Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, No. 428 eBook

Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, No. 428

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, No. 428 eBook....1
Contents....2
Table of Contents....4
Page 1....5
Page 2....7
Page 3....8
Page 4....9
Page 5....10
Page 6....11
Page 7....13
Page 8....15
Page 9....16
Page 10....17
Page 11....18
Page 12....20
Page 13....21
Page 14....23
Page 15....25
Page 16....26
Page 17....27
Page 18....28
Page 19....29
Page 20....30
Page 21....31
Page 22....32

Page 23.....33
Page 24.....34
Page 25.....36
Page 26.....37
Page 27.....38
Page 28.....39
Page 29.....40
Page 30.....41
Page 31.....42
Page 32.....43
Page 33.....44
Page 34.....45
Page 35.....47
Page 36.....48
Page 37.....49
Page 38.....50
Page 39.....51
Page 40.....53
Page 41.....55

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
	1
THE DINNER-BELL.	1
TWO KINDS OF HONESTY.	5
DECIMAL SYSTEM OF COINAGE.	15
FOOTNOTES:	22
WHY THE SCOTCH DO NOT SHUT THE DOOR.	22
EDFOU AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.	24
AN ENGLISH WORKMAN’S ACCOUNT OF A ‘STRIKE’ IN NEW YORK.	31
THE DOCTOR VERSUS THE MEDICINE.	36
	39
A WELCOME SACRIFICE.	40

Page 1

Title: Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, No. 428 Volume 17, New Series, March 13, 1852

Author: Various

Editor: Robert Chambers and William Chambers

Release Date: December 6, 2005 [EBook #17245]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** *Start of this project gutenberg* EBOOK *Chambers's Edinburgh* ***

Produced by Malcolm Farmer, Richard J. Shiffer and the
Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

Chambers'Edinburgh journal

Conducted by William and Robert chambers, *editors of* '*Chambers's information for the people*,' '*Chambers's educational course*,' &c.

No. 428. *New series*. *Saturday*, *March* 13, 1852. *Price* 11/2 *d.*

THE DINNER-BELL.

In one of Webster's magnificent speeches, he remarks that so vast are the possessions of England, that her morning drum-beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth daily with one continuous and unbroken strain of its martial airs. There is another musical sound, within the British islands themselves, which does not as yet quite traverse the whole horary circle, but bids fair to do so in the course of time, and to this we would direct the attention of the American secretary, as a fitting subject for a new peroration. We allude to the Dinner-bell. At noon, in the rural districts of England, this charming sound is heard tinkling melodiously from farm or village factory; at one, in the more crowded haunts of industry, the strain is taken up ere it dies; and by the time it reaches Scotland, a full hungry peal swells forth at two. At three till past four there is a continuous ring from house to house of the small country gentry; and at five this becomes more distinct and sonorous in the towns, increasing in importance till six. From that time till seven and half-past, it waxes more and more fashionable in the tone, till at eight it stops abruptly: not like an air brought to a conclusion, but like one broken off accidentally, to be by and by resumed.

The dinner hours of the labouring-class are no doubt regulated according to business, and perhaps receive some modification from national character. An Englishman, for

instance, is said to work best after his meal, and accordingly his dinner makes its appearance sometimes as early as noon, but never later than one; while a Scotchman, who is fit for anything when half-starved, is very properly kept without solid food till two o'clock. As for the smaller gentry, who scorn to dine at workmen's hours, and yet do not pretend to the abnegation of the great, they may follow their own fancy without doing any harm to others; but the case is different as regards the hours assigned to *dinner-parties*, for these affect the health and comfort of the whole body of the gentry together.

Page 2

We are no enemy to dinner-parties; on the contrary, we think we have not enough of them, and we never shall have enough, till some change takes place in their constitution. We are a small gentleman ourselves, who dine at the modest hour of four, and what is the use to us of a six or seven o'clock invitation? We accept it, of course, being socially disposed, and being, moreover, philosopher enough to see that such meetings are good for men in society: but so far as the meal itself goes, it is to us either useless or disagreeable. If we have dined already, we do not want another dinner; and if we have not dined, our appetite is lost from sheer want. It is vain to say, Let us all dine habitually at six—seven—eight o'clock. Few of us will—few of us can—none of us ought. Nature demands a solid meal at a much earlier hour; and true refinement suggests that the object of the evening reunion should not be the satisfaction of the day's hunger. Only half of this fact is seen by the classes who give the law to fashion, and that half consists of the grosser and coarser necessity. They have already, more especially at their country seats, taken to the tiffin of the East, and at a reasonable hour make a regular dinner of hot meats, and all the usual accessories, under the name of lunch. So complete is this meal, that the ladies, led away no doubt by association, meet some hours afterwards in mysterious conclave, to drink what our ancestors called 'a dish of tea;' and having thus diluted the juices of their stomachs for the reception of another supply of heavy food, they descend to dinner!

The evening dinner is, therefore, a mere show-dinner, or something worse. But it is still more objectionable on the score of taste than on the score of health. We find no fault with the elegances of the table, in plate, crystal, china, and so forth; but an English dinner is not an elegant meal. The guests are supposed, by a *polite* fiction, to have the hunger of the whole day to satisfy, and provision is made accordingly. Varieties of soup, fish, flesh, fowl, game, rich-made dishes, load the board spread for a group of well-dressed men and women, known to have already dined, and who would affect to shudder at so heavy a meal, if it was termed supper. There is a grossness in this arrangement which is strangely at variance with the real advancement of the age in refinement; but it has likewise a paralysing effect both upon the freedom and delicacy of social intercourse. These show-dinners are too costly to be numerous. Even a comparatively wealthy man is compelled to look closely to the number of his entertainments. He scrutinises the claims of his acquaintance; he keeps a debtor and creditor account of dinners with them; and if now and then he invites a guest for the sake of his social qualities, he sets him down in the bill of cost. This does away with all the finer social feelings which it should be the province of such meetings to foster and gratify, and adds a tone of moral vulgarity to the material vulgarity of the repast.

Page 3

Is it impossible to bring about a reform in this important matter? Difficult, not impossible. Dinner-giving is not an integral part of the monarchy, and it might therefore be touched—if not too rudely—without a political revolution. The grand obstacle would be the unsettled claims. A has given B a show-dinner, and it is the duty of B to return it. Invitation for invitation is the law of the game. How, then, stands the account? Would it be necessary to institute a dinner-insolvency court, where all defaulters might take the benefit of the act? We think not. No creditor in his senses would refuse a handsome composition; and if it could be shewn—as it might in the present case—that the composition was in real, though not ostensible value, equivalent to the debt, hesitation would vanish. Before proceeding to shew this, we shall present what may be called the common-sense statement of the whole case:—

Mankind in their natural state dine at noon, or at least in the middle of the working-day. It is the middle meal of the day—the central of three. In our artificial system of society, it has been postponed to a late hour of the afternoon, so as either to become the second of two meals, or, where lunch is taken, the third of three. The change is not consistent with hygienic principle; for, if lunch be not taken, the interval between breakfast and dinner is too great, and in that case hunger tempts to make the meal too heavy for the exhausted powers of the stomach: if, on the contrary, lunch be taken, dinner becomes an absurdity, as in that case a meal so elaborate and heavy is not required, and cannot healthfully be partaken of at so late an hour. Nevertheless, in a plan of life which devotes the eight or nine hours after breakfast either to business or to out-door amusements, it is needless to think of reviving the old meridian dinner for any but ladies and other stay-at-home people; nor even for them, seeing that they must be mainly determined in their arrangements by those leading members of the family who have to spend that part of the day away from home.

There is a need for some reform which would at once accommodate the busy, and save the multitude from the disadvantages of heavy six-and-seven-o'clock dinners. This might be effected by arranging for only a supper at six or seven o'clock—that is, some lighter meal than dinner—leaving every one to take such a lunch in the middle of the day as he could find an opportunity of eating. Let this supper be the meal of family reunions—the meal of society. Composed of a few light tasteful dishes, accompanied by other indulgences, according to taste or inclination, and followed by coffee, it would be a cheerful and not necessarily unhealthful affair. As a meal to which to invite friends, being cheaper, it would allow of more society being indulged in than is compatible with the monstrous presentments of meat and drink which constitute the modern company dinner. It would be practically a revival of those nice supper-parties which our grandfathers indulged in after the hours of business, and of the pleasantness of which we have such glowing accounts.

Page 4

That this is really the common-sense view of the question, can hardly be doubted. By bringing the cost within reasonable limits, the plan proposed relieves the entertainment from moral vulgarity; and by avoiding all suggestion of a meeting for the gratification of mere physical hunger, it relieves it from material vulgarity. We have laughed too heartily at the dinner of the ancients in 'Peregrine Pickle,' to wish to lead back the age to a classic model; and yet on all subjects connected with taste, there are some things to be learned from that people whose formative genius is still the wonder of the world. The meal of society among the Greeks consisted of only two courses, or, to speak more strictly, of one course and a dessert; and the first or solid course was in all probability made up of small portions of each kind of food. The more vulgar Romans added in all cases a third, but occasionally a fourth, fifth, sixth, even a seventh course; and at the fall of the empire, barbarian taste uniting with the *blase* luxury of Rome, heaped viand upon viand, and course upon course, till the satire of a later poet became mere common-place:—

> 'Is this a dinner, this a genial room?
> No; 'tis a temple, and a hecatomb!'

This extravagance has gradually given way in the course of civilisation. We have no more meals consisting of a score of courses; no more gilded pigs, fish, and poultry; no more soups, each of three or four different colours: but as yet we are only in the midst of the transition, and have not got back even to the comparative refinement of the Greeks. At the end of their first course, the more earthly part of the entertainment was already over. Then the guests washed their hands; then they were presented with perfumes and garlands of flowers; and then they drank wine, accompanied with the singing of the paean and the sound of flutes. Such adjuncts, with us, would for the most part be out of place and time; but some of them might be taken metaphorically, and others entirely changed—such as the libation to the gods—to suit a new religious feeling, and a new form of manners. The modern *coena* might thus be made to surpass that of the ancients in refinement and elegance; and it would include, as a matter of course, some of the amusements—varying from a song to a philosophical discussion—-which gave the charm to their symposia.

As for the symposium, we shall have nothing to do with that vexed subject, further than just to hint—for we should be loath to exclude from the benefit of our proposed reform a certain numerous and respectable class of the community—that in ancient times it had no necessary connection with the dinner at all. A little wine-and-water was drunk during the dessert—never during the first course—and then the meal was over. The symposium was literally a drinking-party, given, for the sake of convenience, after the dinner-party; but so far from forming a part of the latter, the guests were sometimes different. It was, in fact, in this respect, like the evening company we occasionally find assembled in the drawing-room on getting up from our show-dinners.

Page 5

But such references to the customs of bygone ages are introduced merely to shew, that among the most accomplished people of history, the social meal was looked upon as a field for the display of taste, not of that barbarian magnificence which consists in quantity and cost. The coena of the moderns should far excel that of the Greeks in elegance, refinement, and simplicity. We have all history for our teacher; we have a finer system of morals; we have a purer and holier religion; and a corresponding influence should be felt in our social manners. When the object of the feast is no longer the satisfaction of mere physical hunger, it should be something intended to minister to the appetites of the mind. When the dinner is no longer the chief thing, some trouble will doubtless be taken with the assortment of the company. Simultaneously with the business of eating and drinking, we shall have anecdote, jest, song, music, smiles, and laughter, to make us forget the business or troubles of the day; and in the morning, instead of arranging our debtor and creditor account of invitations, we shall throw in the evening's gratification to strike the balance, and then make haste to begin a new score.

TWO KINDS OF HONESTY.

