

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines.

From Hogg's Instructor.
LIMINGS OF SOCIAL LIFE.GALEN PESTLE—THE MAN WHO COULD
DIE HIS FAMILY.

'MARTHA, love, have you put the flannel waistcoat on John yet?'

'No; but to night I shall,' meekly replied she.

'Oh, my dear, how can you be so negligent in this changeable weather? For any sake, don't allow this night to pass over. And Tommy, has he got the infusion of sena and prunes, slightly rhubarbed, and sweetened with coarse sugar, as I directed this morning?'

'Yes.'

'How often?'

'Twice since rising.'

'Only! I think Buchan says six times a day. You really ought to be a little more attentive to these matters. I hope you have got the list nailed securely to the nursery window, and the grating round the fire fixed better. Sir James Clark says, you know—but stop! I'll go and see myself, and, while up stairs, I'll mix Ann's powders, and you can get dinner ready.' He had gone a moment, but immediately returning, and putting his head in at the door, anxiously said, 'Tell Betty to run and fetch in the children. There's a shower brewing, I see, from the smoke of the chimneys falling so low. Lose no time, now.'

Mr Pestle again hurried off, leaving his partner to execute the order. She looked after his careworn figure with a sigh, as she turned away. Sighs are the food of sorrow; but Mrs Pestle had not found much nourishment in them. She hadn't thriven on the aliment, if one might judge from the close resemblance she bore to her husband. She had the same careworn depressed look, the same continual weariness of aspect, ever looking like one struggling under an impracticable load. But the appearance rose from an involuntary cause. Her husband created his own annoyances and sufferings, and, according to apostolic injunction, made his wife sharer of them. She, honest woman, was naturally a good natured, kindly soul, disposed to take the world's wrongs and fleshly ills as lightly as might be; but Galen manufactured so many of them, and kept them up so fresh, that Mrs Pestle was ever in a sea of troubles, and a very tempestuous one it was; so notwithstanding this natural tendency of hers, the continual drooping did wear her down. And these troubles of her husband's arose chiefly from his having a large family and little to do. Like most men, he had a hobby, and he rode it well too, but his hobby was like that of many other husbands, the wrong one for him to ride. He was physician in ordinary, cook in ordinary, and housemaid extraordinary to his family. His whole soul was wrapped up in the temporal well-being of his progeny; and to have them right and keep them right, pelican-like, he consumed his own flesh and blood in endeavouring to accomplish, but never after all fairly managing it. He doctored them, drugged them, fed them, led them, washed them, and trimmed them, but to little avail. They were always sickly and pining, always having a variety of puzzling complaints, and always the more physic they got requiring the more. In vain the father studied Buchan, Combe, and Southwood Smith; in vain he tried hemlock, cold water, and warm water; in vain he ransacked the whole pharmacopœia of medicines to find cures for complaints entirely apocryphal, and in vain he watched them in doors and out-doors—nursed them, clothed them, and cooked for them—they would not be right, and when right they would not keep so. His wife's health suffered in consequence as may be well supposed. What woman indeed could bear the fatigue, the care, the sleepless vigils, she endured without suffering? But of this Galen was less regardful than of the manifold complaints, actual or assumed, of his offspring. So much for the outline of our characters.

Up stairs, Galen found the list properly fixed, and the wire-fence round the fire-place properly secured, and nothing to mar the harmony of his parental feelings. He next proceeded to his laboratory, and compounded, from a variety of glass bottles and packages, the powders, washed his hands, and descended to dinner. As in duty, if not in etiquette, bound, Galen sat at the head of his own table; but he filled a double office, inasmuch as he generally performed the part of waiter to the children, who clustered on each side, the eldest next the father, and the younger graduating down towards the mother, at the foot. And what sickly, exotic-looking plants they were—not lean and shrunk by any means, but fat unhealthy creatures, totally destitute of the rosy hue of youth, or the glistening eye of starchy childhood. After a grace more like a weary yawn than an expression of grateful sincerity, he uncovered the soup. 'Eat, fat, my love,' said he, glancing over to his wife, 'and I feel the smell of onions in it, too,' sniffing above it at the same time. 'Ring that bell, John.'

The maid appeared in answer to the summons, and stood rounding the corner of her apron.

'Betty, did you make that soup with onions, after what I said to you, eh?'

'Ye didna speak about ingins the day, sir,

Aweel a wat, I no'er thocht o't sir; or sare's I'm leavin', sir, I wadna w' ma gude will. But there was just ane, chappit vera sma'; and Mrs Glasse says, in the buik—ye pointit it out till me—add pepper an' flavour wi' ingins, till taste.'

