

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

## SMALL TALK AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

BY MRS CROWE.

MATTERS continued in this state for some time, without anything remarkable occurring to vary the monotony of society in a country town, and then, as is usual, after a long cessation of events, there came a shoal of them that set all the Wiltonians a-talking, and made them very lively indeed. The first windfall was, that Mr Blackwood the stationer, who kept the circulating library, and whose shop was the favorite lounge of those who considered themselves the aristocracy of the place, fell down suddenly and expired behind his own counter whilst serving some ladies; and Mrs Pemberton, being fortunate enough to be one of the number, she felt herself called upon to enter upon a series of morning visits for the purpose of faithfully rendering the details to her various friends and acquaintance. But her satisfaction was not of long duration, for while she was engaged on this benevolent mission, her own daughter found opportunities of cultivating the acquaintance of a lawyer's clerk, whose addresses had been forbidden by the mother, and one fine morning it was discovered that the young people had run away and got married. Then Mr James, the fashionable silk mercer, and the most plausible of men, to the astonishment of every body became a bankrupt, and was found to have defrauded his creditors; and finally, poor Edmund Anson, after being some days missing, was found in the canal, wherein, it was asserted, he had voluntarily drowned himself. Here was something to talk about indeed! They had not only to discuss how he did it, but why he did it—a most interesting point to decide; and the more so that they were in fact utterly ignorant of his motives. But what did that signify? It was easy to supply them. It was now considered that for some considerable time past every body had remarked the desponding state of his spirits, and the only question that remained, was, whence did the depression arise? A few liberal people ventured to think it might be constitutional, but the ladies of Mrs Anson's immediate circle, with Mrs Riddle at the head of them, did not scruple to affirm to each other, or to confide to their intimate acquaintance, their absolute conviction that it was the levity of the wife that had broken the heart of the husband, and driven him to seek refuge from a life of wretchedness in death.

Poor Mrs Anson was in the meanwhile absorbed in grief, for she had dearly loved her husband; and as it shortly became known that Mr Markham was left executor to the will, and trustee for the child, the scandal had not a leg to stand on; and as Mrs Anson was rich woman still, whose sorrows would naturally heal with time, and admit of renewing her hospitalities, her friends met her with sympathising faces, and permitted themselves to forget all the evil things they had attributed towards her, and the ill-natured ones they had circulated. But a calumny has a principle of vitality in it that renders it extremely difficult to trample it out of the world altogether, when once it has sprung up. As the seeds of noxious weeds are borne on the wings of the wind, so does a scandal fly from place to place; and long after it is forgotten by those who have first uttered it, it starts up in some distant spot to do its wicked work.

For the present, however, all looked fair and well. Mrs Anson was devoted to her little boy, a well-disposed spirited child, who never occasioned her a moment's uneasiness, except from the apprehension that he might inherit the malady of her husband's family, till he approached the age when it was necessary to decide the direction his studies should take, and then he declared such a strong predilection for the navy, that his mother, after vainly endeavoring to combat it, was at length compelled to yield to his wishes, and get him rated midshipman on board a king's ship.

It was a sad day for her when this darling of her heart left home, and it was several weeks before she could rouse herself sufficiently from her depression to receive her visitors as usual, but at length Mrs Riddle insisted upon being admitted.

'Come, come, my dear,' said she, 'this will never do. One would think nobody ever had a son leave home before. Why, look at me, you can't be fonder of your boy than I am of my Godfrey, and hasn't he been these three years abroad with his regiment? and I know not when I shall see his dear face again.'

'But you have your husband,' answered Mrs Anson, 'and you are used to the separation from your son.'

'Now I am, but it was as hard to me at first, I assure you, as it is to you. He left me when he was eighteen; and never shall I forget the day, or what I suffered. I am used to it now, certainly, but not reconciled, though I bear up because it is no use grieving for what I can't alter; and to say the truth I have another trouble on my mind just now that somewhat diverts my thoughts from my boy.'

'What is that?' inquired Mrs Anson, tenderly.

'Why, Riddle is not well; he hasn't been well for some time; and I'm afraid Dr Pearson is not satisfied about him.'

Mrs Anson hoped this was needless alarm, but it proved not without a just foundation.

The seeds of a fatal malady was beginning to develop themselves, and although he survived these first indications of mischief three or four years, Colonel Riddle died when little past the prime of life, leaving his wife and daughters in very embarrassed circumstances, his half pay and pension expiring with him.

