famous Trappist monks in the order of perpetual silence which its members take.

The convent of the Silent Women as it is called was founded at the beginning of the present century, and although no one knows positively who originated the sombre order, it is believed that a lady of the French court was the foundress. Disappointed by the world, or suffering from the burden of some great sorrow, or great sin, she resolved to go quietly away and sink her identity utterly and so well did she succeed that her very name is lost to posterity, but her work lives, and the convent now contains fifty seven of her disciples. It is situated near Biarritz, down in a narrow ravine, its high walled enclosure surrounded by groves of beech and wild olives, but inside the walls no tree is permitted to grow but the solemn yew, emblem of death. The straight narrow walls which intersect the convent lawns are bordered with yew, and to each nun is allotted a walk, where alone, and in absolute silence never exchanging a word with a human being, never even hearing the sound of her own voice, and never raising her eyes from the ground, she paces until her death. Even the fresh air of heaven is not permitted to breathe upon her face for as she walks her heavy black cowl is drawn over her face, so that she can neither see or be seen. These devoted little women eat only vegetables, and drink nothing but water; their habit is a coarse black robe, with a heavy cowl, and between the shoulders is a white cross.

The silent sisters rise at four o'clock in the morning summer and winter, and till half past seven they tell their beads in the chapel. The refectory is dark, gloomy and never heated, it is not even floored, the feet sinking deep into sand on entering. Each sister has a little drawer where all her table utensils are kept, and the idea of absolute solitude is preserved as far as possible, the nuns all caring for their own tableware. Sometimes during a meal the Superior suddenly rings a bell, and each sister is supposed to pause instantly, even if her hand is raised in the act of eating.

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and not to move until the bell rings again. This discipline is supposed to teach patience and submission.

Here these women live year in, and year out, alive, and yet virtually dead, never even raising their eyes to God's beautiful sky, or standing in his sunlight, in their wish to be delivered from the world and its temptations. If strangers come to the convent gates and wish to be shown through the grounds, or the convent itself the office is performed by nuns from a near-by convent who do not observe the rule of silence. Each sister digs her own grave, and when her time comes she is laid in it by her companions, care being taken that no mark of any kind should indicate the spot where she lies, every trace of her existence and identity being thus obliterated in death as in life.

Strange to say these women who are so willing to spend their lives in self sacrifice of the hardest kind perform no good works. Unlike all other sisterhoods they do no charity never attending the sick or suffering, never rescuing wayfarers, visiting the poor or even teaching children; their whole lives are devoted to the purely selfish work of mortifying the flesh in order to purify, and ultimately save their own souls. The souls of others seem to have no interest for them. There is a cold deliberate selfishness about this silent sisterhood—the only one of its kind in the world, fortunately—which almost makes one shudder, and which, when contrasted with such noble orders as the Sisters of Charity, seems almost like a relic of barbarous ages.

But all the same it seems to prove that an entire community of women can spend their lives together without speaking, and that is a valuable object lesson for at scoffing world.

Somehow or other I have neither heard nor read anything about Mrs. Sternaman, the Upper Canada woman who was virtually convicted of murdering two husbands by poison, being overwhelmed with the attentions usually showered on convicted murderers by tender and sympathetic members of our sex. Can it be possible that Mrs. Sternaman's sex has anything to do with this most singular omission? One would almost be inclined to think so, and it does really seem very hard that when a woman goes out of her way, as this one has done, to prove her perfect equality with man, she should be defrauded of some of the most valuable privileges accorded to the sex. Had this woman possessed the good fortune to write her name Oliver, instead of Olive Sternaman, and had the crime of which she was accused been that of wife instead of husband murder there is no doubt that she would have enjoyed herself very much more during her trial, and the period after her sentence when she fully expected to pay the extreme penalty of the law, would have passed more pleasantly. Tender hearted members of our sex would have absolutely besieged her with calls, and she would have been wept and prayed over in the most touching manner. Lovely women would have been glad to aid her, and taken the deepest interest in her physical, and spiritual welfare, soft hands would have pressed hers in tenderest sympathy, gentle voices whispered words of cheer, and her cell would doubtless have resembled a hothouse, from the number of flowers lavished upon her by feminine admirers. Choice fruits, and dainty dishes would have poured in upon her, and her life would have been a dream of luxury, while sad thoughts, and lonely moments would have been rendered impossible by the number of visitors who would have thronged the jail all eager for the honor of an introduction and the chance of shaking hands with so distinguished a criminal. Indeed it is more than likely that several romantic gifts would have yearned to relieve the tedium of prison life for her, by marrying her on the spot; and she would have enjoyed a success only second to that achieved by a society belle in her first season.