'But it's my taste not to have it flavoured—remember that in future.'

'John' pursued the father, 'have you taken your quinine to day? if not, you had better have it in your soup. And Mary you remembered the barks before lunch, I hope? That soup's too fat Louis, you can't get any.'

'I think a little drop would do no harm,' interposed his wife. 'It might.'

'Really woman you are quite vexations. Don't I know how to manage them best? Give a child afflicted with heart-burn soap! Monstrous! Magnesia alba thrice a day, and a light diet, always in such cases. Robert don't drink water—cold water and anything oily on the stomach, combined, are indigestible, get it warmed.'

'But I'm thirsty papa.'

'Bless me, what a flushed face you have! Put down that tumbler, sir, and come here. Show me your tongue. Ha! the face turns pale, and puls rather high. Here's some disorder. It can't be measles, as there's no loss of appetite; the tongue is not white, and there's no running at the nose. Flushed face continued he soliloquising, 'Do you feel hungry Robert?'

'I should like a bit of pie very much.'

'And pale by turns. Do you feel very hungry child?'

'Yes!—no—yes! I don't want any medicine papa.'

'It must be ascaridas. My love, you'll please take him to bed to night, and observe if his teeth grind while asleep.'

Whether tickled by pepper, or a too hasty disposal of a mouthful, or from some other gastronomic error, one of the children gave a cough. The parent looked hastily up with an anxious eye, dropping the fork, uttering 'There don't smother it. I see it, Agnes, quite plainly. Where was you during the shower to day?'

'Nowhere papa.'

'Come, I insist, Martha, love, was that child out to day? Could you be so foolish? Poor little lamb, will that careless mother of yours never learn—the influenza raging too, and yet, notwithstanding all my precautions—'

'She was't in the shower, I'm sare,' murmured the meek helpmate.'

'Don't tell me so. That child's as sure caught the epidemic as I am sitting here. Bless me, we'll all have it too now; our house will be an absolute hospital! Agnes, you'll bathe your feet in hot water to night; take a nice little powder that I shall mix up, then sleep alone.'

After dinner, this paragon of fathers devoted an hour or two to study, eschewing all light and unprofitable treatises, and confining himself entirely to the *utile*. But it was neither the currency, politics, natural philosophy, nor mathematics that formed the subject of his inquiry. He was not a politician in any sense—a philosopher in its widest sense—far less a literary man in its lowest sense, being nothing less and strictly nothing more than a family man, hence his books were of a peculiar cast. And by the way, it is remarkable that the books often possessing the fewest literary merits are the books we cherish most—they have attained the highest popularity, and possess the deepest interest. All the store of our juvenile library, from the Babes in the Woods, up to the imperishable Thousand and one nights, what mere literary merit had they? what fine writing—what elegant diction—what truthfulness of description or character did they possess? yet where in after years have we found more interesting reading, and where, amid the glittering galaxy of names, spangling the history of our literature will you find productions more popular than that store of our boyhood leisure study, written when, where, or by whom, alike unknown? Again, what a melancholy idea of literature does an old 'Post Office Directory' suggest? yet where, in any biblioplist's store, will you find a work of more unwearying interest? Every line has a story or two of its own, beginning with John Adams, who married your cousin, emigrated to the far west, and now figures in the Republican Senate, down to Will Young, who was transported for forgery, each name is replete with the story of a life. The true 'book life' is within its boards. Give us an old 'Directory' during a dull hour, and we undertake to extract more amusement and instruction from it than from a whole bevy of Bently or Coleburn's last issues. But the Directory was not Galen's study. Such a luxury he never knew. His, we said, was a family taste. One might suppose from that, Sayer and Ude would have refreshed his mental appetite as well as his bodily; but Galen did not aspire to the first class books. Mrs Glasse, Meg Dods, Buchan, the Manual of Domestic Medicine, and a small duodecimo treatise on the disease of infants, formed the staple of his study, with Combe, Clark, and Southwood Smith, as the lighter reliefs. From one of these he rose each afternoon, if not the happier, at least, as he thought, the wiser man.