As we have mentioned, Mrs Anson and Mrs Riddle had been schoolfellows, and although there had never been sufficient congeniality of character betwixt them to establish a friendship, an intimacy had existed, and now that the latter was in distress, the former did not hesitate to acknowledge the claims of old acquaintanceship. Everything that kindness and liberality could do, delicately administered, she did. Her son amply provided for, and inexpensive herself, she had plenty of money to spare; and unknown to everybody but Mrs Riddle, she paid for the education of the younger girls, and contributed in many ways to the support of the family. In short, now in their time of need, she was their good angel; and Mrs Riddle, subdued by affliction, and overcome by the genuine kindness of her old schoolfellow, forgot her foolish jealousies, and became sincerely attached to her. Under these circumstances it was impossible but that some self-reproach should occasionally visit her breast—an uneasy consciousness that she did not merit all the kindness she was receiving; and it may be conceived how much these remorseful feelings were aggravated by a confidence which, in consequence of the friendly relations existing between them since Colonel Riddle's death, Mrs Anson was at length induced to repose in her. It arose out of a conversation regarding Mrs Riddle's children, and her anxiety respecting their future provision.

'If any thing happened to me,' she said, 'my poor girls would be without a protector in the world.'

'They have their brother Godfrey,' said Mrs Anson, 'and he, you say, is very much attached to them.'

'Oh yes, very much, poor fellow, though betwixt school and Sandhurst it is little he has been at home since he was quite a child; and little he will be at home for the future; though, to be sure, it is a comfort that the regiment is getting through its turn of foreign service now, for in about two years more it will be home, and then I hope he will have a long leave.'

'How happy you will be to see him,' said Mrs Anson.

'Oh yes; he's such a good boy, and bears such an excellent character in his regiment. But I wish he was in some other profession. It is a miserable thing to have one's son always away.'

'What is it when its one's only child?' said Mrs Anson, with a sigh. 'Think of me and my poor boy.'

'But there's no necessity for your separation; you who have plenty of money could keep him at home if you liked.'

'No,' said Mrs Anson, gravely shaking her head.

'I know he had a great fancy for the navy,' returned Mrs Riddle; 'but you might have talked him out of that; or if you had positively refused his going to sea, he would have taken to something else.'

'It is not impossible, certainly,' said Mrs Anson, 'but I dare not try the experiment. Oh, my dear friend, there are much greater troubles in the world than poverty, believe me.'

'What troubles?' inquired Mrs Riddle, with astonishment. 'I thought Charles was everything you could wish.'

'So he is, poor dear boy,' responded the other; 'but you little guess the cruel anxieties I suffer about him, for all that. I dare say, now, Ellen, when my poor Edmund was alive, you thought that if there was anybody in the world free from anxiety, it was me?'

'I certainly did think so,' answered Mrs Riddle.

'How little we can judge from outward appearances the internal condition of any family!' exclaimed Mrs Anson.

'You perfectly amaze me, Frances,' responded Mrs Riddle, whose mind began to recur to her former tittle-tattle about Mr Markham and her friend. 'What can you allude to?'

'You must promise me never to mention what I shall tell you to anybody except Mr Markham,' said Mrs Anson.

'I certainly will not,' answered Mrs Riddle, whose curiosity was excited to the highest pitch.

'Now that he is away I have no one I can speak to on the subject, though it's the one that ever lies heaviest on my heart,' continued Mrs Anson.

'What can be coming now,' thought her friend.

'It is hard never to be able to speak of that which is never absent from one's mind,' said Mrs Anson.

'But what is it?' exclaimed Mrs Riddle, anxiously.

'Did you ever remark that there were certain intervals during which you were not let in when you called—not you alone, but when I denied everybody?'

'To be sure I did,' answered Mrs Riddle, opening her ears wider than ever, at the same time that a conscious blush diffused her cheeks.

'And you never guessed the reason?' asked Mrs Anson.

'No; how could I? You never said you were ill; and indeed, we used to see you driving out at the very time nobody could get within your door for a fortnight together—except, indeed, Mr Markham.'

'Yes, he was an exception, an exception that grew out of an accident, but great was the comfort of it to me. My poor Edmund became so fond of him, and he was so kind in our days of trial!'

'Trial about what?' asked Mrs Riddle, utterly perplexed.