But, alas! Mrs. Sternaman was a woman and though her crime was sufficiently heinous in the eyes of the law to secure her conviction, and condemnation, and though matters went so far in her case that the death watch had been set, and there seemed no earthly chance of escape for her, she was left pretty much to "dree her weird alone," and in the brief descriptions which have been given to the public of her prison life, no mention has been made of the sympathy offered her by members of her own sex, no reference to flowers, fruit, or other table luxuries having been lavished upon her. Being a woman she seems to have been left severely alone in her hour of bitter trial, and when her sister woman noticed her at all it has only been to condemn her in terms that were almost blood-thirsty, and to clamor for her execution even before the law had pronounced her guilty. It has been a melancholy instance of woman's inhumanity to woman, and now that those in authority have decided to grant the unfortunate woman a new trial, I wish from my heart the men of Canada would make up their minds to give women a practical illustration of their own methods, by elevating Mrs. Sternaman into a heroine, lavishing the same attentions upon her that fall to the lot of murderers, constituting themselves her spiritual and temporal comforters, turning her cell into a sort of salon, offering to marry her, and otherwise conducting themselves as far as possible after the manner of the gentler sex under like circumstances thus endeavoring to cure a very prominent evil of the present day, on homoeopathic principles.

The Russian blouse is a very up-to-date garment and when worn by the right person it is very stylish and fetching, but unless you are quite certain that you are the right person, and possess the proper figure, do not, I beg of you girls, be persuaded into wearing one, for it is a pitfall which will lure you on to destruction as far as your appearance is concerned.

If you are tall slight and above all straight in figure have a Russian blouse by all means, and you will look well in it no matter if you are so thin that you seem nothing but angles. But let the dumpy woman, and even the women who are tall and stout, beware of the insidious garment as she would of any other false friend, for it will make a caricature of her, and is just the most trying thing she can possibly select in the bodice, or coat line. I saw a Russian blouse on a little woman who fully made up in breadth what she lacked in height, the other day and I wondered how any dressmaker could have the conscience to disfigure a customer to such an extent—but after all perhaps it was not the dressmaker's fault, since it is not given to all of us to choose what is most becoming to our special style in dress.

By the way fashion authorities agree that the day of the Russian blouse is over, and it is soon to be replaced by a pretty little coat which is made close fitting in the back, flared a little on each side of the front and worn with a belt and buckle at both front and back.

Some pretty evening, or rather party dresses for girls from twelve to sixteen, are being shown. For the older girls they are made of colored net trimmed with narrow satin ribbon in a color which matches. One very pretty little gown is bright red net over taffeta and red satin ribbon in clusters of three rows, encircles the skirt, and trims the ruffles. Another is of white bengaline trimmed with lace insertion, and puffs of pink chiffon. Little dancing gowns for younger children are made chiefly of taffeta and washing silks, but liberty wool crepons, crepe de chine and cashmeres in light colors are also employed. White china silk accordeon plaided, and with a quaint little empire over-bodice of white satin with lace, forms an ideal party dress for a small girl of six, or seven.

There are not many hints of future fashions to be gleaned in these days, but two facts which seem to be really settled about the prospective scheme of dress, all the smaller-than-ever sleeve, and the plain collar band.

The stylish little puff at the top of the sleeve to which we have clung with such loving tenacity and which alone has made the tight sleeve endurable, is to disappear altogether, while the merciful frills at the neck, a boom and blessing to so many will follow suit. It really seems as if we were to be condemned to have change of some kind, even if it is not for the better, in order to provide employment for those who design the fashions.