Some few years ago, there resided in Long Acre an eccentric old Jew, named Jacob Benjamin: he kept a seed shop, in which he likewise carried on—not a common thing, we believe, in London—the sale of meal, and had risen from the lowest dregs of poverty, by industry and self-denial, till he grew to be an affluent tradesman. He was, indeed, a rich man; for as he had neither wife nor child to spend his money, nor kith nor kin to borrow it of him, he had a great deal more than he knew what to do with. Lavish it on himself he could not, for his early habits stuck to him, and his wants were few. He was always clean and decent in his dress, but he had no taste for elegance or splendour in any form, nor had even the pleasures of the table any charms for him; so that, though he was no miser, his money kept on accumulating, whilst it occurred to him now and then to wonder what he should do with it hereafter. One would think he need not have wondered long, when there were so many people suffering from the want of what he abounded in; but Mr Benjamin, honest man, had his crotchets like other folks. In the first place, he had less sympathy with poverty than might have been expected, considering how poor he had once been himself; but he had a theory, just in the main, though by no means without its exceptions—that the indigent have generally themselves to thank for their privations. Judging from his own experience, he believed that there was bread for everybody that would take the trouble of earning it; and as he had had little difficulty in resisting temptation himself, and was not philosopher enough to allow for the varieties of human character, he had small compassion for those

Page 6

who injured their prospects by yielding to it. Then he had found, on more than one occasion, that even to the apparently well-doing, assistance was not always serviceable. Endeavour was relaxed, and gratuities, once received, were looked for again. Doubtless, part of this evil result was to be sought in Mr Benjamin's own defective mode of proceeding; but I repeat, he was no philosopher, and in matters of this sort he did not see much farther than his nose, which was, however, a very long one.

To public charities he sometimes subscribed liberally; but his hand was frequently withheld by a doubt regarding the judicious expenditure of the funds, and this doubt was especially fortified after chancing to see one day, as he was passing the Crown and Anchor Tavern, a concourse of gentlemen turn out, with very flushed faces, who had been dining together for the benefit of some savages in the Southern Pacific Ocean, accused of devouring human flesh—a practice so abhorrent to Mr Benjamin, that he had subscribed for their conversion. But failing to perceive the connection betwixt the dinner and that desirable consummation, his name appeared henceforth less frequently in printed lists, and he felt more uncertain than before as to what branch of unknown posterity he should bequeath his fortune.

In the meantime, he kept on the even tenor of his way, standing behind his counter, and serving his customers, assisted by a young woman called Leah Leet, who acted as his shopwoman, and in whom, on the whole, he felt more interest than in anybody else in the world, insomuch that it even sometimes glanced across his mind, whether he should not make her the heiress of all his wealth. He never, however, gave her the least reason to expect such a thing, being himself incapable of conceiving, that if he entertained the notion, he ought to prepare her by education for the good-fortune that awaited her. But he neither perceived this necessity, nor, if he had, would he have liked to lose the services of a person he had been so long accustomed to.

At length, one day a new idea struck him. He had been reading the story of his namesake, Benjamin, in the Old Testament, and the question occurred to him, how many amongst his purchasers of the poorer class—and all who came to his shop personally were of that class—would bring back a piece of money they might find amongst their meal, and he thought he should like to try a few of them that were his regular customers. The experiment would amuse his mind, and the money he might lose by it he did not care for. So he began with shillings, slipping one in amongst the flour before he handed it to the purchaser. But the shillings never came back—perhaps people did not think so small a sum worth returning; so he went on to half-crowns and crowns, and now and then, in very particular cases, he even ventured a guinea; but it was always with the same luck, and the longer he tried, the more he distrusted there being any honesty in the world, and the more disposed he felt to leave all his money to

Leah Leet, who had lived with him so long, and to his belief, had never wronged him of a penny.

Page 7

* * * * *

‘What’s this you have put into the gruel, Mary?’ said a pale, sickly-looking man one evening, taking something out of his mouth, which he held towards the feeble gleams emitted by a farthing rush-light standing on the mantel-piece.

‘What is it, father?’ inquired a young girl, approaching him. ’Isn’t the gruel good?’

‘It’s good enough,’ replied the man; ’but here’s something in it: it’s a shilling, I believe.’

‘It’s a guinea, I declare!’ exclaimed the girl, as she took the coin from him and examined it nearer the light.

‘A guinea!’ repeated the man; ’well, that’s the first bit of luck I’ve had these seven years or more. It never could have come when we wanted it worse. Shew it us here, Mary.’

‘But it’s not ours, father,’ said Mary. ’I paid away the last shilling we had for the meal, and here’s the change.’

’God has sent it us, girl! He saw our distress, and he sent it us in His mercy!’ said the man, grasping the piece of gold with his thin, bony fingers.

‘It must be Mr Benjamin’s,’ returned she. ’He must have dropped it into the meal-tub that stands by the counter.’

‘How do you know that?’ inquired the man with an impatient tone and a half-angry glance. ’How can you tell how it came into the gruel? Perhaps it was lying at the bottom of the basin, or at the bottom of the sauce-pan. Most likely it was.’

‘O no, father,’ said Mary: ‘it is long since we had a guinea.’

’A guinea that we knew of; but I’ve had plenty in my time, and how do you know this is not one we had overlooked?’

‘We’ve wanted a guinea too much to overlook one,’ answered she. ’But never mind, father; eat your gruel, and don’t think of it: your cheeks are getting quite red with talking so, and you won’t be able to sleep when you go to bed.’

‘I don’t expect to sleep,’ said the man peevishly; ‘I never do sleep.’

‘I think you will, after that nice gruel!’ said Mary, throwing her arms round his neck, and tenderly kissing his cheek.

‘And a guinea in it to give it a relish too!’ returned the father, with a faint smile and an expression of archness, betokening an inner nature very different from the exterior which sorrow and poverty had incrusted on it.

His daughter then proposed that he should go to bed; and having assisted him to undress, and arranged her little household matters, she retired behind a tattered, drab-coloured curtain which shaded her own mattress, and laid herself down to rest.

Page 8

The apartment in which this little scene occurred, was on the attic storey of a mean house, situated in one of the narrow courts or alleys betwixt the Strand and Drury Lane. The furniture it contained was of the poorest description; the cracked window-panes were coated with dust; and the scanty fire in the grate, although the evening was cold enough to make a large one desirable—all combined to testify to the poverty of the inhabitants. It was a sorry retreat for declining years and sickness, and a sad and cheerless home for the fresh cheek and glad hopes of youth; and all the worse, that neither father nor daughter was ‘to the manner born;’ for poor John Glegg had, as he said, had plenty of guineas in his time; at least, what should have been plenty, had they been wisely husbanded. But John, to describe the thing as he saw it himself, had always ‘had luck against him.’ It did not signify what he undertook, his undertakings invariably turned out ill.

He was born in Scotland, and had passed a great portion of his life there; but, unfortunately for him, he had no Scotch blood in his veins, or he might have been blessed with some small modicum of the caution for which that nation is said to be distinguished. His father had been a cooper, and when quite a young man, John had succeeded to a well-established business in Aberdeen. His principal commerce consisted in furnishing the retail-dealers with casks, wherein to pack their dried fish; but partly from good-nature, and partly from indolence, he allowed them to run such long accounts, that they were apt to overlook the debt altogether in their calculations, and to take refuge in bankruptcy when the demand was pressed and the supply of goods withheld—his negligence thus proving, in its results, as injurious to them as to himself. Five hundred pounds embarked in a scheme projected by a too sanguine friend, for establishing a local newspaper, which ‘died ere it was born;’ and a fire, occurring at a time that John had omitted to renew his insurance, had seriously damaged his resources, when some matter of business having taken him to the Isle of Man, he was agreeably surprised to find that his branch of trade, which had of late years been alarmingly declining in Aberdeen, was there in the most flourishing condition. Delighted with the prospect this state of affairs opened, and eager to quit the spot where misfortune had so unrelentingly pursued him, John, having first secured a house at Ramsay, returned to fetch his wife, children, and merchandise, to this new home. Having freighted a small vessel for their conveyance, he expected to be deposited at his own door; but he had unhappily forgotten to ascertain the character of the captain, who, under pretence that, if he entered the harbour, he should probably be wind-bound for several weeks, persuaded them to go ashore in a small boat, promising to lie to till they had landed their goods; but the boat had no sooner returned to the ship, than, spreading his sails to the wind, he was soon out of sight, leaving John and his family on the beach, with—to recur to his own phraseology—’nothing but what they stood up in.’

Page 9

Having with some difficulty found shelter for the night, they proceeded on the following morning in a boat to Ramsay; but here it was found that, owing to some informality, the people who had possession of the house refused to give it up, and the wanderers were obliged to take refuge in an inn. The next thing was to pursue, and recover the lost goods; but some weeks elapsed before an opportunity of doing so could be found; and at length, when John did reach Liverpool, the captain had left it, carrying away with him a considerable share of the property. With the remainder, John, after many expenses and delays, returned to the island, and resumed his business. But he soon discovered to his cost, that the calculations he had made were quite fallacious, owing to his having neglected to inquire whether the late prosperous season had been a normal or an exceptional one. Unfortunately, it was the latter; and several very unfavourable ones that succeeded, reduced the family to great distress, and finally to utter ruin.

Relinquishing his shop and his goods to his creditors, John Glegg, heart-sick and weary, sought a refuge in London—a proceeding to which he was urged by no prudential motives, but rather by the desire to fly as far as possible from the scenes of his vexations and disappointments, and because he had heard that the metropolis was a place in which a man might conceal his poverty, and suffer and starve at his ease, untroubled by impertinent curiosity or officious benevolence; and, above all, believing it to be the spot where he was least likely to fall in with any of his former acquaintance.

But here a new calamity awaited him, worse than all the rest. A fever broke out in the closely-populated neighbourhood in which they had fixed their abode, and first two of his three children took it, and died; and then himself and his wife—rendered meet subjects for infection by anxiety of mind and poor living—were attacked with the disease. He recovered; at least he survived, though with an enfeebled constitution, but he lost his wife, a wise and patient woman, who had been his comforter and sustainer through all his misfortunes—misfortunes which, after vainly endeavouring to avert, she supported with heroic and uncomplaining fortitude; but dying, she left him a precious legacy in Mary, who, with a fine nature, and the benefit of her mother’s precept and example, had been to him ever since a treasure of filial duty and tenderness.

A faint light dawned through the dirty window on the morning succeeding the little event with which we opened our story, when Mary rose softly from her humble couch, and stepping lightly to where her father’s clothes lay on a chair, at the foot of his bed, she put her hand into his waistcoat-pocket, and, extracting therefrom the guinea which had been found in the gruel the preceding evening, she transferred it to her own. She then dressed herself, and having ascertained that her father still slept, she quietly left the room.

Page 10

The hour was yet so early, and the streets so deserted, that Mary almost trembled to find herself in them alone; but she was anxious to do what she considered her duty without the pain of contention. John Glegg was naturally an honest and well-intentioned man, but the weakness that had blasted his life adhered to him still. They were doubtless in terrible need of the guinea, and since it was not by any means certain that the real owner would be found, he saw no great harm in appropriating it; but Mary wasted no casuistry on the matter. That the money was not legitimately theirs, and that they had no right to retain it, was all she saw; and so seeing, she acted unhesitatingly on her convictions.

She had bought the meal at Mr Benjamin's, because her father complained of the quality of that she procured in the smaller shops, and on this occasion he had served her himself. From the earliness of the hour, however, though the shop was open, he was not in it when she arrived on her errand of restitution; but addressing Leah Leet, who was dusting the counter, she mentioned the circumstance, and tendered the guinea; which the other took and dropped into the till, without acknowledgment or remark. Now Mary had not restored the money with any view to praise or reward: the thought of either had not occurred to her; but she was, nevertheless, pained by the dry, cold, thankless manner with which the restitution was accepted, and she felt that a little civility would not have been out of place on such an occasion.

She was thinking of this on her way back, when she observed Mr Benjamin on the opposite side of the street. The fact was, that he did not sleep at the shop, but in one of the suburbs of the metropolis, and he was now proceeding from his residence to Long Acre. When he caught her eye, he was standing still on the pavement, and looking, as it appeared, at her, so she dropped him a courtesy, and walked forwards; while the old man said to himself: "That's the girl that got the guinea in her meal yesterday. I wonder if she has been to return it!"