Then, after tea was finished it was quite a study to watch him compounding his drugs, making up pills, opening stoppers of phials with filthy smells, and measuring out small quantities of their contents into small receptacles, and sometimes pounding them all up together, as a remedy for something very dreadful. And when the distribution of these came, before bedtime, it was quite a treat to wit-

ness it. There was little noses to hold, while repugnant mixtures were being poured down little throats; there was coaxing, wheedling and threatening in operation, to sway infantile minds; tempting promises of tremendous generosity, to break juvenile stubbornness, and dark hints at bodily pain and sickness, to influence the swallowing of nauseous doses; and pots of jelly temptingly ranged, to seduce natural dislike into compliance, when little boluses and whisey grey mixtures were coated over with it, and gulped down; and there were little feet to lave in hot water, and little limbs to swathe in flannel, and large woolly night caps, and cumbersome woolly coats to tie down and fasten on little heads and bodies—warm drinks to take away complaints of queer tastes in them, and sometimes an assent, that it was very nice from those that didn't share in it. But above all there was the gloating, gratified eye of the father, who did all this, and more, with his own hands, and the sometimes anxious, sometimes submissive gaze of the wife, who sat and witnessed the process, and who was privileged with exemption from duty and doses of all kinds.

But why need we trace the disposal of the olive Pestles, after being cribb'd and cabined and confined in their dormitories till gentle slumber visited their eyelids, or note the watchings of the father, and the compulsory vigils kept over them by the mother, to ascertain whether their teeth ground, or the nightmare visited them, or restlessness or flushing marred their little countenances? And why need we follow the father into the kitchen every morning, bent on overlooking, in the fulness of his parental care, the cooking of their breakfast, to the annoyance and contempt of the maid, or listen to his multifarious orders for their guidance during the day in his absence! Let us limit our observations to what more immediately may be conceived as the proper matter for our sketch.

As we have already stated, Mrs Pestle's health and spirits gradually sank under the load of troubles she was compelled to bear, and that self pride, so necessary to woman's nature—necessary to maintain the direction of her household and training of her children—was being fast crushed. In fact, she was little more than a cypher in her family. Her authority was a dead letter over her husband's better rule, her influence rendered nugatory; and it was with pain that she saw her children did not thrive under the system pursued by Galen. But what to do to regain her position as a wife and a mother she knew not; and even though many expedients suggested themselves, her meek retiring nature shrank from executing these in the first instance. But what will a mother's heart not attempt, when fairly tested, for the wellbeing of her offspring—let history, let daily life bear witness! Galen never particularly sweet, became as time waxed older, irritable and sour. His views and his precepts must be wholly coincided in, and not one hairbreadth interfered with. Neither wife nor domestic dare infringe or modify the rules, and indeed the latter came to have a sorry enough time of it. One was turned away for allowing a child to run out on damp streets—another for supplying sweetmeats by stealth—a third for not travelling up stairs behind them—a fourth for forgiving them food too hot—and a fifth because she would not take new medicines by way of experiment; and during all this time Mrs Pestle's struggles and duties were multiplied, and thanklessly so. But even the meekest spirit, says some proverb, will turn upon oppression; and what woman ever formed the exception to it?

Mr Pestle came home one day in a particularly acrid frame of mind. It was washing day, and the juveniles were having much their own way of matters, to his great horror and dismay.

'I tell you what, woman,' said he in a boiling rage. 'These children might as well want a mother as call you one. What interest do you take in them—what care over them? None! I get the whole work to do and were it not for me, it would have been a miracle had one of them lived till to day.' Mrs Pestle thought the miracle consisted in their being still alive under the fostering influences, but waived stating this opinion. 'Yet you're always complaining, madam, notwithstanding; and though I've offered you advice and powders, cordials and tonics, you have stubbornly refused them. Ah you need not Poooh phoo. That's all the thanks is it? Very well, just suffer the consequences, and rightly served too.'

'That's scarcely language to a wife, Mr. Pestle. You well know if I have complained I have had good cause, and the cause is in you.'

'Like your sex, Madam. Like your sex—injure yourself, and blame your husband.'

'I suppose you think you'd do better wanting me, Galen?'

'You needn't suppose it, madam, you know it.'

The wife and mother felt stung. Quickly she retorted.—'Since that's the case, you shall have a trial, I'm determined. For the sake of my health and your comfort, I shall go off to Margate to-morrow with my sister—proceed I shall.'

'Very well, madam; and pray, don't return till your body and mind are both cured.'

Little more was said that night, but next morning, true to her threat, Mrs Pestle packed up a small trunk, and bidding good-bye to her family, set out, to the surprise of her children, and gloomy disregard of her husband.

