

## MISCELLANY.

*Old Friends.*—We know all that can be said in laudation of old friends—the people whose worth has been tried and their constancy proved, who have come when you have called and danced when you piped, been faithful in sunshine and shadow alike, not envious of your prosperity nor deserting you in your adversity; old friends, like old wine, losing the crudity of newness, mellowing by keeping, and blending the ripeness of age with the vigour of youth. It is true in certain circumstances and under certain conditions; but the old friend of this ideal type is as hard to find as any other ideal, while bad imitations abound, and life is rendered miserable by them.

There are old friends who make the fact of old friendship a basis for every kind of unpleasantness. Their opinion is not asked, but they volunteer it on all occasions, and are sure to give it in the manner which galls you most, and which you can least resent. They snub you before your latest acquaintances—charming people of good status, with whom you especially desire to stand well; and break up your pretensions of present superiority by that sledge-hammer of old friendship which knocks you down to the ground and will stand no nonsense. The more formal and fastidious your company, the more they will rasp your nerves by the coarse familiarity of their address; and they know no greater pleasure than to put you in an entirely false position by pretending to keep you in your true place. They run in on you at all times, and you have neither an hour undisturbed nor a pursuit uninterrupted, still less a circumstance in your past life kept sacred from them. The strictest orders to your servant are ignored, and they push past any amount of verbal barriers with irresistible force of old friendship to which nothing can be denied. Whatever you are doing you can just see them, they say, smiling; and they have neither conscience nor compassion when they come and eat up your time, which is your money, for the gratification of hearing themselves talk, and of learning how you are getting on. They do not scruple to ask about your affairs direct questions to which perforce you must give an answer, silence or evasion betraying the truth as much as assent; and they will make you a present of their mind on the matter, which, though highly uncomplimentary, you are expected to accept with becoming gratitude and humility. If you have known them in your early boyhood, when you were all uncivilized hailfellows together, they refuse to respect your mature dignity, and will Tom and Dick and Harry you to the end, though you sit in a horsehair wig on the bench, while your class-mate of the country grammar-school, where you both got your rudiments, is only a City clerk, badly paid and married to his landlady's daughter. To women this kind of return from the grave of the past is a dreadful infliction and offenses of danger. The playfellows of the romping hoydenish days dash home, bearded and bronzed, from Australia or California; stride into the calm circle of refined matronhood with the old familiar manner and the old familiar terms; asking Fan or Nell if she remembers this or that adventure on the mountain-side, by the lake, in the wood—topping their query by a meaning laugh as if more remained behind than was expedient to declare. They slap the dignified husband on the back, and call him a d—d lucky dog, telling him that they envy him in his catch, and would gladly stand in his shoes if they could. It was all that cross cornered cursed fate of theirs which sent them off to Australia or California; else he, the dignified husband, would never have had the chance—hey, Fan? and they wink when they say it, as if they had good grounds to go on. The wife is on thorns all the time these hateful visits last; she wonders how she could ever have been on romping terms with such a horror, even in her youngest days, and feels that she shall hate her own name for ever after hearing it mouthed and bawled by her old friend with such aggressive familiarity. The husband, if jealous by nature, begins to look sullen and suspicious. Even if he is not jealous, but only reserved and conventional, he does not like what he sees, still less what he hears: and is more than half inclined to think he has made a mistake, and that Fan or Nell of his bosom would have been better mated with the old friend from the backwoods than with him.

The old friends who turn up in this way at all corners of your life are sure to be needy, and to hold their old friendship as *per se* a claim on your balance at the bank. They stick closer to you than a brother, and you are expected to stick close to

them; and as a sign thereof, to provide for their necessities as so much interest on the old account of affection still running. If you shrink from them and try to shunt them quietly, they go about the world proclaiming your ingratitude, and trumpeting both their claims and their deserts. They deride your present success, which they call stuck-up and mushroom, telling all the minor miseries of your past, when your father found it hard to provide suitably for his large family, and their mother had more than once to give yours a child's frock and pinafore in pity for your rags. They generally contrive to make a division in your circle; and you find some of your new friends look coldly on you because it has been said you have been ungrateful to your old. The whole story may be a myth, the mere coinage of vanity and dissatisfaction; but when did the world stop to prove the truth before it was condemned?

There is no circumstance so accidental, no kindness so trivial, that it cannot be made to constitute a claim to friendship for life, and all that friendship includes—intimacy before the world, pecuniary help when needed, no denial of time, no family secrets, unvarying inclusion in all your entertainments, personal participation in all your successes, liberty to say unpleasant things without offence, to interfere in your arrangements, and to take at least one corner of your soul, and that not a small one, which is not by your own but theirs. Have they, by the merest chance, introduced you to your wife the beautiful heiress, to your husband the "good match"?—the world echoes with the news, and the echoes are never suffered to die out. It is told everywhere, and always as if your happy marriage were the object they had had in view from the earliest times, as if they had lived and worked for a consummation which came about by the purest accident. Have they been helpful and friendly when your first child was born, or nursery sickness was in your house?—you are bought for life, you and your offspring; unless you have had the happy thought of making them sponsors, when they learn the knack of disappearing from your immediate circle, and of only turning up on the formal occasions which do not admit of making presents. Did they introduce you to your first employer?—your subsequent success is the work of their hands, and they bear your fame on their shoulders like complacent Atlases balancing the world. They go about cackling to every one who will listen to them how it was they who first mentioned your name to the Commissioners, and how, in consequence, the Commissioners, gave you that place from whence dates your marvellous rise in life; how it was they who advised your father to send you to sea and so make a man of you, and were the indirect cause of your K. C. B.-ship. But for them you would have been a mere nobody, grubbing in a dingy city office to this day. They gave you your start, and you owe all you are to them. And if you fail to honour their draft on your gratitude to the fullest amount, they proclaim you a defaulter to the most sacred claims and the most pious feelings of humanity. You point the moral of the base ingratitude of man, and are a text on which they preach the sermon of non-intervention in the affairs of others. Let drowning men sink; the weak go to the wall; and on no account let any one trouble himself about the welfare of old friends, if this is to be the reward. Henceforth you are morally branded, and your old friend takes care that the iron shall be hot. There is no service, however trifling, but can be made a yoke to hang round your neck for life; and the more you struggle against it the more it galls you. Your best plan of bearing it is patience, or resolute and decided repudiation, taking all the consequences of evil-speaking without wincing.

To these friends of your own add the friends of the family—those uncomfortable adhesives who cling to you like so many octopods, and are not to be shaken off by any means known to you. They claim you as their own, something in which they have the rights of co-proprietorship, because they knew you when you were in your cradle, and had bored your parents as they want to bore you. It is of no use to say that circumstances are of less weight than character. You and they may stand at opposite poles in thought, in aspiration, in social conditions, and in habits. Nevertheless they insist on that the bare fact of long-time acquaintance is to be of more value than all these vital discrepancies; and you find yourself saddled with friends who are utterly uncongenial to you in every respect, because your father once lived next door to them in the country town where you were born, and spent one evening a week in their society playing long whist for threepenny points. You inherit your weak chest and your snub nose, gout in your blood, and a handful of ugly skeletons in your cupboard—these are things