It was Mary's pure, innocent, but dejected countenance, that had induced him to make her the subject of one of his most costly experiments. He thought if there was such a thing as honesty in the world, that it would find a fit refuge in that young bosom; and the early hour, and the direction in which she was coming, led him to hope that he might sing *Eureka* at last. When he entered the shop, Leah stood behind the counter, as usual, looking very staid and demure; but all she said was,'Good-morning;' and when he inquired if anybody had been there, she quietly answered: 'No; nobody.'

Mr Benjamin was confirmed in his axiom; but he consoled himself with the idea, that as the girl was doubtless very poor, the guinea might be of some use to her. In the meantime, Mary was boiling the gruel for her father's breakfast, the only food she could afford him, till she got a few shillings that were owing to her for needle-work.

Page 11

‘Well, father, dear, how are you this morning?’

’I scarce know, Mary. I’ve been dreaming; and it was so like reality, that I can hardly believe yet it was a dream;’ and his eyes wandered over the room, as if looking for something.

’What is it, father? Do you want your breakfast? It will be ready in five minutes.’

’I’ve been dreaming of a roast fowl and a glass of Scotch ale. Mary, I thought you came in with the fowl, and a bottle in your hand, and said: “See, father, this is what I’ve bought with the guinea we found in the meal!"’

’But I couldn’t do that, father, you know. It wouldn’t have been honest to spend other people’s money.’

‘Nonsense!’ answered John. ’Whose money is it, I should like to know? What belongs to no one, we may as well claim as anybody else.’

’But it must belong to somebody; and, as I knew it was not ours, I’ve carried it back to Mr Benjamin.’

‘You have?’ said Glegg, sitting up in bed.

’Yes, I have, father. Don’t be angry. I’m sure you won’t when you think better of it.’

But John *was* very angry indeed. He was dreadfully disappointed at losing the delicacies that his sick appetite hungered for, and which, he fancied, would do more to restore him than all the *doctors’ stuff* in London; and, so far, he was perhaps right. He bitterly reproached Mary for want of sympathy with his sufferings, and was peevish and cross all day. At night, however, his better nature regained the ascendant; and when he saw the poor girl wipe the tears from her eyes, as her nimble needle flew through the seams of a shirt she was making for a cheap warehouse in the Strand, his heart relented, and, holding out his hand, he drew her fondly towards him.

‘You’re right, Mary,’ he said, ’and I’m wrong; but I’m not myself with this long illness, and I often think if I had good food I should get well, and be able to do something for myself. It falls hard upon you, my girl; and often when I see you slaving to support my useless life, I wish I was dead and out of the way; and then you could do very well for yourself, and I think that pretty face of yours would get you a husband perhaps.’ And Mary flung her arms about his neck, and told him how willing she was to work for him, and how forlorn she should be without him, and desired she might never hear any more of such wicked wishes. Still, she had an ardent desire to give him the fowl and the ale he had longed for, for his next Sunday’s dinner; but, alas! she could not compass it. But on that very Sunday, the one that succeeded these little events, Leah Leet appeared with a smart new bonnet and gown, at a tea-party given by Mr Benjamin to three or four of his

intimate friends. He was in the habit of giving such small inexpensive entertainments, and he made it a point to invite Leah; partly because she made the tea for him, and partly because he wished to keep her out of other society, lest she should get married and leave him—a thing he much deprecated on all accounts. She was accustomed to his business, he was accustomed to her, and, above all, she was so honest!

Page 12

But there are various kinds of honesty. Mary Glegg's was of the pure sort; it was such as nature and her mother had instilled into her: it was the honesty of high principle. But Leah was honest, because she had been taught that honesty is the best policy; and as she had her living to earn, it was extremely necessary that she should be guided by the axiom, or she might come to poverty and want bread, like others she saw, who lost good situations from failing in this particular.

Now, after all, this is but a sandy foundation for honesty; because a person who is not actuated by a higher motive, will naturally have no objection to a little peculation in a safe way—that is, when they think there is no possible chance of being found out. In short, such honesty is but a counterfeit, and, like all counterfeits, it will not stand the wear and tear of the genuine article. Such, however, was Leah's, who had been bred up by worldly-wise teachers, who neither taught nor knew any better. Entirely ignorant of Mr Benjamin's eccentric method of seeking, what two thousand years ago Diogenes thought it worth while to look for with a lantern, she considered that the guinea brought back by Mary was a waif, which might be appropriated without the smallest danger of being called to account for it. It had probably, she thought, been dropped into the meal-tub by some careless customer, who would not know how he had lost it; and, even if it were her master's, he must also be quite ignorant of the accident that had placed it where it was found. The girl was a stranger in the shop; she had never been there till the day before, and might never be there again; and, if she were, it was not likely she would speak to Mr Benjamin. So there could be no risk, as far as she could see; and the money came just apropos to purchase some new attire that the change of season rendered desirable.

Many of us now alive can remember the beginning of what is called the sanitary movement, previous to which era, as nothing was said about the wretched dwellings of the poor, nobody thought of them, nor were the ill consequences of their dirty, crowded rooms, and bad ventilation at all appreciated. At length the idea struck somebody, who wrote a pamphlet about it, which the public did not read; but as the author sent it to the newspaper editors, they borrowed the hint, and took up the subject, the importance of which, by slow degrees, penetrated the London mind. Now, amongst the sources of wealth possessed by Mr Benjamin were a great many houses, which, by having money at his command, he had bought cheap from those who could not afford to wait; and many of these were situated in squalid neighbourhoods, and were inhabited by miserably poor people; but as these people did not fall under his eye, he had never thought of them—he had only thought of their rents, which he received with more or less regularity through the hands of his agent. The sums due, however, were often

Page 13

deficient, for sometimes the tenants were unable to pay them, because they were so sick they could not work; and sometimes they died, leaving nothing behind them to seize for their debts. Mr Benjamin had looked upon this evil as irremediable; but when he heard of the sanitary movement, it occurred to him, that if he did something towards rendering his property more eligible and wholesome, he might let his rooms to a better class of tenants, and that greater certainty of payment, together with a little higher rent, would remunerate him for the expense of the cleaning and repairs. The idea being agreeable both to his love of gain and his benevolence, he summoned his builder, and proposed that he should accompany him over these tenements, in order that they might agree as to what should be done, and calculate the outlay; and the house inhabited by Glegg and his daughter happening to be one of them, the old gentleman, in the natural course of events, found himself paying an unexpected visit to the unconscious subject of his last experiment; for the last it was, and so it was likely to remain, though three months had elapsed since he made it; but its ill success had discouraged him. There was something about Mary that so evidently distinguished her from his usual customers; she looked so innocent, so modest, and withal so pretty, that he thought if he failed with her, he was not likely to succeed with anybody else.

‘Who lives in the attics?’ he inquired of Mr Harker, the builder, as they were ascending the stairs.

’There’s a widow and her daughter and son-in-law, with three children, in the back-room,’ answered Mr Harker. ’I believe the women go out charring, and the man’s a bricklayer. In the front, there’s a man called Glegg and his daughter. I fancy they’re people that have been better off at some time of their lives. He has been a tradesman —a cooper, he tells me; but things went badly with him; and since he came here, his wife died of the fever, and he’s been so weakly ever since he had it, that he can earn nothing. His daughter lives by her needle.’

Mary was out; she had gone to take home some work, in hopes of getting immediate payment for it. A couple of shillings would purchase them coal and food, and they were much in need of both. John was sitting by the scanty fire, with his daughter’s shawl over his shoulders, looking wan, wasted, and desponding.

‘Mr Benjamin, the landlord, Mr Glegg,’ said Harker.

John knew they owed a little rent, and was afraid they had come to demand it. ‘I’m sorry my daughter’s out, gentlemen,’ he said. ’Will you be pleased to take a chair.’

‘Mr Benjamin is going round his property,’ said Harker. ’He is proposing to make a few repairs, and do a little painting and whitewashing, to make the rooms more airy and comfortable.’

‘That will be a good thing, sir,’ answered Glegg—’a very good thing; for I believe it is the closeness of the place that makes us country folks ill when we come to London. I’m sure I’ve never had a day’s health since I’ve lived here.’

Page 14

‘You’ve been very unlucky, indeed, Mr Glegg,’ said Harker. ’But you know, if we lay out money, we shall look for a return. We must raise your rent.’

‘Ah, sir, I suppose so,’ answered John with a sigh; ’and how we’re to pay it, I don’t know. If I could only get well, I shouldn’t mind; for I’d rather break stones on the road, or sweep a crossing, than see my poor girl slaving from morning to night for such a pittance.’

‘If we were to throw down this partition, and open another window here,’ said Harker to Mr Benjamin, ’it would make a comfortable apartment of it. There would be room, then, for a bed in the recess.’

Mr Benjamin, however, was at that moment engaged in the contemplation of an ill-painted portrait of a girl, that was attached by a pin over the chimney-piece. It was without a frame, for the respectable gilt one that had formerly encircled it, had been taken off, and sold to buy bread. Nothing could be coarser than the execution of the thing, but as is not unfrequently the case with such productions, the likeness was striking; and Mr Benjamin, being now in the habit of seeing Mary, who bought all the meal they used at his shop, recognised it at once.

‘That’s your daughter, is it?’ he said.

’Yes, sir; she’s often at your place for meal; and if it wasn’t too great a liberty, I would ask you, sir, if you thought you could help her to some sort of employment that’s better than sewing; for it’s a hard life, sir, in this close place for a young creature that was brought up in the free country air: not that Mary minds work, but the worst is, there’s so little to be got by the needle, and it’s such close confinement.’

Mr Benjamin’s mind, during this address of poor Glegg’s, was running on his guinea. He felt a distrust of her honesty—or rather of the honesty of both father and daughter; and yet being far from a hard-hearted person, their evident distress and the man’s sickness disposed him to make allowance for them. ’They couldn’t know that the money belonged to me,’ thought he; adding aloud: ‘Have you no friends here in London?’

’No, sir, none. I was unfortunate in business in the country, and came here hoping for better luck; but sickness overtook us, and we’ve never been able to do any good. But, Mary, my daughter, doesn’t want for education, sir; and a more honest girl never lived!’

‘Honest, is she?’ said Mr Benjamin, looking Glegg in the face.

‘I’ll answer for her, sir,’ answered John, who thought the old gentleman was going to assist her to a situation. ’You’ll excuse me mentioning it, sir; but perhaps it isn’t everybody, distressed as we were, that would have carried back that money she found

in the meal: but Mary *would* do it, even when I said that perhaps it wasn't yours, and that nobody might know whose it was; which was very wrong of me, no doubt; but one's mind gets weakened by illness and want, and I couldn't help thinking of the food it would buy us; but Mary wouldn't hear of it. I'm sure you might trust Mary with untold gold, sir; and it would be a real charity to help her to a situation, if you knew of such a thing.'

Page 15

Little deemed Leah that morning, as she handed Mary her quart of meal and the change for her hard-earned shilling, that she had spoiled her own fortunes, and that she would, ere night, be called upon to abdicate her stool behind the counter in favour of that humble customer; and yet so it was. Mr Benjamin could not forgive her dereliction from honesty; and the more he had trusted her, the greater was the shock to his confidence. Moreover, his short-sighted views of human nature, and his incapacity for comprehending its infinite shades and varieties, caused him to extend his ill opinion farther than the delinquent merited. In spite of her protestations, he could not believe that this was her first misdemeanour; but concluded that, like many other people in the world, she had only been reputed honest because she had not been found out. Leah soon found herself in the very dilemma she had deprecated, and the apprehension of which had kept her so long practically honest—without a situation, and with a damaged character.

As Mary understood book-keeping, the duties of her new office were soon learned, and the only evil attending it was, that she could not take care of her father. But determined not to lose her, Mr Benjamin found means to reconcile the difficulty by giving them a room behind the shop, where they lived very comfortably, till Glegg, recovering some portion of health, was able to work a little at his trade.