The family man was now alone and certainly he felt a little queer at entering his novitiate. A cipher does bear often an important relationship to adjacent figures, and Mr. Pestle very soon found his wife had really something to do among the nine children, but what remained a puzzler. The first day, however, was got over tolerably well, and not much went agog in his management. He saw them all at length physicked and went to bed as usual, and then his trials began. About two o'clock in the morning he was awakened by a fearful squalling in the nursery. Insidiously he bade his wife rise and go to these children, but a moment's waking reflection impressed on him the fact that he must do it himself. Shivering, in his shirt, Galen groped and stumbled along up stairs. A little one had fallen out of his crib, and his cries had become epidemic among the others.

'I want mamma! I want mamma! shrieked the unfortunate.'

'Hush—hush a-bay!' &c. began Galen, trying to soothe it in his arms, nursery fashion.

'No! no!—Mamma! Mamma!' squalled the urchin vehemently, and the others re-echoed the cry.

In vain Galen walked up and down the floor, shivering with cold humming, coaxing, and wheedling; the child wouldn't pacify. A full half-hour was thus spent before it cried itself asleep, and the father was again en route to his own dormitory. Stiff, frigid and with teeth chattering, he tumbled in, and attempted to restore warmth. It just came at length bringing the dreadful suggestion that he had forgot to shut the nursery-door. The awful idea of colds, sore throats, or something worse pervading the inmates next day, left him no room for pause. Peeping with terror, he jumped up, rushed up stairs again, and found—the door shut. Back again he came, taking the skin off his shins on a chair by the way, and after the enjoyment of a few hours' uncomfortable slumber, he started up, on feeling some object crawling across his body, and pulling at his nose. He looked up: two children were saddled a-top of him, one with his nightcap in hand, and other dragging off the clothes. The father rubbed his eyes.

'Oh, where's mamma?' exclaimed the juveniles. 'We want to get dressed; it's so cold.'

'Papa, you'll dress us: here's my clothes,' shouted one.'

Papa looked around. Other throats in the nursery piped a shrill treble for him and mother. It was barely five o'clock yet, but the children had been put earlier to bed last night than usual. Galen rose. He felt queerish, an awful pang suddenly shot up one side of his head—he had got the toothache. Uttering a dismal groan, he clapped his hand on the spot.

'Pa! on my clothes first, papa,' said one, pushing a diminutive petticoat and pair of stockings into his hands.

'Not mine first—mine first!' urged another, trying to supplant his sister.

A tremendous shout arose in the nursery. Galen, almost yelling with pain and vexation, pulled at the bell, like a madman, for Betty. She came, half-dressed and half-awake.

'Go up stairs to these children! are you deaf that you don't hear them crying?' shouted he.

After some bungling attempts, he managed to get the clothes of the two applicants clumsily fastened on, and then rushed up stairs to superintend the others. After rendering what assistance he could, and getting them tolerably pacified, he was assailed with cries of 'Oh, papa, I want a piece!'—'Papa, when will breakfast be ready?'

'You'll have breakfast in a little, my dears; meantime, John you'll take your biters, and, Agnes, you must come and get a nice little dose of turpentine and molasses. Let me feel your pulse this morning, Tommy. Ah! yes; fever abated; I thought it would—but you'll continue your powders to-night.'

Breakfast was got through without any serious accident or incident other than the father's inability to eat with the raging pain in his jaw; thereafter calling on Betty, he proceeded to instruct her preparatory to going out.

'You'll be particular in watching these children when I am absent to day girl.'

'Yes, sir.'

'You'll give these powders to Jane at 12—mind at twelve; and that pill to Tommy at one, in a little jelly. Observe they don't fall down stairs, and remember to keep them back from the fire.'

'Yes sir; the fire sir.'

'Now notice they are not to have anything to eat till I come home; and watch if the pavements are damp before you go out to walk. Be sure to put a shawl on Mary, and see that John has a great coat on.'

'Yes sir; nothing to eat, a shawl and a great coat.'

'Have some chicken soup and salad for dinner, and a little bit of roast; and go to the apothecary's and give him this note for some new medicine I want.'

'Yes, sir.'

'There is nothing else I remember of.'

'Nothing else, sir.'

When Galen returned home he was in no enviable humour with the toothache. But what a scene here presented itself to his view. Betty sitting wringing her hands; Tommy rolling on the floor groaning, and rubbing his diaphragm; Agnes, with a foot rolled in flannel, slowly sobbing; and the rest of the younger branches doing much as they pleased sitting on their haunches around some pots of jelly, with