

GOOD COMPANY; THE COMMERCIAL ROOM, AND THE BOTTLE.

BY JOHN BURNS.

London; Horsell & Cauldwell, Strand, publishers.

The above is the title of a pamphlet written by a commercial traveller, and which formed the subject of one of his lectures delivered in Exeter Hall, London, and also in most of the large cities of England, Scotland and Wales. Wherever John Burns, the Irish orator appeared, he drew crowded houses and was received with enthusiasm. The announcement of "Good Company; the Commercial Room and the Bottle" never failed to secure a "bumper."

We give the following extracts, feeling assured that they will interest our readers. They lay bear the habits of a large portion of one of the most respectable and useful classes in connexion with the commerce of the greatest trading community in the world. Although the arrangements of hotels in Canada somewhat differ from those of the old country, and the exclusiveness of the English Commercial Room is a thing unknown in America, we regret to say that the evils indicated in this lecture rest upon many of the commercial travellers of this continent also. We now proceed to give Mr. Burns' definition of "Good Company."

"As the first requisite, in the cooking of a hare, is said to be, 'to get the hare,' perhaps we had better first get a correct idea of what we mean by these terms. We know that a great number of words and phrases in our own and every other language convey very different meanings, according to the manner in which, or the class of persons by whom they are used. Thus we often hear of a person being *knocked up* by sickness, when he is more likely *knocked down*; and the Frenchman complained that, when the train in which he was a passenger was about to enter a railway tunnel, where there was barely passing room, his fellow-passengers, instead of telling him to look in, cried, 'Now then, look out!'"

One would think there was but one meaning attached to the word "*good*." Not so. Different people form very different ideas as to what is and what is not *good*. Ask a dram-drinker what is *good*, and he gives you "a glass of grog" as an answer. Ask a teetotaler, and water pumps immediately commence dancing teetotal quadrilles through the drawing-rooms of his imagination. A schoolboy will tell you 'tis an adjective; and you call him a *good* boy; but if he cannot tell its degrees of comparison, you call him a *good-for-nothing*, and, instead of a *good* reward, you threaten him with a *good* thrashing. So with its diminutives and derivations. One of the greatest rascals that ever I knew was a Mr. *Goodman*; and one of the worst murderers that ever lived was Daniel *Good*. Now my good friends are saying, "My goodness! what's all this good for? What is it about?" All about the meaning of the words "GOOD COMPANY." What does it mean? Well, whatever fathers and mothers, and other people of antiquated ideas, may think, "Good Company" does not mean (at least in the vocabulary of *fast life*) the company of those whose lives are well-regulated, and who are thought good men and good citizens. Quite the contrary. Neither does it mean the company of the rich, or of those holding high positions. Mixing with *them* is called "*Moving in*

Good Society," and the terms "Good Company" and "Good Society" are evidently distinct. A man may be too fond of "Good Company" to care much about moving in "Good Society." Neither rank, wealth, position, nor even accomplishments, unless of a certain order, will make a man "Good Company." He may be rich as a Rothschild, famous as a Wellington, polite as a Chesterfield, learned as a Johnson, and yet be (as each of those was, or is considered to be) anything but "Good Company." Vocation or habits (as to morality) has little to do with constituting a man "Good Company." Robert Burns was considered the best Company of his time, so was Sydney Smith; yet one was a loose though glorious poet—a loose liver and a hard drinker; and the other was a good clergyman and an abstainer. When a man says, "So-and-so is the best company I ever enjoyed," he does not mean that he is rich, or moral, or learned: he simply means *that he possesses the power of making you merry and happy while in company with him; such a one as the poet addressed with—*

"I never can forget the soft visions that threw
Their enchantments around me while lingering
with you."

The class of individuals called "*nice young men*" are not considered "Good Company," however they may wish to be considered so. By *nice young men*, I mean those who would, for ever and ever dispense with the use of pocket-handkerchiefs rather than use one without *eau de Cologne*, or not let one corner, at least, peep out the edge of the pocket; who will spend half-an-hour in determining the exact topographical position of a single hair; and whose greatest earthly concern is for the style, cut, and colour of their collars, neckties, and fancy pipes. These may make *conquests*, but never "Good Company."

He who makes the *beau idéal* of "Good Company" is generally what is called an *off-handed man of the world*, which means a man of no place. He has invariably some good qualities of both head and heart. He is liberal to a fault, and good natured and forgiving to a fault. He can keep the company in a round of laughter and a round of glasses at the same time. He can generally sing a good song, and pronounce it a good drop of singing if properly mixed. He can adapt the words of "Dan Tucker" to the opera music of "Beethoven," and the overture of "Tancredi" to the words of the "Ratcatcher's Daughter."

He can argue upon any side of a question, but best on the *wrong* side; indeed he sees no credit in arguing on the right. He can discuss political economy with a Chancellor of the Exchequer or the price of lumber and brimstone with a vendor of lucifer-matches; measure the tail of Donat's comet to a decimal fraction, or analyze the infinitesimal nothingness of a metaphysical idea. He can look in your face with the solemn gravity of Minerva while he is chaffing you out of your boots: in fact he can "be everything by starts;" change "from grave to gay, from lively to severe;" "touch all strings of the lyre, and be master of all." He could laugh, or, like Nero, fiddle, if the city were in a blaze, or cry at the death of a midge; not because he wants feeling, or has too much of it, but because his feelings must be made subservient to fun and pleasure. He lives, not because he was born, and his time has not yet come to die: he lives just for the fun of