In process of time, however, as infirmity began to disable Mr Benjamin for the daily walk from his residence to his shop, he left the whole management of the business to the father and daughter, receiving every shilling of the profits, except the moderate salaries he gave them, which were sufficient to furnish them with all the necessaries of life, though nothing beyond. But when the old gentleman died, and his will was opened, it was found that he had left everything he possessed to Mary Glegg; except one guinea, which, without alleging any reason, he bequeathed to Leah Leet.

DECIMAL SYSTEM OF COINAGE.

The pounds, shillings, and pence which served for the simple reckonings of our fathers, have entailed upon us a highly complicated system of accounts since we have become a great commercial people. Steam-engines, locomotives, and electric telegraphs have multiplied our transactions a hundredfold, but no adequate labour-saving machinery has been introduced into the counting-house, where the value of these transactions has to be recorded and adjusted. The simple and scientific method of computation by what is called the decimal system, is used at this moment, we are told, by more than half the human race. Not only has it been by law established in most of the countries of Europe, but throughout the great empires of China and Russia; it is penetrating the Ottoman Empire; it has obtained a footing in Persia and Egypt; and it is universal

Page 16

in the United States of America, whence it has made its way into several other transatlantic states. Among ourselves, the thing is approved and admired in the abstract, but we dread the trouble it would give us to fall into a method to which we are unaccustomed; and we apprehend, on very insufficient grounds, that much confusion would arise during the transition. Moreover, it is to be feared that out of a spirit of prejudice or contradiction, many would not, even under the penalties of law, adopt the change. At this moment, as is well known, certain classes of people persist in selling corn and other articles by old local measures, although at the risk of prosecution. Thus, in Scotland, we still hear of firlots, bolls, and mutchkins, notwithstanding that these antiquated measures were abolished upwards of twenty years ago. In short, it would appear that the change of popular denominations in weights, measures, and moneys, is one of the things which the law, in ordinary circumstances, has great difficulty in reaching.

This difficulty, however, ought not to be deemed insuperable. The boon given to society by the decimal system is worth struggling for. On this account, it appears highly desirable that the people at large should be made thoroughly acquainted with its principles, and be able to weigh the advantages against the difficulties of such a change. Some years ago, the subject was pretty fully discussed in several literary and commercial periodicals; and recently, Mr Taylor's little work[1] has presented it in a more permanent form. Our own pages appear particularly suitable for giving wide circulation to a familiar and popular exposition of the subject.

The ancients used certain letters to represent numbers, and we still employ the Roman numeral characters as the most elegant way of expressing a date in typography or sculpture; but every one must see what a tedious business the calculation of large sums would be according to this cumbrous system of notation: nor is it easy to say whereabouts our commercial status, to say nothing of science, would have been to-day, had it never been superseded. The Romans themselves, in computing large numbers, always had recourse to the abacus—a counting-frame with balls on parallel wires, somewhat similar to that now used in infant-schools.

It was a great step gained, and a most important preparation for clearing away the darkness of the middle ages by the light of science, when between the eighth and thirteenth centuries the use of the characters 1, 2, 3, &c. was generally established in Europe, having been received from Eastern nations, long accustomed to scientific computations. The great advantage of these numbers is, that they proceed on the decimal system—that is, they denote different values according to their relative places, each character signifying ten times more accordingly as it occupies a place higher. Thus 8, in the first place to the right, is simply 8; but in the next to the left,

Page 17

it is 80; in the third, 800; and in the fourth, 8000. Yet we do not require to grasp these large numbers in our thought, but deal with each figure as a simple unit, and subject it to every arithmetical process without even adverting to its real value. To some, it may seem superfluous to explain a matter so familiar; but we have met with many who know pretty well how to use our system of notation mechanically, yet do not know, or rather have not thought of the beautifully simple principle on which it proceeds—that of decimal ascension.

Now, we want to see the same principle applied to the gradations of our money, weights, and measures. Instead of our complicated denominations of money—namely, pounds, each containing twenty shillings, these each divisible into twelve pence, and these again into four farthings—we want a scale in which *ten* of each denomination would amount to *one* of that immediately above it, as in our notation. And instead of our complicated system of weights and measures, we want one similarly graduated system—each measure and weight rising ten times above the former. All calculations of prices would then be made by simple multiplication. What a gala-day for school-boys when the pence and shilling table would be abolished by act of parliament, and there would no longer be the table of avoirdupois-weight to learn, nor troy-weight, nor apothecaries', nor long-measure, nor square-measure, nor cloth-measure, nor liquid-measure, nor dry-measure, but one decimal scale of weights and measures would suffice for every commodity, and there would only be their names to get by heart in order! Every one sees that there would be an astonishing simplification in this system of reckoning by tens—that the study of arithmetic would be immensely facilitated, and the business of the counting-house divested of puzzling calculations. Let us see whereabouts we are in the way towards its attainment.

About ten years ago, a parliamentary commission on the subject of weights and measures, advised the adoption of a decimal scale, but recommended as a preliminary step, the decimation of the Coinage. Regarding it as important, however, that great deference should be paid to existing circumstances, and that the present relative notions of value, so deeply rooted in the public mind, should be disturbed as little as possible, they pointed out the facilities existing in our present coinage for a re-arrangement on the decimal plan. They said that the pound might be preserved precisely on the present footing, and thus would be maintained in name the price of everything above twenty shillings in value. They remarked that the farthing, which is the 960th part of L.1, might be set down as the 1000th, which would be a variation of 4 per cent. only—somewhat less than that to which copper is liable from fluctuation of price. We have thus the units at the one end of the scale, and the thousands at the other; it remains only to interpose the tens and hundreds between them, by introducing a florin as the tenth of a pound, and a cent—equal to 2-1/2d. nearly—as the tenth of the florin. Adopting these views, the following would be the new and simple scale of money-reckoning:—ten millets, 1 cent; ten cents, 1 florin; ten florins, L.1.

Page 18

Nothing was done, however, in following up these recommendations, till the subject was brought before the House of Commons by Dr John Bowring, in 1847. The consequence of his appeal was, that a coin denominated a florin, and representing the tenth of a pound, was struck, and put in circulation. It was, however, considered 'an unfortunate specimen of Royal Mint art,' and the issue was discontinued, though a few specimens still linger unforbidden among us. The matter is thus at a stand-still, and may probably not be agitated again till the people generally are more impressed with its importance, and disposed to urge it on the legislature.

The first thing wanted is obviously an abundant issue of acceptable florins. No matter though the coin be recognised by the ignorant as a two-shilling piece, rather than as the tenth of a pound; it is a decimal coin with which they may become familiar without disturbing their old ideas and modes of reckoning. The single step that would then remain to be taken is the decisive one—the introduction of the coin equivalent to one-tenth of a florin, accompanied by the withdrawal of the representatives of duodecimal division, and a legislative enactment that all accounts kept in public offices, or rendered in private transactions, should be in the decimal denominations.

The only difficulty which has appalled the advocates of the decimal system, is with respect to the cent-piece. It is said to be too small for a silver coin, too large for a copper, and mixed metals find no favour at the Mint. But if it is to be a denomination in accounts, it must have a representative coin, and a silver cent could be very little smaller than our present 3d.-piece. 'The great mass of the people,' says Mr Norton (a correspondent of the *Athenaeum* on this subject), 'will not adopt an abstraction; you must give them something which they can see, handle, and call by name, if you wish them to take notice of it in their reckonings.' Mr Taylor, and some other writers, have proposed to evade this difficulty by passing over the cents altogether, and counting only by pounds, florins, and millets. The French, say they, have in theory a decimally graduated scale, yet they always reckon by francs, and cents, which are 100ths of francs; the intervening decime being ignored in practice. So, likewise, the Americans have the dollar, the dime (its tenth part), the cent (its hundredth), and the mill (its thousandth). 'It is now nearly thirty years,' says Mr John Quincy Adams, in his report to Congress in 1821, 'since our new moneys of account have been established. The dollar and the cent have become familiarised to the tongue, but the dime and the mill are so utterly unknown, that now, when the recent coinage of dimes is alluded to, it is always necessary to inform the reader that they are ten-cent pieces. Ask a tradesman in any of our cities what is a dime or a mill, and the chances are four in five that he will not understand

Page 19

your question.’ This, however, we cannot help considering one of the greatest inconveniences of transatlantic and continental reckonings. We are accustomed to talk of amounts in as small numbers as possible; and one of the great advantages we see in decimal gradations is, that we should never have a number above 9, except in pounds. There is something not only troublesome but indefinite, in the idea of ten and twenty in comparison with one and two; and a French account in francs bewilders us when it amounts to thousands and millions. Probably the half and quarter francs of France, and the half and quarter dollars of America, have been the means of exploding the decimals next below them; and on this ground we differ from those who plead for the continuance of our present shillings and sixpences, as half and quarter florins. The shilling is a coin so inseparably connected with 12 and 20, that no decimal system will obtain while it exists. It is useless to say, that it would be retained only as a circulation coin, and not as a denomination in accounts; for so long as we have it at all, we will certainly reckon from it and by it. For purposes of common barter, there ought to be a two-cent piece, a four-cent, and perhaps a seven-cent; and thus we shall be compelled to *think decimally*. ‘If it is worth while to alter at all,’ says Mr Taylor, ’ought we not to go the whole required length, and aim without timidity at the possession of a scale complete at once within itself, and so escape an indefinite prolongation of the purgatory of transition? In a change like the one under consideration, the work of pulling down an old system is far more difficult than that of building up another, and every prop must be removed before it will fall.’

With respect to the copper coins, there seems to be no hurry about disturbing them. It appears that the Dutch stiver and the French sou have maintained their place in spite of legislation. So, probably, would the English penny, and properly enough as a 4-millet piece. We fear our poor people would feel it to be an attempt to mystify them, were the government to withdraw this familiar coin and substitute a 5-millet piece, as some have recommended, for the sake of establishing a binary division of the cent. It would, doubtless, be considered desirable, as an ulterior measure, to have a more exact copper coinage, marked as one millet, two millets, and four millets; but when we have, without scruple, passed as the twelfth part of a shilling the Irish penny, which is really only the thirteenth part, we may, in the meantime, use our present copper money, which will differ only a twenty-fifth from the new value attached to it—a discrepancy of no consequence, except to the holders of large quantities, from whom the Mint would be bound to receive it back at the value it bore when issued. These coppers, however, ought not to be used beyond the value of the cent, for then would arise the confusion of dealing with the 100 millets in the florin, or

Page 20

what would popularly be termed an odd half-penny in every shilling. For the same reason, the adjustment of prices, in order to be equitable, should be calculated downwards from the pound and florin, not upwards from the penny. Thus, if a labourer's wages have been 1s. 3d. a day, his employer must not say that 15 pence are 60 farthings—that is, 6 cents; but 1s. 3d. is five-eighths of a florin, which amount to about 6 cents 2 millets.

