

Choice Literature.

A PATENT ATTACHMENT.

(Continued.)

Now, I must say that it was a little strange that on that very morning the back door should be open, and in should be thrust the white clayey face of that man who said that he wished to recommend to me Prester's Patent Attachment to Kerosene Lamps. And he came in and took a chair, and tilted it back against the wall, and begun upon its merits: "You see," he said, "it's the simplest thing in the world. You're looking for a sort of brass fixing, I daresay, from what I said. Well, this attachment is nothing but a little pink powder—looks as if I was trying to sell you some nostrum for your cheeks, don't you? only your cheeks need none. Don't see how you keep such a colour as that and live in the midst of kerosene smoke and gas, as every one does who has not the little pink powder. Innocent looking, isn't it? But just as powerful in its own way as dynamite is in the opposite way. This powder," said he then with emphasis, "is composed of twenty-seven different chemicals. It works like magic, and goes like wild-fire. We're just introducing it, and have had the most tremendous success. I should like to see you buy it, as I see you burn a good many lamps, and your name would make it go in the neighbourhood. Will you let me take one of your lamps, please? And a match? Now you see this little box of pink powder? A pinch of this in every lamp at once, destroys all smell of kerosene, all smell of smoke, indeed, all gas, takes away all the disagreeable atmosphere from the lamp turned down for the night or in the sick-room, prevents the burner from tarnishing, neutralizes grease, and makes explosions impossible! There can't be any explosion without gas. There can't be any gas where this little powder has its chance! In fact, with this little pink powder kerosene becomes as harmless and innocent as water. It's the greatest discovery of the age, madam! It prevents fire, affords absolute safety where there has always before been a degree of danger. It—there—do you see?"

He had opened a lamp, lifted out the burner and the wick, put in a pinch of his powder, set fire to the lower end of the wick, that blazed up a foot in a second, and had then boldly plunged the burning wick down into the kerosene in the lamp. To my open-mouthed wonder it went out as if it had plunged it into cold water. I left him without a word, and with all the spoons on the table, and ran for Rex, who was just sitting on his hat, having stayed to finish the work neglected the evening before.

"Oh, Rex!" I gasped, "come here. There's a man in the kitchen, Prester John, or somebody, who puts out fire with kerosene!"

So Rex came, and the patent attachment man went over his trick again.

"Ah, Rex!" I cried, "to think of it! No smell, no smoke, no gas, no grease, no flaring up, no explosion!"

"That's not the whole of it," said the man. "Will you give me a basin of water?" And he lighted the lamp and set it in the sink, and dashed handful after handful of water over the chimney, that neither broke, nor snapped, nor cracked. "You see again," he said, "you see for yourself, that it anneals the glass, and makes it practically indestructible, saves its cost in chimneys alone in no time."

"What do the insurance companies say to this?" asked Rex.

"Says it spoils their business!"

"Have you any certificates, or papers or references?"

"No, sir. I don't trouble myself to load up with useless paraphernalia. This little box of pink powder is its own certificate."

"Oh, Rex, it doesn't need any other certificate than your own eyesight as to what it does!"

"That it doesn't," said the stranger. "And \$2.75 will make your kerosene harmless for one year. It will be a year before we are round this way again."

"I don't think I care to buy," said Rex, looking steadily at the man.

"All right," was the reply. "That's all I want to know. Much obliged for your attention." And he banded up his affairs and was off in a twinkling.

"The thing I like best about that fellow is his manner of going," said Rex; "that was like business." And then he was off himself as the car came tinkling along.

I ran out after him with a message I had forgotten, but he was gone; and there stood my late visitor buckling a loose strap of his harness.

"Sorry your good man didn't care to buy," said he, glancing up. "He'd rather lose everything by fire than lay out a doubtful penny. I wouldn't have stood out about the price, if that was what he had in mind. Let me see I said \$2.75? I'd rather have let him have it at \$1.75 rather than not have you have it. I suppose he's never afraid of a kerosene lamp's cutting up?"

And then all the visions that could shape themselves of Rex and kerosene lamps, all the flaring and spluttering and sputtering darted before my eyes and echoed in my ears. "I don't care!" cried I. "I'll take it myself at that price." I had some money I'd been keeping apart to make over my bonnet with, and I ran into the house to get it; and when he drove off I was the possessor of a box of pink powder that was to insure perfect safety to my kerosene lamps for a year, and perfect safety to me from Rex's growling and grumbling. No more smoke now; no smell or gas or grease; and never again would Rex start up and spring across the room with fear of the coming explosion.

I put a big pinch of the pink powder into every single lamp, without waiting to draw my breath, in a vague fear, too, that Rex would come and hinder, and I set them all in a row on the kitchen table, and had just lighted them every one, in order to test the chimney for myself, when Mary Stetson came in to borrow some yeast. "You just see here, Mary Stetson," cried I, without bothering about

the yeast—and I opened a lamp and set the wick afire and extinguished it in the kerosene, performing the miracle just as the man had performed it, to my own satisfaction and her bewildered amazement.

