

RANDOM THOUGHTS.

BY ARTHUR MURSELL.

WHEN invited to offer a few small contributions to this paper, the first difficulty which opposed itself was that of finding a topic, and I began to fear that I should have to whistle for one; and I had indeed begun to do so, when my little bird, hanging up in his cage, began to whistle too. It was a strange note, quite unusual with the little singer, and fell into a kind of threefold chirp, which in its monotonous repetition beat itself out in my musing brain into the very polite sentiment, "Lad-ies first, lad-ies first—ladies first." I thought I would take the hint, and try to offer a hint or two upon a point on which I fear advice is much more often tendered than taken, namely, the choice a woman ought to make of the home which she will fill.

It may, and doubtless does appear incredible to most minds, but it is nevertheless a fact that a lady did once really ask my counsel in an *affaire de cœur*, and took it too. I never was more embarrassed in my life, and never tried to wriggle out of giving a deliverance with greater eagerness, but it was extorted at length by those coaxings which adamant cannot resist, and the cream of my sapience will be found in the following remarks to "all whom they may concern."

There are many who will contradict me, but I am well convinced that man has more to gain by marriage than a woman, and that the woman runs a greater risk than man. The masculine temperament is more restless, and the masculine tastes less domestic than the feminine. Man cannot bear retirement so well as woman, and he seeks either excitement or rest, and until he finds the latter in a home of his own, he seeks the former elsewhere.

We find more young women who can make themselves contented over a novel and some knitting, or who are to be appeased by cats and crochet, than young men who can be happy over a paper, even though sweetened by a pipe. Tobacco and the *Times* soon cloy. Moreover, most young men live alone, and if they want society they must go out to look for it. Young women, on the other hand, live either with their parents, or along with their working companions in their houses of occupation, or in lodgings where they consort together. There is more sociality in their places of abode than in those of young men; and so there ought to be, because, being debarred from nearly all the sources of diversion which young men possess, such as reading-rooms, debating clubs, and public-houses, they require some set-off against this deprivation in the sociality of their dwellings. And here, in this difference of the home lot of each, we find the reason why a man should seek marriage, and why a woman can afford to be cautious in her choice.

Some men seem to think, and act upon the hypothesis, that because a man is usually the actual and active bread-winner, all the advantage is on the woman's side; that his is the sacrifice, and hers the gain. A coarser blunder never muddled a stupid head or hardened an unfeeling heart. The man who has found a thoroughly domestic wife, has found the most lucrative, or perhaps we ought to say productive, investment for his earnings which the money market can offer. If he will use his home as a home, and not as a sort of house of call, or a left-luggage office to stow away his wife and children in, he will find it quite as cheap to keep half-a-dozen in homely comfort as to keep one in vagrant dissipation. Loving is cheaper than loafing. And the husband has no one but his wife to thank for all the comforts of that home. It is she who makes the home for him, not he for her. If he has bought the chairs and tables, and if he pays the gas bill, she creates a rest and comfort that no chairs and tables can supply, and fills it with a light which money cannot purchase, or gas companies produce. A cottage, plus a good wife, becomes a home; a palace, minus a wife, becomes a den. Then pray, Mr. Cobles, with your Cocker's arithmetic calculations, let us hear no more about the gain being all upon the woman's side. What has she left to become the fellow-bearer of the burdens of your life? You found her contented with her lot, and independent. She could have done very well, as far as bread and cheese went, without you. You didn't marry for her sake, but for your own, and you have the lion's share of the advantage, in having a home which is worthy of the name, and a heart which can sympathise with your trials. So get rid of the delusion as fast as you can that you confer an advantage by leading a lady to the altar; it is you who

seek the advantage, and "he who findeth a wife findeth a good thing."

If it is true that the balance of advantage is on the man's side, it follows that the balance of previous wariness and caution should be upon the woman's. It is more his interest than hers to leap, and therefore more incumbent upon her to look before she leaps. The incidence of the trouble arising out of an ill-assorted union, although terrible enough to both, falls most heavily upon the heart and shoulders of the wife. The husband has more distractions than she can very well command, and a mistake in marriage is more supportable to the man than to the woman. Then the advice of the little bird to the "ladies first" is "Look before you leap." Look at the bidder for your hand, and see that he looks at you. Look at his face. Do not reject him because he has not the face of an Adonis; for remember the curls of Hyperion may shade the craft of the satyr. But see that it is an earnest and an honest face—a face that looks straight at you. The little bird will not go so far as to say you should not have any confidence in a man who does not always look straight into your eyes. It is not so easy to look point-blank at a pouting pair of lips, and a roguish pair of eyes, and a dimpled pair of cheeks, especially when you are bent upon the "annexation" of these possessions; and a sidelong glance may be only the index of a genuine feeling. But you must try to distinguish between what is coy and what is sinister. This will become more apparent from the mode in which the suit is pressed. If a man begins to talk pounds, shillings, and pence—to boast about his business or his reputation, and to turn his pockets inside out to show how rich he is, let him see that these are not the baits with which a true heart is to be caught. Ask yourself a few questions as to the probable inducements he may have for seeking your hand. Yes—I know he has seen your pretty face, your curls, your various charms; I know he has beheld how bewitchingly you can waltz, and heard how enchantingly you sing and play. But my bird, although a little bird, is an old bird, and does not stop to pay compliments. So he advises you to use every means of ascertaining whether your admirer is honestly charmed by these fascinations, or whether anything more sordid or less pure lurks behind. If he is so captivated that he cannot help himself, and *must* pop the question, still you can help yourself, and need not all at once say, "Yes," or even, "Ask mamma." Your irresistible charms are sure to nay some one else, so you needn't be desparate. It is a grand mistake to act on the idea that any man is better than no man at all. It is not good for *man* to be alone; but it is far better for a woman to be alone than to have a bad husband. When a man parades his pocket and his position instead of pleading his true regard, it is a *prima facie* presumption that he aims at the purse as much as the person of his quarry. And, whatever the world's garrulous magpies may say, my little bird denounces all mercenary marriages as hateful profanations and ignoble compacts.

Perhaps, however, the rich, and those in good position, usually know well enough how to take care of themselves, without needing any further precautionary chirps from my little bird. But it still whistles a light note of caution to the humbler class, who are often too precipitate about this life-contract. I don't think balls and parties are the best places to begin this tender quest. The beau who makes the best partner in a quadrille will not, as a consequence, make the best partner in life's rough battle. I do not say, on the other hand, that the loudest psalm-singer will do so either. But my little bird has a friend who once built its nest under the eaves of a place where many Christian people used to meet for worship; and it comes and chirps to my bird sometimes, and it says that it has seen more honest and promising faces, and more signs of earnest loving hearts in the comparatively few young men who join in the worship there, than in the fops of fashion who go drawing through the streets on Sundays with a cheroot, preferring "weeds" to worship, and drinking to devotion. Are not some of our Christian young women to some extent responsible for the fewness of our young men who make profession of religion? I wonder whether they have ever thought of this. The great trouble and complaint with nearly all the leaders of our Christian communities is that there is such a small proportion of recruits drawn from the ranks of our young men. To what extent may this be attributable to serious and well-intentioned young women? Surely a profession of religion is not the prerogative simply of women. Few people, even in