Such is the plan which has been officially laid down for a decimal coinage, and such the steps needful to carry it out. The only scheme we have seen which materially differs from it is that of Mr H. Norton. He selects for the highest denomination the half-sovereign, and proposes to call it a ducat. The shilling, as now in use, would then be the second denomination; the third, he proposes, should be a cent, equal to about 1-1/5th of a penny, and which, he says, would be fairly represented by our large unmilled pennies, if newly christened; the fourth denomination to be a 'rap,' the tenth of the cent, and somewhat less than half a farthing. The great advantage adduced in favour of this scale is, that it would be much more likely than the other to secure general adoption. The removal of the pound, he says, affects chiefly the higher and educated classes; it leaves the shilling, which is the staple and standard for the masses, and also the penny, with slight alteration, accompanied by the utter removal of the old one. It is also said, that a half-farthing piece would be a great boon to the poor, especially in Ireland. The circumstances alleged in recommendation of this scale, are just what appear to us to be its defects. The continuance of the poor man's penny would not appear a boon if he found there were to be only ten of them for a shilling; especially as many small articles, which were a penny before, would probably be a penny still, the dealers not finding it convenient to adjust the fraction. We well remember the dissatisfaction of the poorer classes in Ireland at the equalisation of the currency in 1825. Hitherto, the native silver coins had been 5d. and 10d. pieces, a British shilling had been a thirteen-penny, and a half-crown, 2s. 8-1/2d. This half-crown was the usual breakfast-money of gentlemen's servants—that is, their weekly allowance for purchasing everything except dinner. When the servant now went to the huckster's, and got, as heretofore, 6d. worth of bread, 9d. worth of tea, 4d. worth of sugar, and 5d. worth of butter, there was only 6d. of change to buy another loaf in the middle of the week, instead of 8-1/2d., which was wont to afford, we will not say what, over and above. It is for a similar reason that we say, if there remain anything which can be either identified or confounded with a penny, it should be lowered rather than raised in value. Small prices are not easily adjusted, and the temptation in the other case lies on the side of the dealer not to alter them. It is more certain, for instance,

Page 21

that a baker will take care to divide 2s. worth of bread into twenty-five penny-loaves, when a penny comes to be the twenty-fifth of a florin, than that he will divide 1s. worth into ten only, if a penny become the tenth of a shilling. And it would be less hardship for the poor housekeeper to find her penny-loaf 1-25th smaller, if she could discern the reduction, than to get only ten for her shilling, even if they were a fifth larger. Besides, we should feel it to be a poverty-stricken thought, that our internal commerce should be reduced to barter in half-farthings' worths, and that our merchants and bankers should have no denomination above the value of 10s. for the enormous sums which figure in their books.

The subject of names is worth a remark or two. The commissioners recommended 'florins,' as affording facilities to foreigners for understanding our monetary system; and in this respect it has advantages. 'Cent' and 'millet' are easily enunciated, and they convey to the educated classes, whether at home or abroad, the relative value of the coins. We cannot say, however, but we would prefer a more familiar nomenclature than florins, cents, and millets. Mr Norton's suggestion, that the names should not only be capable of easy and rapid utterance, but that they should be of the same Teutonic origin as our shilling and penny, is worthy of serious consideration. Dr Bowring, who advocated a strictly decimal scale, suggested the names, 'queens' and 'victorias' for the two middle denominations, leaving pounds and farthings as they were. Now, if it be deemed proper to change the name of the unfortunate florin when it makes its reappearance, 'queen' would be a very pretty substitute; but 'victoria' would soon be mangled down to its first syllable. If this style of nomenclature be preferred, 'prince' would be a more suitable name for the little cent-piece. Mr De Morgan is for 'pounds, royals, groats, and farthings.'

But 'royal' is not capable of rapid enunciation, and 'groat' is decidedly objectionable for designating ten farthings, as it is still sacred to fourpence in the English mind. Whatever the names, the full enunciation of them at first would appear stiff and solemn; but abbreviated modes of expression would soon be established. 'Four-two' would be understood as L.4, 2 (florins), while 'four and two' would convey four florins, two cents. When three denominations were used, it would be 'four-three-two,' there being little danger of a misunderstanding as to whether the 'four' were pounds or florins. So, in writing, it would only be necessary to write after any sum the name of the lowest denomination, as 48, 3, 7c., which would be known as L.48, 3 florins, 7 cents; or, to add ciphers for all lower denominations, as 48300, which, whether pointed or not, would convey L.48, 3, 0, 0.

In a future paper, we will resume the subject of decimals, viewing it with reference to weights and measures; when its advantages will more fully appear, by the facility it affords for the calculation of prices.

Page 22

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The Decimal System; as applied to the Coinage and Weights and Measures of Great Britain. Groombridge and Sons: 1851.

WHY THE SCOTCH DO NOT SHUT THE DOOR.

Nations have curious and almost unaccountable peculiarities. One interlards conversation with shrugs, and another with expectoration; and a third, by way of indicating satisfaction, rubs its hands. The Scotch have a peculiarity of their own. When they quit a room, they do not shut the door, but merely draw it gently after them, so as to leave it unlatched. Some individuals may not be strictly attached to this practice; but on the whole the Scotch may, for the sake of distinction, be said to be an anti-door-shutting nation. Now, why such should be the case, becomes an interesting philosophical problem.

Much consideration have we spent in pondering on this national oddity, and are free to admit that the conclusions arrived at are not so satisfactory as could be wished. Nevertheless, in default of any better explanation of the phenomenon, what we have to say may possibly carry a degree of weight.

The reason why the Scotch do not shut the door is, as we imagine, highly characteristic. It is not that they are ignorant of the important fact, that doors are made for shutting. They are fully aware that latches are not mere ornamental attributes of doors—things stuck on not to be used. And it cannot be imputed to them, that they leave doors open for the sake of ventilation. In short, if strangers were to guess for a hundred years, they would fail to hit upon the real, true, and particular reason why the Scotch do not shut the door. One would naturally think, that as the act of shutting the door is the prerogative of the person who quits an apartment, it would not by so mindful a people be neglected. And neither it is. There is no neglect in the matter. The Scotch take a profound view of the subject. They institute a rigorous comparison between shutting and not shutting. True, they are not taught to do so, any more than Frenchmen are taught to make gestures. It is in them. They are born with a natural proneness to consider, as if it were a question of algebraic quantities, whether the satisfaction they might impart by shutting the door would not be more than counterbalanced by the dissatisfaction that might accrue from distinctly and unmistakably shutting it. Still, it seems strange how any displeasure could be incurred by the performance of what all the rest of mankind believe to be a mark of good-breeding. Strange, indeed! But it surely will be observed, that much depends on making a principle of a thing. And with respect to good-breeding, what if it can be placed in a double point of sight? It may be the etiquette in some countries to shut the door; but that proves nothing. In Europe, men uncover their heads on entering the

Page 23

presence of the great; in the East, they uncover the feet. Fashions are local. When the Scotch do not shut the door, they act conscientiously, according to ancient national usage. We may be certain that they have deliberately, arithmetically, and cautiously, weighed the question of shutting in its various and delicate bearings; and arrived at the clear conviction that, all things considered, it would be better not to shut!

Of course, the Scotch having, by innate logic, attained to a principle, they adhere to it as a thing which neither argument nor raillery can upset. They have very properly resolved not to be reasoned, nor laughed, nor cudgelled out of their opinion. The door ought not to be shut! That is a truth as effectually demonstrated as any truth in mathematics; and such being the case, they will die rather than yield the point. Let it be understood, therefore, that in these observations we aim not in the slightest degree at proselytising our northern friends. They are a nation of anti-door-shutters, and that, on principle, they will remain to the end of the chapter.

It may, at the same time, be mentioned, that this acute people have no special objection to seeing a door shut, provided anybody else does it. Their principles apply only to shutting by their own hand. What might be very wrong in them, while quitting an apartment, would be proper enough for him who remains. He may rise and shut the door, if he feels inclined. It is his affair. Strictly speaking, he should appreciate the delicacy of feeling which has gracefully left the performance of this simple act to his own discretion. Yes, it is in this fine instance of steady principle that we see a discrimination of politeness exquisitely ingenious and beautiful. The English have the reputation of being a blunt, downright people; and their practice of shutting the door after them makes it certain they are so. When they draw to the door, turn the handle, and hear the latch click, they as good as say: 'There, the door is shut; the thing is done. I leave no doubt on the subject; I care not what you think of me; I have done my duty.' This is England all over—great, uncalculating, independent-minded England! The Scotch almost pity this daring recklessness of character. They are astonished at its boldness. It is action resting on no proper grounds. How differently they proceed! Treating it as belonging to the science of numbers, the following becomes the method of stating the question:—

Given that there is a door which may or may not be shut on quitting an apartment, let it be shewn by the rules of arithmetic whether it would be preferable to shut the said door or leave it open. Write down, first, the arguments for not shutting, according to their supposed value; then do the same for the arguments *per contra*; lastly, sum up both, and strike the balance. Thus—

FOR NOT SHUTTING.

Page 24

Because the door is apt to slam, which would be exceedingly unpleasant, and might suggest the idea that you went out in a passion—valued as . . . 4
If it did not slam, it might still make
a creaking noise--valued as 2
Supposing it to make no noise at all, the impression is conveyed that you are going away never to return, whereas you have no such intention, ... 1

Chances of your causing a noise to disturb the company on opening the door when you return, ... 2

Probable loss of character by conveying the notion, that you are peremptory and abrupt in manners, ... 3

Giving the parties remaining the option of shutting, or not, as suits their fancy, . . 2

That by leaving the door open, you do not commit yourself to a determinate act, ... 2

—

16

FOR SHUTTING.

That a cold wind may not blow into the room; but this not probable, for it will be easy for those remaining in the apartment to rise and shut the door themselves, ... 1
That by a faint possibility you may give
offence by leaving the door open, ... 1

That you may prevent persons outside overhearing what is said; this of small account, for people should not speak about things they do not wish to be repeated, ... 1

—

3

Deducting 3 from 16, 13 remain. Result—balance of 13-19ths in favour of not shutting the door. Nothing, therefore, could be more clearly demonstrated than that the Scotch are strongly justified in leaving the door open when they quit an apartment. Doubts, indeed, may be entertained as to the values arbitrarily put on the respective items in the

account: but to venture into this remote part of the inquiry would be to plunge us into the depths of metaphysics. Even supposing we were to make the matter as clear as the sun at noonday, there would still be sceptics. On shewing the above arithmetical calculation, for example, to an English lady, who has for a number of years studied Scotch character and manners, she, with a degree of bluntness that was exceedingly startling, gave it as her unqualified opinion, that the whole thing was a piece of nonsense; and that the only reason, as far as she could observe, why the Scotch do not shut the door, is that they have never been taught that it is consistent with good-manners to do so. The audacity of some people is really wonderful!

EDFOU AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

Page 25

There is something extremely pleasant in the general regularity with which the picture of Egypt unfolds itself on either hand like a double panorama as you descend the Nile. When moving in the opposite direction, against the perpetual current, you are sometimes compelled to creep slowly on, tugged by a tight-strained rope at the rate of seven or eight miles a day; whilst anon a wind rises unexpectedly, and carries you with bewildering speed through forty or fifty miles of scenery. But the masts being taken down, and the sails folded for the rest of the voyage, and the oars put out, you begin to calculate with tolerable certainty on the rate of progress; for though violent contrary winds do frequently blow during part of a day, it is almost always possible to make up for lost time in the hours that neighbour on sunset before and after. Well-seasoned Nile-travellers confirm our experience; and as we had rowed and floated within a calculated time from Assouan to Ombos, and from Ombos to Silsilis, so did we proceed to Edfou, and to the stations beyond, with few exceptions of obstinately adverse weather.

True, some portions of the view are missed during the hours of night-travelling; but these have most probably been seen during the ascent. Besides, though the scenery of the Nile is certainly not monotonous enough to weary the eye, yet there is a general sameness in its details, a want of those bold, original features which in other countries stamp the character of particular localities. Two parallel lines of mountains ever within sight of each other, now advancing towards the river through a sea of verdure in promontories, always nearly with the same level outline, now receding in semicircular sweeps; a narrow flat plain, loaded with crops and palm-groves, and intersected by canals and dikes, sometimes equally divided by a tortuous stream of vast breadth, but sometimes thrown, as it were, all to one side, east or west; occasionally a long line of precipices descending sheer into the very water; once only a regular defile with rocks on either hand; islands in the river, sandbanks, broad, winding reaches—such, in a few words, is a description of Egypt. It is the variety of colour produced by that mighty painter, the sun, that gives all the beauty to the landscape; and of this it is almost impossible to convey an idea. The chaste loveliness of the dawn, the majestic splendour of noon, and the marvellous glories of the sunset-hour—the thousand hues that glow and tremble, and melt and mingle around through all the scenes of this great drama of light—words have not yet been invented to describe.

