

NOTES FROM HAMILTON.

OPENING OF THE LECTURE SEASON—RUMOUR—A MYSTERY.

The "tremendousness" of the events which have transpired in such rapid succession of late has played sad havoc with the "nameless" club. It cannot be said that the several members are any more wide-awake, or sensitive, than other intelligent people, but their habits of observation have been largely developed, and nothing affords them more pleasure than to collect and analyze the phenomena of the day, which enables them to interpret what are generally known as the "signs of the times." They are members of the cosmopolitan school, and their penetrating gaze is of the far-reaching order. There is nothing contracted about them. Although keenly alive to the importance of a thorough knowledge of home matters, yet the affairs of the world at large is wherein they most distinguish themselves. The extent of their knowledge in this respect is entirely astonishing. They are familiar with everything everywhere. They are prepared at all times to give a decided opinion in regard to almost any question concerning any country under the sun. They could have told you, more than a year ago, as to what changes would be made in the map of Europe; Stanley's discoveries in the "Dark Continent" only corroborated their surmises; they knew there would be trouble in Afghanistan; that the fishery award would be repudiated by the United States; that socialism in Germany would become a danger to the State; that the Indians of the Far-West would, sooner or later, awake to a consciousness of their rights; that there would be a ballot revolution in Canada and that the Mackenzie Government would be overthrown. They know the extent of the population, national debt, general resources, etc., of all nations, and they have measured the advancement made by the various peoples in the sciences. They have a knowledge of the art and literature of almost every country, and they are prepared to speak of the system adopted by each for their encouragement. Still, the members of the club are not puffed up with vanity, but are plain, unassuming people. They are quiet and inoffensive, and their habits are very simple. They retire late and fare on the plainest diet (from choice, not from necessity). If there is any one thing that gives them more uneasy concern than another, it is the meagre encouragement which literature and the fine arts receive in this, their native country. This deplorable fact has been to them a grievance of long standing, and they have frequently endeavoured to devise a means by which the country might be aroused from its apathy. It pained them to behold genius struggling to make itself felt amid all the adverse circumstances which combined to keep it down. It seemed strange to them that not one of the wealthy men availed himself of the splendid opportunity to make himself immortal, and have his name honoured by future generations, by donating a fund for the endowment of an Art School. Then the Government might be induced to appropriate a handsome sum annually for the purchase of the best work of art produced by native talent. What a grand stimulus that would be! Then would native genius have something to hope for.

Thus, the friends silently mused, the other evening, as they sat around the grate in which the fire had been kindled for the first time this fall. The countenance of each wore a thoughtful expression and seemed touched with a gentle sadness. The red coals glowed and faded and the curling smoke assumed fantastic shapes as it ascended up the chimney just as naturally as in winters gone by. The rooms were brilliantly lit up, but they might as well have been left in darkness, for the seconds, minutes and hours went by all uncounted, except by the little clock on the mantle. Slicer was the first to arouse himself. Walking over to the sideboard he poured out some refreshments for himself and then invited the friends to join him.

"Autumn; delightful autumn is once more at hand," observed Fitzwiggles, as he proceeded to refill a pipe.

"It is indeed," replied Snuffers, placing his glass upon the table.

"O that youth and summer-time would last forever," exclaimed Heavyseige, half mournfully.

"A beautiful thought," observed McGuffinsby.

"We will investigate it some 'er time."

"Strangle Guffy," suggested Heavyseige.

"His own puns will strangle him some day, if we let him alone," said Fitz, "but think of our torture in the meantime."

"You will wiggle through it, I guess," replied McGuffinsby.

"Friends!" observed Slicer, seriously, "the season is coming on. We must be up and doing. We have a duty to perform; a duty to art, to ourselves, to our country."

"And to our grocer," interrupted Heavyseige; "come, fellows, drink up."

"As I was about to remark," continued Slicer, "a scheme begins to dawn upon me by which we can help on the great cause in which we are all so deeply interested. We must agitate the people and cause them to begin to interest themselves in the development of art. I suggest that a series of able lectures be given during the coming winter."

The suggestion was received in silence. After a little while Fitzwiggles exclaimed emphatically,

"The idea has my hearty approval."

"And mine," said McGuffinsby.