A decided novelty this season in trimming cloth gowns is machine stitching, done in patterns like the old fashioned quilting. The cloth is padded underneath to give it the raised appearance desired, and the design covers the blouse, bodice and the sleeves, and usually extends entirely around the skirt. It is an odd, and exceedingly pretty form of decoration.

ASTRA.

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MADE IT WARM FOR HIM.

A Merchant Found a Way to Punish a Persistent Pilferer.

A professional man in St. Louis, who was accustomed during the summer months to have his fruit sent to him by express from his farm in central Missouri, was much annoyed one season by the pilferings of baggagemen. No matter how carefully his choice peaches or pears were boxed, the packages were sure to be broken into and despoiled with a free hand. He stood the loss without a murmur for several weeks when, having noticed that the boxes which came in express car No. 37 were rather worse robbed than those shipped in other cars, he decided to mete out a little righteous retribution. In pursuance of his scheme, he wrote a letter of instruction to the manager of his farm, and patiently awaited events.

Three or four days later he received a notification that an express package, addressed to him, was coming in car No. 37, and would reach the city about noon. He went to the station to meet the train, and when it came in, he took a position near the express-car and watched. He had not long to wait. A man whose head and face were swollen beyond recognition came to the door of the car. He was pulling after him in the most careful manner a box that bore marks of having been opened and hastily nailed up again. With a muttered curse, he lowered the box to the truck waiting below to receive it.

"Handle that mighty careful, Jim," he said to the boy with the truck. "For all you know it may have—"

"Sufferin' Job!" interrupted the boy. "What's the matter, Swipesy?"

"Nothing," shortly replied the baggageman. "Be mighty careful how you handle that package. That's all I've got to say to you. Stand out of the way; I'm going to throw this trunk."

The story soon leaked out. Following the instructions he had received, the manager of the farm, by a little cautious night work, captured a hornet's nest boxed it up,

and shipped it on that particular day and in that particular car, in lieu of the peaches which the box was supposed to contain. Fruit-packages addressed to the professional man in question were never meddled with by that baggageman afterward.

Blacks That Are Blacks.

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The Diamond Dye Blacks are scientific successes that are everywhere appreciated by the ladies.

Diamond Dye Fast Black for Wool stands ahead of all other wool dyes for fullness, richness and depth of color. All wool goods when they have become rusty and soiled can be restored to a deep jet black, equal to the best French blacks, and fitted for long years of wear.

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The Diamond Blacks are the best in the world. Ask for them and return all imitations and poor makes.

This was Much too Personal.

A singular dilemma in which a young Washington lady found herself is described by the Post of that city. The young lady, it should be premised, is a member of a certain patriotic society, which lately held an 'open meeting.' The woman who had the affair in charge notified each member of the toast she would be expected to respond to ten days or so before the meeting. To one young woman, whom, as it happened, she did not know personally, she sent the toast, 'Our Flag.' The young woman received it, and at once went to call on the head of the society, in a state of great distress. She simply could not respond to the toast, she said. She didn't know whether a joke was intended, but she had been chafed unmercifully about it already, and wouldn't go near the meeting if she were to be called on to speak on that subject.

"Why, what on earth is wrong with that sentiment?" asked the head of the society. The pretty young woman hesitated. She blushed.

"Well," she said, "you see I'm going to marry a man named Flagg."

Compromise.

Father—Baby say dad! (Encouragingly) D—d—d—
Mother—Baby say mam! (Encouragingly) Mam—mam—
Baby—D—d—dam!

And he Walked on.

They were ca'chieving the somnambulist. "Why is it that you walk in your sleep?" they asked. "Because I can't ride," he replied.

The Men Who Lose.

"Here's to the men who lose—
The touchstone of true worth is not success;
There is a higher life—
Though fate may dash it down, onward to press,
And bravely do one's best."

Here's to the men who lose!
It is the vanquished's graces that I sing,
And this is the toast I choose!
"A best-fought battle is a noble thing,
Here's luck to those who lose!"



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