Page 26

And then the night! Who can sit down and recall and count over the impressions which fly like a troop of fairies over the thrilling senses at that mystic hour, when the skirts of retiring day have ceased to flutter above the western hills, and the moon casts down her pale, melancholy glances on the silent scene, and the stars—our guardian angels, according to some—seem to stoop nearer and nearer to the earth as slumber deepens, as if to press golden kisses upon the eyelids of those whom they watch and love! In all countries these hours are beautiful; but in Egypt—let those who doubt come and witness all that we beheld, and which is indescribable, on the evening that we left the neighbourhood of Silsilis on our way to Edfou—on that calm, placid river, over which brooded a silence interrupted only by the alternate songs of the crews of the two boats as they leisurely pulled with the current.

It was late in the afternoon of next day when we reached the landing-place; but we immediately set out to see the ruin, if ruin it can be called, for it is almost in perfect preservation. After traversing a broad extent of ground covered with rank grass and prickly plants, we came to the customary palm-grove, and then entered what romancers would probably call the ‘good city’ of Edfou. It is a considerable collection of huts, principally constructed of mud, clustering amidst mounds of rubbish at the base of the temple. The lofty propylaea, above a hundred feet high, I believe, were of course seen from afar off, both during our walk and in ascending and descending the river. As is the case in nearly all other Egyptian buildings, the effect at a distance is anything but picturesque. From want of objects of comparison, the impression of great size is not produced; and nothing can be meaner in outline than two towers like truncated pyramids, pierced with small, square windows at irregular intervals. On a nearer approach, however, the surface-ornament begins to appear; and the central doorway, overhung by a rich and painted cornice, presents itself in its really grand proportions, but crushed, as it were, by the vast size of the twin towers, which now seem magnified into mountains. At Edfou the effect of this surprise is partly injured by the circumstances: first, the accumulation of huts through which you approach; and second, that of mounds of dirt which have risen nearly to the height of the doorway. However, when you come to the summit of these mounds, almost on a level with the lintel, and look down between the enormous jambs into a kind of valley formed by the great court, with its wonderful portico and belt of columns, it is difficult to conceive a more imposing scene.

Page 27

The walls on all sides were covered with gigantic figures, quite wonderful to behold in their serene ugliness; but awakening no more human sympathy than the singular figures we saw on the Chinese-patterned plate stuck over the doorway in Nubia. The exaggeration that is usually indulged in with reference to Egyptian art is such, that if we were to attempt to describe these sculptured ornaments according to our own impressions, we should run the risk of being accused of caricature. We do not mean on this temple only, but on all the temples of Egypt. Now and then a face of beautiful expression, though still with heavy features, is met with; but in general both countenance and figure are flat, out of proportion, and stiff in drawing, whilst the highest effort of colouring consists of one uniform layer, without tints or gradation. Perhaps amidst the many thousand subjects found in tombs and temples between Philoe and Cairo, one or two may be treated with nearly as much skill as was exhibited by the Italian painters before the time of Cimabue—except that scarcely an attempt even is made at grouping or composition. Nor must it be supposed that the Egyptian school was in course of development. They seem to have arrived at the highest excellence of which their intellect was capable. Their outlines, though in general excessively mean, are very firmly drawn; and they represent details with a laborious ingenuity worthy of the Chinese. Some enthusiastic antiquarians describe with great animation the scenes of public and domestic life which occur in such profusion; and, book in hand, we have admired and wondered at—not the genius of the artists, but that of their historians. How, in fact, do the Egyptians really proceed? They want to represent a hunt, for example: so they sketch a man with his legs extended like compasses, armed with a huge bow, from which he is in the act of discharging a monstrous arrow. Then close by they draw, without any attempt at perspective, a square enclosure, in which they set down higgledy-piggledy a variety of animals, some of them sufficiently like nature to allow their species to be guessed at. In one corner, perhaps, is a sprig of something intended for a tree, and intimating that all this is supposed to take place in a wood. This hieroglyphical or algebraical method of ‘taking off’ the occurrences of human life is applied with almost unvarying uniformity. Such was high art among the Egyptians; whom it is now the fashion to cry up at the expense of those impertinent Grecians, who presumed to arrive at excellence, almost at perfection, in so many departments.

Page 28

However, the vast size of the figures on the front of the propylaea of Edfou does certainly, in spite of their awkwardness, produce an imposing effect, especially at the time we first beheld them, when the gray twilight had descended upon the earth, and night was already thickening beneath the heavy portico. We walked, or rather slid, down into the great court. It was surrounded with massive columns loaded with ornament, and looked grave in the extreme, in spite of the heaps of rubbish that encumbered it, and enabled us to ascend to the summit of the colonnade at one corner. The architecture of the Egyptians was certainly sublime. Their style anticipated and surpassed the Gothic in majesty, though certainly not in beauty. Their massive walls, Cyclopean columns, dim porticos, gloomy chambers, produce even now all the terrific impressions they could have desired. Perhaps the crumbling ruins which encumber the roof, the wretched remains of Christian buildings once erected on this temple as on a rock for security, rather heighten than diminish its effect. We walked round a vast wall still in perfect preservation, which encircles the windowless parallelogram formed by the temple, and reaches about half its height, leaving a narrow court like a moat all round; and we felt that these religious edifices had been fortresses likewise, and that temporal as well as spiritual terrors had of yore surrounded them. When shall we be able to wring forth the secret of that ancient time? When will its history cease to be a myth, its kings become real personages, its civilisation something better than a romance? As yet, nothing has been discovered except a string of disjointed facts, which scholars arrange each after his own fashion, and which no more resemble any other known series of human actions than the accidental combination of the kaleidoscope does this living and breathing world. We want a key, and a key has not been found. So men go stumbling on through the inextricable labyrinth, and exhaust more ingenuity in vain speculations than would suffice to bring a variety of modern sciences to perfection.

It was perfectly safe to indulge in these thoughts, because even if any mighty antiquary had been at hand, he would have been obliged to confess that although some truth may have been brought to light, it is impossible to put one’s finger upon it. For almost all men who have studied Egyptian antiquities differ entirely in their conclusions—all arrange dynasties in a different manner, and find more mistakes than discoveries in their predecessors. Well, thought we, let us leave them to their researches: if they do not find the pot of gold, they may cultivate the ground. For our part, we will hasten on to where yon pale gleam of yellow light is pouring between the propylaea and the body of the temple over the court-yard upon an enormous mountain of rubbish. It was the moon that had risen—not to enlighten the scene, but to render it more dim and mysterious,

Page 29

more full of strange shadows and illusions. On such occasions it is difficult even for the least imaginative to check a thought of what that pale, thoughtful-looking orb, which has watched the changing aspects of this scene for so many thousand years, could tell if it had a tongue! We gazed inquiringly at it; but as it rose higher and higher, and poured down more light on all objects around, it seemed to smile at our inquisitiveness, and to bid us turn less eager glances towards the dust and rubbish of old times, where perchance we may find a precious stone, perchance a bit of broken glass—but bend our eyes more steadfastly to the future, the centuries unborn, the inevitable, though not yet created infinite.

Edfou is situated at a little distance inland on the western bank of the Nile. As usual, the land in the neighbourhood of the river is high in comparison with that which is beyond—-that is to say, there is a continual descending slope to the edge of the desert, where at this time of year there is, as it were, a succession of large ponds, water-channels, and marshes. It is impossible to reach the desert except by a long, elevated, tortuous dike, which begins near the town and terminates near the foot of a spur of the Libyan chain, some three or four miles distant. By the aid of the telescope we could distinguish in the niches of the rock a variety of dark spots resembling the entrances of grottos; and, hearing that others had made the same observation, though without undertaking the fatigue of a visit, we determined to set out next morning, and combine a little sporting with antiquity-hunting.

Though the sun was not very high, it was sufficiently warm when we started, and we had good reason for anticipating a broiling ride. At this point there is not an atom of shade, not the semblance of a tree between the river and the stony desert. All the palm-groves cluster round the town of Edfou and the villages north and south. We were soon upon the dusty dike, which, as we proceeded, seemed to lift us higher and higher above the level plain, half bright-green, half sheeted with water, that lay in death-like repose, and reflected the sun’s rays like a burnished mirror. It soon appeared that our anticipations of good sport were not to be disappointed: on all sides, as far as the eye could reach, as well as near at hand in the pools at the base of the *gisr* or dike, appeared innumerable birds, principally aquatic. Large flocks of paddy-birds, often called the white ibis, speckled the green of the fields; enormous pelicans stood hanging their enormous beaks, as if in drowsy contemplation, over distant pools; storks and herons, single, or arranged, as it were, in military array, accompanied them; and prodigious masses of white birds glittered in the sun on the verge of the marshy plain. Then the water was alive with cormorants, geese, ducks, divers, teal, coot, that swam about in amazing numbers, or, startled at the slightest noise, flew generally

Page 30

at a cautious distance overhead. Birds of prey were of course likewise numerous—-hawks, kites, vultures; and whole flights of large, black crows went by now and then, cawing vociferously. We could see also prodigious numbers of the *ghatta* or red-legged partridge flying northward or settling on the edge of the desert. It seemed as though a grand parliament of the feathered creation were about to be held.

When we reached the desert we found a small Coptic convent standing amidst the ruins of a much larger one near the head of the *gisr*. We visited it in the course of the morning, and were civilly received and conducted over the establishment. However, there was nothing particular to see. The grottos we found to be of no interest whatever, being only a few feet deep, and containing neither sculptures nor inscriptions. At the base of the rocks were some oblong mouths of wells, but they were nearly filled with sand, so that, in an antiquarian point of view, we had reason to be disappointed. We passed some time on the plain, covered with *halfeh*, a kind of coarse grass, to the north of the convent; succeeded in getting some partridges to add to our water-fowl; and returned in the afternoon with a donkey-load of game to the boat.

On the opposite side of the river there is some good ground for hare-shooting. We had been there before with success, and determined on a second visit. The scenery presented a curious contrast to that on the west bank—no dikes, no ponds, no marshy fields. The country extends from the bank in a high level plain, principally overgrown with halfeh-grass, to the desert. Formerly there was scarcely any cultivation; all was abandoned to unprofitable thickets, that grew wild down to the river's margin. Now a good deal of *dhourra* is grown; and in January we saw the bright green blades of wheat coming up amongst the stubble. The castor-oil plant has been introduced, but as yet the unprofitable silk-tree and the wild bushes are far more common.

The change that has taken place is attributed to the fact, that a Frenchman, in the service of the pacha, has discovered coal-mines in the vicinity; and this is farther confirmed by the name bestowed on the mountains—Gebel et Fahm (Mountains of Coal.) But none of the valuable mineral has as yet made its appearance, and sceptics pretend that none ever will. We saw four or five large black heaps at a distance, and thought they might be the produce of the neighbourhood; but on drawing nigh they turned out to be charcoal manufactured in the desert, and brought down for sale by the Bedouins. There is a village of Ababde beneath the desert hills on the extreme verge of the plain; and the new cultivation seems entirely due to its inhabitants.

Page 31

It was late in the evening when we this time came to the hare-ground; but we expected to take advantage of puss, as we had done once before, by moonlight. As we beat about among the bushes, myriads of drowsy sparrows, that had settled to rest on the boughs, rushed up with a tremendous noise, but sank down again almost instantaneously, to be once more disturbed. We started a few hares, but they glided away like shadows in the twilight, and we got no shots. Next morning we again tried our fortune; but it would appear as if the wary things had held a council of war, and decamped with bag and baggage. We found the sparrows lively and twittering, as though their night's rest had not been disturbed; hundreds of doves cooed securely on the boughs; and half a dozen mighty storks flew off from the midst of a dew-bespangled copse. But though we turned out the crews of two boats in default of dogs, not a hare shewed its ears; and we gave up the search disappointed. It is remarked by old travellers on the Nile, that these animals constantly shift their quarters; not, indeed, in the course of a night, as we perhaps gratuitously supposed, but from season to season.

AN ENGLISH WORKMAN'S ACCOUNT OF A 'STRIKE' IN NEW YORK.