"And mine," repeated Heavyseige. "For my part," observed Snuffers, rising to his feet, "I am glad Slicer's proposition meets with such hearty approval. I have long been of opinion that course of lectures delivered by competent persons who have the subject at heart, would do an incalculable lot of good. The people will—"

"I rise to a point of order," interrupted Fitz.

"We are not the people—it is not necessary to lecture us."

"Bear with him for a moment, friends," pleaded Slicer. "It may be that Snuffers is just practising a little. The whole matter has been arranged by him and myself. The first lecture is to take place next month; here are the cards." Slicer then served each of the party with a card upon which was printed in clear letters:

First of a Series.

LECTURE.

"THE DUTY OF THE STATE TO ART,"

BY

CLARENCE AUGUSTUS SNUFFERS, Esq.

"Great goodness, Snuffers, are you mad?" asked Fitz, in astonishment.

"No, no," replied Slicer, "a beginning has to be made by some one, and Snuffers has consented to run the risk of kindling the fire."

A few days after the announcement of Snuffers' intended lecture had been made public, the friends might have been seen seated around a table in their comfortable rooms in solemn council. All traces of mirthfulness had for the moment disappeared from Fitzwiggles' face. Indeed, each looked as serious as a coxswain in a jury box. Slicer was gazing intently at a mysterious-looking bit of paper which he held in his hand, and which had previously been examined most minutely by every one of the party. It was a message in cypher. It had been handed into the club in the early part of the day, and, upon the outside was written "Private and confidential." They read, and re-read, backwards and sideways; they studied, and compared, and speculated, but no one could arrive at any satisfactory solution of the curious missive.

"Bah; it's some kind of a love-letter," exclaimed Fitzwiggles, after a long pause.

"No, no," said Snuffers, "the more I reflect, the more confusing it becomes."

"I hope it's not one of these infernal distress warrants in disguise," observed Heavyseige.

"It's my opinion," remarked McGuffinsby, "it's nothing more or less than an offer from some one who wants to deliver a lecture."

Meanwhile, Slicer had never taken his eyes off the paper. His diligence was rewarded, for he surprised the party by exclaiming, "I have it, fellows. By transposing a few of the letters I can read: 'Members of the nameless club, your hearty co-operation is most earnestly desired in the establishing of a free and independent newspaper. One that will be untrammelled by party ties, but will boldly advocate the welfare of our common country on the broad basis of 'Canada First.' Think well over the matter. You will hear more from me in a few days.'"

"Nothing more than I expected," remarked McGuffinsby.

"I am not at all surprised," added Heavyseige.

"It will be a grand success," said Fitzwiggles; "I'll take stock in it."

"There never was a better opportunity for such a venture," observed Snuffers; "the country is ripe; such a paper would be hailed with delight everywhere. It could battle for the best interests of this country, and its influence could do more to help our cause than all the lectures that could be delivered between this time and the day of judgment."

"We are all in favour of the movement," said McGuffinsby, "let us adjourn."

W. F. McMAHON.

Hamilton.

A MERCILESS CRIME.

"As you are to be my wife, Valerie, for my sake stop flirting with those abominable fops who attend the parties and receptions that are being given now."

And the speaker, a tall, handsome young man, dressed in an evening suit of dark broadcloth, stood leaning against the arm-chair where sat Valerie Pearl, the acknowledged belle of the little seaside circle, and betrothed to young Gerald Grey, the son of a wealthy city merchant.

"Gerald, I shall do just as I please. The young men pay me attention, and I shall make no outcry against it."

"Then you do not believe me sincere in my regard for you, Valerie."

"I have no reason to doubt it yet, Gerald. You are evidently jealous, and needlessly so; for here in this idle place what else is there to do but to flirt and play the part of a coquette?"

"Valerie, you are heartless—utterly devoid of feeling. You do not care to obey my wishes."

"And you would have me make a nun of myself, and keep away from society. No, Gerald, I do not care to obey you, if that is your desire."

"It is very evident that you care more for the silly attentions of others than you do for me."

"And if I do, what then?" she asked, her blue eyes looking him full in the face,

"You cannot have the consideration for my feelings due from a promised bride; that is all."

"Haven't I plighted you my whole heart once—to you solely? What else is there for me to do?"