'You would never have suspected that Mr Anson was subject to attacks of the most fearful malady.'

'Fits?' inquired Mrs Riddle, quite disappointed, that the secret was not of a more interesting character.

'No, much worse; insanity—hereditary insanity,' answered her friend. 'The attacks came on almost periodically, and at those times I never durst leave him. His horror at the idea of his malady being known, too, was beyond anything you can conceive. It was on that account he would not allow me to say he was ill, lest the truth should be suspected.'

'What a dreadful thing,' said Mrs Riddle. 'But was he in that state when you drove out with him?'

'Yes; but under his cloak he had a straight waistcoat on, and I seldom ventured to take him out except when Mr Markham could accompany us. Nothing promoted his recovery so much as those drives.'

'Poor soul! how little we guessed your affliction,' cried Mrs Riddle, her heart smiting her for her past unjust imputations.

'And now you can understand my anxiety about my poor boy, and why I was afraid of crossing a propulsion so strong, that the protraction of his wishes was already beginning to affect his health.'

This confidence naturally augmented the friendship between the two ladies. Mrs Anson had many strange and interesting experiences to relate, and Mrs Riddle was touched with pity and remorse whilst she listened to them. Their sons, too, furnished an inexhaustible subject for conversation, which suddenly received a fresh accession of interest from the early prospect of the two young men meeting. Mrs Anson received a letter from her son, announcing that the Thunderer, which had been some time cruising in the Indian Seas, was ordered to the Cape of Good Hope.

'How fortunate,' exclaimed Mrs Riddle. 'Then he'll see my Godfrey; for the 33d is quartered at Cape Town. I will write, and desire him to seek out your Charles immediately.'

'They will probably have met by this time,' said Mrs Anson.

'Perhaps not,' returned the other. 'I had better write; for there are so many officers there, naval and military, that not being acquainted, they may never meet, if I do not.'

So there was a letter written by each lady, recommending the young men to each other's good offices; and many a pleasant chat the mothers had, figuring to themselves the friendly intimacy that would spring up betwixt their sons; and the pleasure it would give both to see a neighbor in that far land.

So time went on, and at length they began to look for letters which should give them tidings of the happy meeting; the mail was daily expected, and each morning Mrs Riddle, when the postman had passed her own door, threw on her bonnet and shawl, and went to her friend's house to inquire if she had any news.

'Well, Martin, any letter from India yet?' said she to Mrs Anson's butler, one morning that she went on this errand.

'No, ma'am, there was't no letters to-day; only the newspaper.'

'How strange it is,' said Mrs Riddle. 'Surely the mail must be in. Where is Mrs Anson?'

'When I took her the paper she was in the summer-house. Shall I let her know you are come?' asked Martin.

'No, I'll go to her,' said Mrs Riddle; and, passing through the house to the garden, she proceeded to seek her friend.

'Frances, are you here?' said she, opening the door of the little thatched building, overgrown with woodbine and clamatiss, in which Mrs Anson was wont to pass many of her hours.

'Frances, dear, what is the matter? Are you ill?' she exclaimed, as she perceived her friend stretched on the floor, with the newspaper lying beside her. But Mrs Anson made no answer, and when Mrs Riddle attempted to lift her up, she found she was quite insensible. She opened the window, sought for water, and finding none, ran back to the house and summoned the servants.

What it could be nobody could imagine. She had been very well just before, and had eaten her breakfast as usual. She had met Martin at the door of the summer house, to ask if there was a letter, and seemed disappointed that there was none; but he had not remarked any symptoms of illness. In the meantime the doctor was sent for; but before he could arrive Mrs Anson's senses began to return. She opened her eyes, and put her hand to her head.

'Do you feel better, dear?' said Mrs Riddle, tenderly.

For a moment or two Mrs Anson remained silent, looking about as if seeking to recollect herself, till her eyes met Mrs Riddle's face hanging over her. Then she clasped her hands, uttered a deep groan, and sank back on the floor again.

'What can it possibly be?' exclaimed the latter.

'There can't be nothing in the newspaper, sure,' said Martin.

'Something has happened to Charles,' thought Mrs Riddle, to whom this hint at once furnished a clue to her friend's condition, and snatching the paper from the

ground, she eagerly ran her eyes over it. There it was!

Extract from the Cape Town Journal, 11th May.—Lamentable Occurrence.—A duel was fought here yesterday, arising out of a quarrel at the mess table of the 33d regiment, which has unfortunately proved fatal to one of the parties.