It was my second summer in New York: a residence of two years in that busy and enterprising city had enabled me to form juster views concerning the social policy of its inhabitants than those which had presented themselves to me on first landing; two years, if properly made use of, will serve to correct many fallacies, and to throw light on places and people. There is nothing like seeing with your own eyes, if you want really to know what the two latter are—whether they come up to your standard of comparison or otherwise. In several respects, chiefly material, I liked America better than England; the abundance and cheapness of provisions, for instance, and the ease with which fruits and other luxuries—to say nothing of books and newspapers—were procurable by the working-classes, presented, at that time at least, a striking contrast to the state of things in the 'old country.' I liked, too, at first, the sort of free-and-easy intercourse of the working-men with those, conventionally speaking, above them. Jack considered himself as good as his master, though not without occasional mortifications at not finding the sentiment reciprocated. The feeling, however, imparted a show of independence, rather captivating to one who was not a little imbued with 'old-country' radicalism. On the other hand, I had been astonished, not to say disconcerted, at finding—which I did more and more every day—how much mechanics are looked down upon in the United States. You have only to wear jacket and apron, and write yourself artisan, to be excluded from 'good' society as rigidly as if born under the caste-laws of India. Where there appears to be an equal chance for all to rise, those who have risen draw the line of demarcation with much greater severity than strangers are willing to believe.

Page 32

Another point on which my notions were corrected was, that it was not so *very* easy to find work in New York as is commonly reported; and that, though wages were 20 per cent. higher than I had been accustomed to, the high price of clothing, lodging, &c. made it, notwithstanding, necessary for a man to be exceedingly careful of his expenditure, if he wished really to save money. There was no royal road to wealth on that side the Atlantic any more than on this.

Yet, among the facts which I liked, there was a set-off for this: it was the absence of those stupid trade-regulations which in England, and on the continent of Europe, hamper so annoyingly the movement of commerce, and complicate so vexatiously the relations between employers and employed. Few of these relics of feudal-age policy exist in the United States: a master takes as many apprentices as he pleases, perfectly regardless of anything his journeymen may think or say to the contrary. He believes, and not without reason, that while he pays them fair wages for their labour, they have no right to interfere with his mode of conducting his business. It was a relief to get clear of the traditionary customs and usages of European workshops, and to feel that the way was clearer for rising out of the ranks. But there was one exception, in a large foundry and engine-factory into which I sometimes went to see an acquaintance: there the 'old-country' customs, as to drinking when new hands were taken on, prescribing coercive limitations, and so forth, were in full vigour. My shopmates were greatly amused one day by my account of what I had seen and heard in the factory and our foreman exclaimed in language that would have done credit to Sam Slick: 'Well! if them machinists aint the pigheadedest fellers I ever heerd tell of!—they must be Johnny Bulls!'

Such were some of my experiences of American life, and I was working on in my usual plodding way, when I found that there was still something to be learned. The journeymen cabinet-makers throughout the city took it into their heads that too great a share of the profits of trade went into the masters' pockets, and they determined, by demanding higher wages, to secure if possible an increased proportion for themselves. The masters being informed of the fact, maintained the contrary, and thereupon issue was joined. An 'old-price book' and a 'new-price book' came immediately to be talked about, with a fervour scarcely exceeded by that of the O.P. hostilities, well remembered by old playgoers in London; and among the men, a few ambitious spirits assumed the direction of affairs, and drew around them many willing helpers. Preliminary meetings were held to organise an opposition to the masters, and to take measures for the proper setting-forth and enforcement of the claims of the men, and the grounds on which the advance of wages was demanded. Deputations were appointed to wait on the employers, or 'bosses,' and shew reason why they should 'give in;' but the bosses would not give in, and declared themselves to be the best-judges of their own business; that wages were as high as sale-prices would allow, and that a rise was out of the question. On hearing this, the men threatened a strike, to take place by a certain day, if their demands were not complied with.

Page 33

From ten to twelve hands were employed in the shop where I worked—a rather heterogeneous assemblage. The foreman and one or two others were Americans, and the rest were Germans, French, and Irish—I being the only Englishman. Notwithstanding the diversity of nation, there was but little in sentiment, for with the exception of the apprentice, who was not a free agent, and myself, they all determined to 'turn out,' and many a taunt had I to bear for refusing to join them. Our boss was a man well to do in the world. Having of course heard of the threatened strike, he said: 'Well, you can do just as you like. There's no boss in the city pays better prices than I do, and they wont go up a cent the higher for all your striking.'

For my part, I was quite taken by surprise by the strike; it was the last thing I should have expected to see in America. But there it was, sure enough; and now that the boss had so unequivocally declared his sentiments, the shop became the more demonstrative in the expression of theirs. They were not going to be slaves for anybody; it was a free country; they had a right to higher wages, and higher wages they would have. The Britisher wasn't half a man; he was a sneak, who ought to have stayed in his own tyrannical country; and much more to the same effect. Consequently, on the day fixed, they just shewed themselves at the shop for a few minutes after breakfast, and then went off in a body to a great 'mass meeting,' called for the first day of the strike; and all the while emigrants from Europe were pouring into the city at the rate of ten or twelve hundred every week.

A first measure was to ascertain the numbers who had struck, how many were recusants, and in what shops they were working, with a view to devise means for procuring a total cessation of work in all the shops of the city. Advertisements of the proceedings speedily appeared in the daily papers, chiefly in those which, being sold at a cent apiece, circulated most largely among the working population. The masters were warned, that holding out on their part would be of little avail; and as for the 'misguided men' who persisted in working, they were invited to join the ranks of the insurgents, with promises of work at twelve dollars a week, or the option of being stigmatised as unworthy members of society. Compared with the 'turn-outs,' the number of those who persisted in their labour was very small. As for myself, it seemed at first uncommonly dull to hear only the noise of my own tools, or of the apprentice's, echoing through the workshop. But the weather was fine; my 'job,' a 'secretary bookcase,' was one that I liked; and I kept on without a single misgiving as to the propriety of my determination.

Page 34

After a few days spent in debates and discussions, and adjustment of differences between the old and new list of prices, deputations were sent round to all shops where the men had not joined the strike, and, among others, they visited me. For some reason—perhaps to avoid vexing the boss—they would not come up stairs, and requested me to meet them at the basement door. On going down, I saw some five or six well-dressed, intelligent-looking men—not a rare sight among the mechanics of New York—and then, they standing under the 'stoop,' and I leaning against a pile of maple-joists, one of them opened the business with a little dissertation on political and social economy, and the inherent right of men to band themselves together for the common good; after which, he inquired my reasons for continuing to work in opposition to the *will of the majority*. Those who have lived in America, and those only, will be able fully to comprehend the significance of these four words in italics. My answer was, that 'I had come to America to better myself, and could not afford to lose time.'

'But you need not lose time. There's a steam-boat fitting up down below at the dock; we can get you work on board of her at twelve dollars a week.'

'I don't know anything of steam-boat work; and if I did, it would not suit me to give up a steady place for one that must necessarily be uncertain.'

'You mean to say, then, that you will keep on working where you are?'

'I do.'

'You must be a fool to work for eight or nine dollars a week, when, by standing out, you could get twelve.'

'Not so sure of that; it is but a few who can make two dollars a day, and I am not one of them. Nine dollars is about a fair rate for what I can do.'

'That's no reason why you shouldn't try to better yourself by standing out. The bosses must give in, if all hands will only strike; and if it weren't for you European slaves and convicts, we'd soon carry our point.'

The term convict is a taunt frequently applied to Englishmen by working-people in the United States, and its introduction into the argument did not at all surprise me.

'I have little inclination,' I answered, 'to throw myself out of work just to enable you, and a dozen or two more, to get your twelve dollars a week. My first duty is, to take care of myself and my family. Our boss is a good fellow in the main, and I don't want to leave him; and, besides, there's another reason why I won't strike.'

'And what's that?'

’Because it won’t succeed. You might as well try to stop the stream of the Hudson, as to keep up wages, while fifty or a hundred cabinet-makers are coming in every week from Germany, ready to work for twelve dollars a month.’

’That shews how much you know about it. In our great and free country, there’s work for all Europe; so it’s no use saying wages can’t be kept up.’

Page 35

‘Whether or not,’ I retorted, ’that’s my opinion, and I shall stick to it till I find a better.’

On this, the opposite party delivered himself of a lengthy harangue, in which arguments were quoted from Adam Smith, De Tocqueville, and others, with considerable fluency; all intended, apparently, to convict me of flagrant error, and prognosticate ‘consequences.’ I had not at that time read the works of these writers, and had only very youthful experience to oppose to such a weight of authority; and being, besides, one of those unfortunate individuals who cannot think of the right thing to say until twenty-four hours after the occasion has passed, I remained silent. My opponents mistook silence for assent, and left me, expressing a hope that they should see me at their committee-room next day.

The passage, at the entrance of which this scene had taken place, was separated from a turner’s shop adjoining by a thin wooden partition, and the turner, who was a New Yorker, stopped his lathe to listen to our parley. When he heard me turn to go up stairs, he shouted: ’Hillo! Johnny Bull, they were rather too many for you. You must get up a little sooner in the mornin’, if you want to circumvent Yankees! Look out for squalls, old fellow!’

‘Words is only wind,’ I replied, quoting one-half of a ‘down-east’ adage, as I ran up the stairs; he, however, before I got out of hearing, added the second half: ‘but blows hurts.’

Three or four days passed away; trade was remarkably brisk, and a few of the bosses gave in—a fact announced with great exultation by the turn-outs, who now felt confident of victory, and urged their demands more strenuously than ever. But compliance was no part of the bosses’ intentions, for no sooner were the arrears of unfinished work cleared off, than the hands found themselves again at liberty. This proceeding naturally irritated the struggle somewhat; and subscriptions for the support of those who, habituated to live from hand to mouth, had saved nothing, were called for with renewed importunity. The strike was beginning to feel the pressure of the laws of nature.

Now and then, one of my shopmates would drop in, and intimate that it would be dangerous for me to persist in having my own way; but I felt no whit inclined to yield, for, although I had seen the houses of intermarried blacks and whites devastated, and a bonfire made in the street with their furniture, I had but little apprehension of personal violence, and the boss protested that he would ‘see me righted,’ should any mischief befall. So it went on for a few days longer, when a second deputation waited upon me, and, less ceremonious than the first, they rushed noisily, and without notice, up the stairs, and crowded into my bench-room. There were about twenty of them; their spokesman looked clean and respectable, but the others were a dirty, out-at-elbows, tobacco-chewing crew, only to be described by that expressive American

Page 36

epithet, ‘loafers;’ and they eyed me with very sinister looks, while the leader began an appeal to my *esprit de corps*. It is scarcely necessary to repeat the argument that followed. Having nothing new to offer, I merely said, that I considered myself at full liberty to work for whatever amount of wages to me seemed satisfactory; that I would no more submit to any interference with that liberty, than to any tyranny over my conscience; and that all I claimed at their hands, was to be let alone. Cries of ‘Hustle him out!’ frequently interrupted me; and perhaps a proof that ‘blows hurts’ might have followed, but just as I finished, my boss came in, and commanded the party to leave his premises, with an assurance that he would not suffer me to be molested. The leader, who seemed as much ashamed of his followers as Falstaff was of his ragged regiment, immediately beat a retreat, and his troop with him; one or two, as they went out, declaring that they would ‘hammer’ me whenever they caught me in the street. I, however, went and came as usual, and for some reason—perhaps the boss’s declaration in my favour—met with no annoyance.

