

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF FASHION.

There is a very large class of fashionable people in this country whom Mr. Thackeray, if he had the privilege of making their acquaintance, would set down as snobs. They have an air of outward elegance, of magnificence, and run to the vulgar extreme of fashion. The absence of true refinement of soul is, of course, indicated in a thousand ways, when they, themselves, are least aware of it. And then there seems to be an understanding between them, that they shall tolerate licenses in others in order that they may enjoy the same privileges themselves; for instance, the liberty of making remarks upon dress, and of gratifying their curiosity and love of gossip in various ways. The fashionable woman has the most to fear from her own "set." It must be a hardening process which the naturally sensitive feelings of a woman go through before she can coolly face and even court the scrutiny, secret or avowed, to which she knows she is subjected, by her "dear, five hundred friends." She may be willing and anxious to tell "where she got her love of a collar," and "how much she paid for her new silk," that "she sent to New York for her velvet cloak," and that "her husband gave her her diamond earrings on her birth-day;" but it can be only the baser emotions of her heart which are gratified by knowing the envy and petty scandal which she braves, and which laugh at the uncharitable remarks which are sure to follow during her absence from those whom she has excelled in her dress—the most ludicrous of all, is that which prompts them to go to one another for the purpose of having their vanity tickled. "What have you pretty to tell me to-day, dear?" "Ah! you can't guess! Mr. A. said you had the handsomest neck of any woman at the party last night." "Thank you, love!—Did he, really! I have something nice for you, too. Mr. B. told Miss C. that you were the best dressed lady he had seen this season!" Admirable, isn't it? These ladies separate mutually delighted with themselves and each other—as if such base flattery were the genuine coin which they covet! There is falsehood in the very principle. According to the degree in which she wishes to hear herself praised, is the compliment that one invents or exaggerates for the other, who, to repay her kind friend as liberally, returns one of similar worth. How unsatisfactory to the heart, and even to the craving, insatiate vanity which grows hungry with what it feeds upon! Such cannot know the sweeter praises of an approving conscience and of a deeply-loving, deeply-happy Home.

In the whole system of high fashionable life and *ton*, distinction is so much that is untrue to nature, selfish, mean, and artificial, that it is not wonderful its votaries are betrayed into sins against a true politeness founded in kindness, against true refinement founded in nobility of soul. As long as wealth and fashion, with their glare and caprice, have the dictation of "good society," there must be all kinds of snobbery. When gold-headed canes instead of unsullied honor make

the gentleman, and *moir antiquus* instead of modesty and gentleness make the lady, we may expect strange derelictions even from Lord Chesterfield's system of politeness, to pass unnoticed, obscured by the brilliancy of the deer's outward appearance.

A little incident in "high life" came to our notice not long ago. A lady, who prided herself on her high breeding, sent to another in a neighboring city, with whom she was but slightly acquainted, to do her the great favor to select and send to her by express, a hat for her daughter, with the order—"Please send it soon." The lady sent to, the first day it was convenient for her to go out, purchased a beautiful hat, paid for it, (the money was not sent with the order, but the lady wishing the favor done being a woman of "wealth and standing," of course no hesitation was felt,) and dispatched it by express. Now, the daughter was married upon a certain day and left before the bonnet arrived; but the lady purchasing was not to blame, for no particular time had been assigned her. The bride went upon her wedding tour to the city where the lady resided, and without troubling herself to inquire if she had sent the hat ordered, purchased another upon the day in which the first arrived at her mother's. The mother paid the express charges and sent the bonnet back to the lady; the milliner refused it; the lady wrote to say that it was upon her hands and to know what she was to do with it—she had a winter hat herself, and could make no use of it. The lady of "wealth and standing" in town, has allowed the bonnet to remain upon her friend's hands, who, for her kindness in doing a favor, is a sufferer to the amount of a costly winter hat. Of course instances like this are rare, but that such fruit should occasionally fall from the cultivated tree of selfishness and vain display, is not singular.

Where dress is the criterion of merit, the temptation in weak and unreflecting minds to excel is so powerful that the subtler promptings of truth are sacrificed, particularly where deliberate falsehood is not resorted to. By falsehood we mean all equivocations thought excusable by many; appearing beyond her real means; sacrificing the business interests of her husband or father; neglecting home duties, and living a life of hollow show, envy, vanity, and deceit, as many a woman does. The flowers of *real* beauty cannot bloom in such a hot-house atmosphere; the real graces of life cannot take root in such a shallow soil. Oh, for a little more of nature's loveliness—a little more of the grace of modesty—of the refinement at which a love of the intrinsically beautiful gives—for a little more true friendship and heart-felt praise—a little more sincerity, self-sacrifice, and genuine human sympathy!

We see a smile gathering on the face of some fair and foolish child of fashion at the mere mention of the last-named qualities. We sigh while she smiles. For the expression of noble sentiments which kindle the eye and flush the cheek with lofty enthusiasm—for a response to the deep, unutterable melodies of the human soul—for the sympathy which warms and

delights great hearts—for the pleasures of spiritual excitement, the discussion of elevating philosophies—for the love of the fine arts and an interest in their perfection—for a passionate labor to aid in the education and happiness of the masses—for a deep love of man and God—she might indeed smile if we looked to such as her, and the "exquisite" whom she admires, for things like these.

The standard of moral and social excellence is *not* to be found in the creature of fashion, but in her, who, discarding the falsity of mere assumption, dares to act from the impulse of virtue and honor alone.

CORRUPTION OF LANGUAGE.

A Correspondent, for whose opinion in such matters we have great respect, says:

"While you were speaking of the barbarisms in speech, the other day, I wonder very much that you did not take notice of the use of *commence*, instead of the good old Saxon word *begin*. There is scarce a boarding-school girl who, after she has written *begin*, does not scratch it out and substitute the hideous Gallicism *commence*, because she imagines it is the finer word. Of late it has got into the kitchen, as well as into the boarding-school. Our house-maid, Biddy, the other day, came home from church in a driving snow-storm, saying, "It commenced to snow before I got to church, ma'am, and while I was there it commenced to blow, and before I got out it commenced to rain." I saw the word *commence*, in the metaphorical sense of approve, adopt, sanction, has become so much into use that its repetition is absolutely nauseating. If a man agrees with another, he is said to *commence* his views, and so on; this on poor word being made to do duty for twenty others. The gift of fluency is certainly possessed by our public speakers, but, as a general rule, they have a very meagre vocabulary, and they and the newspaper writers ring the changes upon the same word with a perseverance which, as the saying is, "would do them honor in a better cause."

"How is it that *prestige* is now so often printed in Italics, as if it were a French word, and pronounced *presteesh*, with the accent on the second syllable? *Prestige* is a legitimate English word, formed in the same manner from the Latin as *vestige*, and pronounced so as to rhyme with it. It is a common affection to call a singer an *artists*, as if using the French orthography made a difference in the thing. If a singer be an artist, call him so boldly in English, if he be not, call him a performer, a vocalist. The phrase *en route*, I see, has lately come much into use in the newspapers, instead of the English word *on the way*. If a member of Congress be on his way to Washington, he is said to be *en route* to Washington. Now, nobody who is not acquainted with French knows how to pronounce the words *en route*, and this gives those who have a smattering of the language a decided advantage and an opportunity to show off their accomplishments—they therefore say *en route*.

"I might enlarge this list, but you must think it long enough for the present.