"For goodness sake, are you a witch?" said she. "How do you do it? What have you done to them? You must show us how! It's the most tremendous thing I ever saw in my life! Wait a moment and let me run for mother."

"And Mrs. Peters, too," I cried after her. And when she came back there were all the Stetsons and the Peterises, and Miss Ray and the Smiths with her, till the kitchen was full. I didn't mind; I was rather glad of it; their lamps had been held over my head so long that I was glad to show them a thing or two myself!

"It will be the most astonishing moment of your lives," I said. (And it was.) "You see this box of pink powder? A pinch of it lets you—put—out—fire—with—kerosene, prevents all the smoke and soot and gas and smell, and explosions and flaring-ups and everything! We'd have been burned up for sootery if we'd had such a thing about us two hundred years ago. It's made of twenty-seven different chemicals—think of that! and the way it acts is nothing short of a miracle."

"How much did you pay for it, Jane?" asked Miss Ray.

"Well, he asked \$2.75. Oh! and the most wonderful thing of all is the chimneys—at least as wonderful as any. You light that wick, won't you, Mary, and drop it into the kerosene? Just the way you saw me do. Just see here now, the chimneys; they're every one blazing hot, the lamps have been lighted so long. Mercy! the shades are hot, too. Now look here, and hear what you have to say!" And I took the basin of water and dashed a couple of handfuls in two quick sprinklings along the whole line, and crash went every chimney flying into a hundred splinters, and my lovely cut glass shade, my Kohinoor, split into twenty splinters!

At the same moment up flared the kerosene in the lamp into which Mary Stetson had dropped the lighted wick; flashed and steamed to the very ceiling in a pillar of flame and smoke, and that kitchen was cleared in a twinkling of a horde of shrieking women. And I cried "Fire! fire!" with all my strength as I ran, and felt the sound die in my throat, and I saw our home, our dear home, and everything in it, the labour of years, going out in that blaze, and I fell senseless, and it was all they could do to bring me to—and Rex to face!

That little evil pink powder held its virtues for exactly the space of ten minutes—if it ever had any virtues, and the man was not practising some terrific sort oflegerdmain on us. But its sins! There was no sewing work done in that house for a week. The kitchen was a black cavern when I crept back into it at last. It took me the whole six days to clean the grime and smoke and soot. And the expense! Lamps, chimneys, powder, at least \$50, to say nothing of what Rex called the consequential damages in the loss of time and sewer work! But it was good thing for Rex. There has never been a chimney in our house since but it is as clear as a soap bubble. And he says the best patent safety attachment to kerosene lamps that he wants is his wife's faithful neatness and care of them. But it was a shocking lesson.

THE END.

THE EVIL EFFECT OF OVER-PRaise.

At the beginning of his career an author—especially if he be a poet, and chances to possess a particularly sensitive set of nerves—is almost certain to exaggerate the import and influence of adverse criticism. Later on he will probably discover that there are worse things than "slashing notices"—namely, "slashing" praises. By the exercise of a little observation he will see that the latter can make even a man of merit ridiculous, and that the former, if unjust, can make nobody ridiculous save the reviewer himself. Malignant criticism has never yet succeeded in killing even the slightest piece of genuine creative work. How frequently it has killed the critic?

It has been said that no author that is, no author of ability—can be written down except by himself. This is true with a qualification. He can be written down and out of sight, temporarily at least, if his enemies have the nerve and the diabolical adroitness outrageously to overpraise him. But this is an office of such subtle cruelty that no one but a friend ever thinks of undertaking it. Ah, dear critic, if you wish to deliver a staggering blow at some young author who has offended you by what you suspect to be good literature, praise him extravagantly for the qualities which he doesn't possess. Pick out his faults and call them felicities. If he is a verse-maker compare him with Tennyson and Browning, to the obvious disadvantage of those over-rated persons. If he is a novelist, let it broadly be intimated that beside him Scott and Thackeray and George Eliot were but innocent children in the art of fiction. This will bring down your man. Disparagement can't do it.

Unmerited adulation has two baleful effects. One is to render the victim satisfied with himself—and self-satisfaction is the death of talent and the paralysis of genius—and the other is to draw down on him the indifference or the contempt of those very readers who were previously ready to accept his work at its honest value. Now, Brown has a neat touch in the lyrical way; Jones has painted two or three pleasant prose sketches in the magazines; Robinson may possibly write an interesting novel—if he lives long enough. You feel kindly toward these three young gentlemen; their spurs are yet to be won, and so far as you are concerned, you wish them success in the winning. But when you read in the columns of the *Daily Discoverer* that Milton might have been proud to write Brown's last triole (it was a charming little triole; you couldn't have told it from one of Dobson's), or that Hawthorne's mantle has fallen upon the shoulders of Jones (without hurting him any), or that Robinson's new novel is superior to Thackeray's "Henry Esmond"—when, I say, you light on these dar-