What was the upshot? As emigrant cabinet-makers arrived, they were at once engaged, and set to work; and at the end of six weeks, the strike came to an end. The turn-outs not only failed in carrying their point, but found themselves in a worse position than when they began, for numbers of them were no longer ‘wanted,’ and had to migrate to the country, or accept a lower rate of wages than before, besides the loss of the best part of the busy season. In our own shop, one American and two of the Germans were altogether dismissed, greatly to their mortification; and in this unexpected reverse, they began to perceive how they had been duped. I, on the other hand, having finished the first bookcase, was well advanced in a second; and had, besides, the satisfaction of knowing that the overplus of my six weeks’ earnings was safely added to the ‘nest-egg,’ and of hearing my shopmates applaud my resolution, and wish that they had done likewise. Many were the conversations touching masters and men that grew out of the event, and, if permitted, I may perhaps take an opportunity of making our conclusions public.

One day, some two years after the strike, while walking down Washington Street, I met the leader of the second deputation aforementioned. ’I guess I have seen you before,’ he said, laying a hand upon my shoulder. ’Didn’t you work at C——’s? Ah! you were the toughest customer we had; but if we had all done as you did, it would have been better for us.’

THE DOCTOR VERSUS THE MEDICINE.

Page 37

We have not taken any part in the controversy now raging between the Allopathists and Homoeopathists; but we think it our duty to point out a signal benefit which appears to have resulted from it. Allopathy means simply ‘another suffering,’ and Homoeopathy ‘the same suffering;’ from which the ingenious may conclude, that our regular doctors pretend to cure diseases by inducing other diseases, and the new school by inducing symptoms identical with those of the existing disease. But there is another difference between the schools. The one gives the medicine boldly by the grain, the other cautiously by the millionth part of a grain. Both sometimes fail; both sometimes cure. Which is right?

We cannot pretend to answer the question; but in practice we hold with the regular doctors. We do this because we are used to it. We may be said to have been born with their silver spoon in our mouths; and we should be terrified if the ghost of a grain went in instead. We have done our duty from our youth up by pills, boluses, and draughts: we can lay our hand, with a clear conscience, on our stomach, and avouch that fact. We have ever held our doctor in too much reverence to disobey him; and we revere him more and more every day, since we find him grappling closer and closer with the Homoeopathists, and meeting them manfully on their own ground. ‘We will not,’ says he, ’give in to the absurdity of attempting to counteract a disease by a medicine that produces the same disease; but something good may be learned from your infinitesimal system. To that system you owe the fact that you are now at large: if you had given doses like ours of such medicines, you would have been in the hands of the turnkey or the mad-doctor long ago. Your cures have been effected by your giving so little as not to interrupt nature in any appreciable manner. But we will improve upon your placebos. If an infinitesimal dose is good, no dose at all is better—and, except in special cases, *that* shall henceforward be our system!’

Our readers may think this a jest; but it is actually the point at which, on the part of the Allopathists, the controversy has arrived. A very intelligent and intelligible paper by Dr C. Radclyffe Hall, of Torquay, has appeared in the *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal*, in which the subject is treated in a pleasant and profitable way. He is aware of the difficulty there will be in introducing the new system—of the surprised stare with which the patient will regard the doctor ’doing nothing;’ and as confidence is an important part of the cure, the rule cannot be made absolute. ’But as often as it can be adopted it should. By degrees, the doctrine will work its way, that medical attendants are required to survey, superintend, and direct disease, to watch lest harm accrue unnoticed, to employ active remedies when required, or not to interfere at all, as seems to their own judgment best. Every case of successful treatment without medicines will assist to indoctrinate the public with this view. By learning how much nature can do without medicines, people will be able to perceive more correctly how much medicines, when they are necessary, can assist nature.’

Page 38

The following is given as an example of a case of non-interference. 'A child, above the age of infancy, is chilly, looks dull around its eyes, has headache, pain in the back, quick pulse, and no appetite. It is not known that the digestive organs have been overtaxed. The case may prove—anything. A local inflammation not yet made manifest by local pain; the commencement of continued, or remittent, or exanthematous fever; in a word, there is scarcely any ailment of children of which this may not be the commencement. *If*, on careful examination, no local disease can be made out, we have no correct indication for special treatment. Give nature fair play. Put the child into a warm bed in a warm room, keep it quiet, stop the supplies of food, but not of water, and wait. When reaction takes place, if there be anything serious, it shews itself, and we then know what to attend to. Very frequently, the case is one of mere ephemeral febrile disorder, from exposure to cold; and in two or three days, the child is perfectly well again, without having taken either medicines or globules. But have we done nothing? When the heart was striving to restore the balance of the circulation, by adopting the recumbent posture, we gave it less work to do. The equable warmth of bed was soothing to the nervous system, and solicited the afflux of blood to the surface. By abstinence, we avoided ministering to congestion of the viscera, and introducing food which, as it could not be properly digested, would decompose and irritate the stomach and bowels.' Here the do-nothing doctor actually assisted nature; he took care that she should not be thwarted in her operations, and he stood by watching the case, like an attorney at the examination of a prisoner, who does nothing, but whose presence is essential to his client. If the usual counteracting remedies had been administered, a disease would have been induced, for which a process of convalescence would have had to be gone through. If the globules had been given simultaneously with the hygienic treatment described, Homoeopathy instead of nature would have had the credit of the cure.

'In all chronic blood-diseases,' says Dr Hall, 'medicines are useful, but hygienic treatment'—the word is explained by the treatment of the above case—'must rank the first. In all acute blood-diseases, when mild and occurring in a previously healthy constitution, as they must run through a special course, and last for a certain time, cases will frequently do very well without any medicines. More frequently, a little medicine occasionally to meet a temporary requirement is serviceable; but in every case of this kind, however severe, the difficult point of medical judgment is, rather, when to do nothing, than what to do. Hygienic treatment is invariably necessary. Acting on the principle of the accoucheur, that nature is to be carefully watched, but that so long as she proceeds well, she is to be let alone, we shall meet with few

Page 39

cases of illness in which we cannot find opportunities to judiciously dispense with medicines.' Another difficulty in adopting this system may be found in the doctor's fear, that if he dispenses with medicines, the patient may dispense with him; but we are of Dr Hall's opinion, that this is quite illusory. The only difference it will make will be, that patients will learn to trust more to the judgment of their medical attendant, and less to the efficacy of his medicines.

Hydropathy proceeds on the hygienic treatment, although doubtless in a somewhat rough manner. Air, exercise, rubbing, cold water, simple food—such are its substitutes both for medicines and globules; and we think the regular doctors might with great advantage take a leaf out of its book, as well as out of the book of homoeopathy. With this reform, we would suggest—although with some timidity, for doctors are sensitive on the point—that a re-examination, on broad scientific principles, even of common diseases, would do some good. Doctors are too fond of systems of treatment, which are not made to fit the patient, but which the patient is expected to fit. Diseases run their course, and so do remedies; but it might be well to inquire what relation there is between the course of the one, and that of the other. The unvarying treatment of a disease looks odd to a thinking bystander. The same medicines are administered in case after case; the dose follows the symptom with the certainty of fate. The patient dies—the patient recovers. What then? The doctor has done his best—everything has been according to rule!

The following are the rules laid down for practitioners on the new system:—

'1. Never prescribe medicines when hygiene will do as well and can be enforced.

'2. Never permit the patient, or those around him, to expect more from medicines than medicines can perform.

'3. Never prescribe medicines, except avowedly as mere palliatives, when the period is gone by for them to be of ultimate service.

'4. Never conceal the *general* intention of the treatment; that is, whether it be adopted with a view to cure, or only to mitigate the disease, or merely to alleviate a symptom or symptoms.

'5. Never prescribe medicines more powerful than are necessary; or continue a powerful medicine longer, or repeat it oftener, than the disease actually requires.

'6. Never attribute to the medicine-giving part of the management of a successful case more than its due share of credit.'

We have called this a new system, but a new system is nothing without a name; and we therefore beg leave to suggest one, made up, like the others, of a Greek compound. First, we have Allopathy, another suffering; then Homoeopathy, the same suffering; then Hydropathy, water-suffering; and now let us have Anapathy, no suffering at all.

APPLICATION OF THE SIRENE TO COUNT THE RATE AT WHICH THE WINGS OF INSECTS MOVE.

Page 40

The buzzing and humming noises produced by winged insects are not, as might be supposed, vocal sounds. They result from sonorous undulations imparted to the air by the flapping of their wings. This may be rendered evident by observing, that the noise always ceases when the insect alights on any object. The sirene has been ingeniously applied for the purpose of ascertaining the rate at which the wings of such creatures flap. The instrument being brought into unison with the sound produced by the insect, indicates, as in the case of any other musical sound, the rate of vibration. In this way it has been ascertained that the wings of a gnat flap at the rate of 15,000 times per second. The pitch of the note produced by this insect in the act of flying is, therefore, more than two octaves above the highest note of a seven-octave pianoforte.—*Lardner's Handbook*.

A WELCOME SACRIFICE.

BY THE REV. JAMES GILBORNE LYONS, LL.D.

Vain is the blood of rare and spotless herds,
Pastured in meads where blue Clitumnus shines;
Vain are sweet gums from lands that Indus girds,
Or diamonds sought in deep Brazilian mines;
Vain are Iberian fruits, and perfumed flowers,
Rich as a Grecian sunset's purest dyes,
If deemed, when worship claims thy holiest hours,
For HIM IN HEAVEN fit gift or sacrifice.

The flocks that roam on thrice ten thousand hills,
Each living thing that moves on shore and sea,
The gems and gold which gleam in caves and rills,
Saba's low shrub, and Lebanon's proud tree,
The fragrant tribes that spring on cliff and field,
That flush the stream, or fringe the smooth lake's brim,
Breathe, burn, and bloom, at His high will revealed,
And own with joy their Light and Lord in Him.

Our gains are His, and, laid before the Cross,
These must of our oblations form a part,
But oh! the choicest ores and gems are dross,
If brought without that pearl of price—THE HEART.
The poorest serf who fears a tyrant's nod,
Whose inmost soul hard bondage racks and wrings—
That toil-worn slave may send unseen to God
An offering far beyond the wealth of kings.

Come thou with breast from pride and passion freed,
Hands which no stain of guilt has ever soiled,
Feet swift and strong for every gentle deed,
Faith, hope, and truth, by sordid crowds unspoiled;
Come with a spirit full of generous love
For all beyond, and all below the skies:—
Make ready thou, for Him who reigns above,
The Christian's gift—A LIVING SACRIFICE.

'MY TRAVELLING COMPANION.'

Page 41

An individual, signing himself ‘A Protestant Dissenter,’ has written to us, to remonstrate against one of the heroines of the tale in No. 424, with the above title, having been consigned by the author to the seclusion of a convent. As the same correspondent protests against the ‘Visit to an English Monastery’ in No. 413, as something calculated to introduce the wedge of Popery among our readers—the said article having given much offence to our Catholic readers, and terrified all our Protestant readers, but one, into thanking God for their own faith—perhaps it may be thought unnecessary for us to notice such a communication. But this is only one of the reproaches we receive almost daily, from all sides of the religious question. Our correspondents are not satisfied with the well-known fact, that while retaining our own opinions, we wilfully interfere with the opinions of no other man. Each secretly thinks we ought to side with *him*, and would have us sacrifice to this duty the usefulness of a journal which circulates freely among all denominations of religion, and inculcates the practical part of Christianity wherever it goes. We are tired of such correspondence—and there is the truth. Let it be understood once for all, that ours is no more a religious than it is a political mission. The supposed party tendency of expressions that occur here and there in our papers is the result of mere chance; it may be detected as often on one side as on another; and in no publication but our own does it rouse the acrimony of partisans. We give information connected with monasteries, churches, and conventicles, with equal impartiality; and if this is found otherwise than useful or amusing, it is the fault of those who convert facts into sentiments.

* * * * *

Printed and Published by W. and R. CHAMBERS, High Street, Edinburgh. Also sold by W.S. ORR, Amen Corner, London; D.N. CHAMBERS, 55 West Nile Street, Glasgow; and J. M’GLASHAN, 50 Upper Sackville Street, Dublin.—Advertisements for Monthly Parts are requested to be sent to MAXWELL & CO., 31 Nicholas Lane, Lombard Street, London, to whom all applications respecting their insertion must be made.