"Say that again, Valerie; say that you will be mine," said Gerald, stooping and clasping the white hand which lay upon her pink muslin dress in his, and pressing it to his lips.

"All yours, Gerald. There, don't feel slighted because I now and then look at the people here. Nothing will come of it, I'm sure. Now, Gerald, say that you are sorry for doubting me."

"Well, then, I am sorry," said the lover, pressing a kiss upon her alabaster brow; "and I will try not to be jealous any more."

And presenting his arm to the fair girl, they passed from the verandah of the hotel into the parlour.

In an alcove, partly concealed by draperies, they paused before a little mahogany chess-stand.

Valerie knew the power she held, and she did not scruple to cast side glances now and then towards an adjacent table, where sat several young men playing cards.

The truth was she loved society and excitement, and was as unfit to be the wife of Gerald Grey (who had a naturally jealous disposition), as he was to wed a virago.

"Zounds, what a pretty woman that is in the alcove, Jack!" remarked one of the young men at the table.

"You say pretty; why, that is classical loveliness. She is our regal highness, the queen of the place. By Jove! but you should know her, Harry. She will make you giddy-headed the first ten minutes, and at the end of half an hour desperately in love. But there is young Grey who has her heart and hand; he is terribly jealous, so they say."

"Well, he should take her away to some solitary island where lovers of female beauty cannot spy her out."

"He would, if she cared to go. But, Harry, there is not so much affection between them as there might be; at least, not on her side."

"Perhaps not," responded Harry, languidly.

"Come, I have a little scheme in view. I will go and get my flute, and play a few notes under the window just to try the effect upon the nerves of young Grey."

Accordingly, the party rose and quitted the room, leaving the two lovers sole occupants for the time being.

"There, those inquisitive persons have gone. I hope they will learn manners enough not to stare when they come again," said Gerald.

"I don't think they did so purposely. Young men must use their eyes," said the fair flirt.

"But they stared, and that is an impertinence they will have to answer for," said Gerald, as he arose and abruptly left the room.

He had not been gone long before the low, melodious tones of the "Last Rose of Summer," played upon the flute, came through the window, and ebbed and swelled with the gentle evening breeze until it seemed to be very near, then died away with a low, long-drawn cadence as sweet as the chimings of a silver bell.

"Oh, how tender!" murmured Valerie, as she went out through the open window upon the balcony.

The performer was concealed by some dark bushes, but his presence could be detected by the sound.

Soft and low, thrilling and throbbing, now loud and distinct, then deep and far away, but always tenderly melancholy, it seemed to her the perfect ideal of knightly minstrelsy when lovers went forth to serenade their fair divinities.

She hardly dared think it was meant for her, but breathlessly watched and listened, totally unconscious that the moon had slowly risen from behind some trees, and was shining directly upon her.

Gerald Grey, coming up the avenue from the beach, where he had been smoking his evening cigar, saw her, with the moonlight streaming over her, long before he heard the music of the flute.

He noticed with admiration the almost statue-like mould of her features, and thought as most lovers think, that she was thinking of him.

Alas, how misguided he was! Coming nearer, he could see the lips parted over the pearly teeth into a smile that expressed perfect trust in the present and contentment for the future.

What, then, must he have felt when the music commenced again?

It would be difficult to tell what his feelings were, but there came into his face a terrible light—a passion that convulsed his whole frame, and made him surge to and fro like a drunken man.

"She is false to me! At last I have found out what I suspected; she holds secret meetings with strange parties. She is false! Oh, my Valerie, you are mine no more. Farewell for ever!"

Like a snake with stealthy, noiseless tread, and with dilated, bloodshot eyes, he crept upon the unknown musician. A sound of a falling weight, a low, gurgling groan, and the prostrate form of a man lay behind the clump of foliage where the morrow's sun revealed it to the inmates of the hotel.

The party of young men supposed their friend safe in bed. Could they have known the true situation, and the blanched, horror-stricken face of Gerald Grey on beholding what he had done, they would not have slept so soundly.

Hours afterwards he had put out to sea in a sail-boat, and was far away when the body was discovered the next morning.

The sad event taught Valerie Pearl a practical lesson that a lifetime will never efface.

She may not have loved Gerald Grey as she should have loved him, but the promise was given, and the stigma placed upon her name by the result will never wear away.