zling literary verdicts, you are apt, if you have a spark of kindness left in you, to feel very sorry for Brown, Jones and Robinson. They have been put in an absurd attitude. If they are the modest, sensible fellows you suppose them to be, it will take them years to recover their self respect. If they have complacently swallowed all this treacle, they are dead men. In any case they have received such a set-back in general estimation as no amount of savage abuse could have procured for them. Savage abuse would have been forgotten in forty-eight hours; but this dismal panegyric is a thing that has got to be lived down—to be obliterated, if possible, by higher achievements than anybody has ever expected at the hands of these unfortunates. Henceforth they may well add to their regulation prayers: "Save us from our friends, and from all undue praise, good Lord, deliver us!"—*September Atlantic*.

TWO ANECDOTES OF THACKERAY.

When, soon after our marriage, Mr. Brookfield introduced his early college friend, Mr. Thackeray, to me, he brought him one day unexpectedly to dine with us. There was, fortunately, a good plain dinner, but I was young and shy enough to feel embarrassed because we had no sweets, and I privately sent my maid to the nearest confectioner's to buy a dish of tartlets, which I thought would give a finish to our simple meal. When they were placed before me, I timidly offered our guest a small one, saying, "Will you have a tartlet, Mr. Thackeray?" "I will, but I'll have a two-penny one, if you please," he answered, so beamingly, that we all laughed, and my shyness disappeared.

On another occasion, also very early in my friendship with Mr. Thackeray, he was at our house one evening with a few other intimate friends, when the conversation turned on court circulars, and their sameness day after day. A few samples were given: "So-and-so had the honour of joining her Majesty's dinner party with other lofty and imposing personages," invariably ending with Dr. Pretorius. "By the way, who is Dr. Pretorius?" somebody asked. A slight pause ensued, when a voice began solemnly singing the National Anthem, ending each verse with

God save our gracious Queen,
Send her victorious, happy and glorious,
Dr. Pretorius—God save the Queen.

This was Mr. Thackeray, who had been sitting perfectly silent and rather apart from those who were talking, and had not appeared to notice what was said.—*Mrs. Brookfield, in Scribner's Magazine for September*.

THE PARISH CLERK.

He used to smell of rhubarb as he slept in the lowest receptacle of the three-decker during our long sermons. During the service he was, as occasion required, very locomotive, walking about the church and saying the responses as he went. One never could tell from what corner an Amen might not be nasally intoned as he opened or shut windows. Before the sermon he ascended into the pulpit, and there, by the help of very imperfect matches, he used to light the candles. The process was a very trying one for the congregation, as the matches were usually damp, and the clerk was old and awkward. I have seen him three times running upset candles upon the head of a young clergyman in the reading desk who was officiating for the first time after his ordination. The patience with which the young man bore the succession of falling candles on his head was most exemplary, but the scene was highly ludicrous. These old clerks were certainly sometimes very funny, and we shall never see their like again. A clerical friend of mine told me that when he first entered the duties of his incumbency he found a clerk who in saying the Psalms made many mistakes. At last the clergyman remonstrated with him, and said, "I wish, John, you would not say in the Seventy-fourth Psalm 'Let us make haycocks of them.' If you look you will see the words are, 'Let us make havoc of them.'" Old John answered, "Well, sir, of course if you wish I will; but it always used to be haycocks." The same. I was told to give out the notice: "On Sunday next the service in this church will be held in the afternoon, and on the following Sunday it will be held in the morning, and so on alternately until further notice." What he actually did give out was as follows: "On Sunday next the morning service in this church will be held in the afternoon, and on the following Sunday the afternoon service will be held in the morning, and so on till all eternity."—*Temple Bar*.

OLD SAMMY ROGERS.

When a young man, so runs the story, as repeated by Mr. Hayward, "he admired and sedulously sought the society of the most beautiful girl he then and still thought he had ever seen. At the end of the London season at a ball she said 'I go to-morrow to Worthing; are you coming there?' He did not go. Some months afterward, being at Ranelagh, he saw the attention of every one drawn toward a large party that had just entered, in the centre of which was a lady on the arm of her husband. Stepping forward to see this wonderful beauty, he found it was his love. She merely said, 'You never came to Worthing.' A lover so indifferent was not likely to have suffered from this laconic rebuke, which meant so much. Possibly he thought the beauty would wait while he was revising couplets or straining his "hard bound brains" to write fresh ones. Four lines a day was the measure of his poetical fecundity, and one cannot imagine Rogers roused to a storm of passion, whether by love or poetry. "He did nothing rash," says Mrs. Norton. "I am sure Rogers as a lady never fell down unless he was pushed, but walked from chair to chair of the drawing room furniture till he reached the place where the sunbeam fell on the carpet. He was the very embodiment of quiet."—*The Spectator*.