She could read no more. The paper fell from her hands. It was not Charles Anson, then; it was her own Godfrey that was killed.

Alas, it was; but he had died by the hand of her friend's son. Almost immediately after the ship had entered Table Bay, two or three of the officers were invited to dine at the mess, and among them Charles Anson. As we mentioned in the beginning of our tale, the boy's grandfather had been in the army and fell at Waterloo; and some casual reference to his name made by a senior officer who had known him, resulted in Godfrey Riddle's remarking, from the opposite side of the table, that his son, Edmund Anson had made away with himself in consequence of the ill conduct of his wife, &c.

The sound of his own name had caught the ear of the young midshipman, who was seated at some distance, and he heard the cruel scandal associated with that of his mother. When the company dispersed, he quietly followed Godfrey Riddle from the room and challenged him. A meeting ensued; and the death of the thoughtless, but innocent perpetrator of his mother's calumny paid the penalty of her guilt—for no milder expression can be applied to such wanton aggressions on a woman's reputation as that we have instanced.

The misery and suffering that ensued to the mothers, and the fatal effects of the quarrel and its catastrophe on the excitable mind of Charles, we need not dilate on; but such were the bitter fruits borne by those wild words sown upon the wind.

From the Dublin University Magazine.

## STORY OF A MUNSTER POET.

DERMOT O'CURRAN, the son of a farmer, was born about, or a little before, 1740, in the county of Cork, but resided, after he grew up, in the parish of Modelligo, county of Waterford. Young O'Curran was peculiarly gifted by nature; he had a finely formed person, a strikingly handsome face, a lively disposition, agreeable manners, deep and ardent feelings, and considerable abilities, and was from his early youth a poet. Unhappily, he fell in love with a pretty peasant girl, a native of Modelligo, (the "Mary" of his poems,) who was proud of the attachment of a young man so much superior to her usual associates, and encouraged, perhaps reciprocated, his love. But she saw that other girls were anxious to attract his attention at their dances and rustic recreations; and, inspired by the demon of jealousy, she repaired to one of those old crones, of whom formerly there were too many, who professed to deal in charms, spells, and philtres, and purchased from her a potion said to be a virtue to keep her lover constant to herself. This she contrived to mingle in his drink at some convivial meeting. The mischievous compound attacked his brain, and the unfortunate Dermot became incurably deranged. His whole temperament changed; he lost his vivacity, and became melancholy, moody, and unsocial, but retained his poetic talent; and, though aware of the fatal injury inflicted on him by his native Mary, he still remembered his passion, which seemed to gather intensity from his madness. But now he had become an object of terror and dislike to her, and she repelled him harshly whenever he approached her, as he often did, to complain of his shattered health and troubled brain, of which he was quite sensible. Her cold and disdainful manner augmented his malady, and he wandered about the solitary parts of Modelligo a wretched being, ragged, barefooted, sallow, sickly, with scarcely a trace of his former beauty left; but still frequently composing poems on his love and despair, which he could be induced by kindness to repeat to his friends, by whom they were committed to memory. At length he disappeared for some time, and was supposed to have left that part of the country. But, one Sunday morning, in the latter end of summer, while all the rural population was at mass, he suddenly entered the cottage of his scornful love, near Farnane-bridge. It happened that she had remained at home alone, and was employed cutting brambles with a bill-hook, to feed the fire on which the potatoes were cooking for dinner. Immediately on O'Curran's entrance he began to speak to her of his enduring attachment, and to entreat her pity; but, instead of trying to soothe and amuse the maniac till some one should come in, it appears that she foolishly irritated him by contemptuous expressions, and especially by taunting him with his infirmity. Knowing himself to have been in this respect her victim, he became infuriated beyond the usual pitch of his delirium, and, in a wild paroxysm of frenzy, snatching up the bill-hook, he severed her head from her body. Remarkable retribution she felt a sacrifice to the madness that she had occasioned by her own superstition and jealousy. No sooner was the fatal deed done, and O'Curran's fury appeased by the blood of the murdered woman than the feeble light of such reason as he commonly retained dawned again upon his mind; he became conscious of the nature and the consequences of his act, and rushed from the house to conceal himself. The dismay of Mary's family at finding her headless corpse on their return from chapel may be conceived. On searching for the murderer, the track of the madman was easily