Persons travelling abroad now and then meet with a broken-down man who expresses in every lineament of his face the despair from which a judicious woman might have saved him.

FIVE O'CLOCK TEA.

On first appearance, there does not seem much difficulty in arranging a room and the table for a five o'clock tea; but, nevertheless, everybody is not equally happy in managing even such a slight reflection, especially when guests are expected. A few hints, therefore, may not come amiss with regard to this so-called feminine pastime. Anything approaching confusion or disorder should certainly be avoided, and everything should be in its place at the appointed time. The drawing-room nicely decorated with flowers, the hostess at her post, the servants waiting to respond at the slightest sound of the bell, and all things in readiness.

And now with regard to the arrangement of the table. This should be either a round one, or a table made with an underself for cups and saucers. It is usually kept solely for the purpose, and should be wheeled into a convenient spot in the drawing-room, where the hostess can comfortably do the honours and entertain her guests at the same time. A tablecloth worked with a crewel work border is used; but this latter does not harmonize so well with the softer shades of colouring now seen in most drawing-rooms, nor appear in quite such good taste as the ecru tints usually used for art needle work. Then the tea-tray, with the cups, teapot, and cream, and milk jugs, sugar bowl, &c., is put on the table, the silver urn also; and let it be remarked that all these needful accessories should be in the best possible style. A pretty cosy may with advantage be used, as, besides keeping the tea hot, it has the farther advantage of throwing a little colouring on the table when needed. The tea must be strong, if possible; it should not, however, stand too long, as that renders it unwholesome. It is better to make it in relays when guests are expected at different times. Black tea is best to use, and it must be of good quality. Cakes, biscuits, bread and butter cut in slices and neatly rolled, should be on the tea-table, or another close at hand. At this season, especially in the country, where there is abundance of fruit to be easily obtained, some kinds may be placed ready; but these are by no means important, and of course entail tiny china or glass plates, which are not otherwise requisite. The lady of the house, her daughter, or some young relative pours out the tea, and hands it with the cake, bread and butter, &c., to the friends assembled. If there are any gentlemen present, their services are put in requisition. There should be plenty of pretty occasional tables about the drawing-room, on which cups, &c., may be put down; but they must be put in such positions that they will not be easily knocked over.

Where expense is no great object, much taste and refinement may be wisely displayed in the choice of the silver, and also that of the china used on these occasions. Very pretty curious sets, suitable for five o'clock tea, are to be seen in most of the best china shops in our cities. Real old china, too, cups and saucers of quaint shapes and patterns—when not too valuable to use—may with advantage be utilized by way of variety. These afternoon teas, also, are first-rate opportunities for displaying dainty little cream jugs, strangely devised sugar bowls, old-fashioned teaspoons and sugar tongs, and the like, which are too often "hidden under a bushel," or in a cabinet, but which, when thus used, add an air of finish and refinement to the otherwise commonplace appearance of the tea-table.

Of course, to a certain extent, most of these remarks apply to a tea when many guests are expected, but much the same applies to the cosiest of cosy gatherings, an afternoon tea for some few—four at the outside—special friends; and for people living in the town or country it is a charming way of entertaining one's friends, selecting a few congenial ones each time. Then it is true fewer things are wanted, but not less taste, either in the display of china or plate. Small delicacies and choicer "brands"—if we may use the term for tea—may be introduced with advantage; such dainties as would, perhaps, be almost wasted in a large party, but which could not but be appreciated in choice little coteries. Generally, for small gatherings of this kind, a tiny little table is all that is necessary, and usually no urn.

In the winter coffee may be occasionally substituted for tea; but buttered toast for the thin bread and butter, or for the cakes. In the summer—and here again this applies to the country, or at least to the suburbs—the garden is undoubtedly the right place to choose as a meeting place for this pleasant meal; but care must be taken to provide really comfortable easy chairs, dry grass, or at least footstools for the feet; and above all, a shady spot, as free from cold draughts or from hot sun as possible. Enough hints, however, have been given to young housekeepers for the arrangement of this meal, which, after all, is the least arduous of all to order. The rest must be left to individual tastes and peculiar idiosyncracies, which may be brought to bear even upon such an apparently trivial matter as afternoon tea.