

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From the London People's Journal.

A SOIREE.

It is good to be merry and wise.—OLD SAW.

We are about to furnish the reader with a 'modern instance' in support of this old saw. If the instance support some other wise good old saws about 'the duty of following good examples'—the economy of learning from our opponents'—the superiority of a social to an anti-social spirit in any sect or party—the little that is required to make reasonable people happy, &c.—so much the better. But far from us be the arrogance which takes it for granted that a reader is not capable of deducing these satisfactory things for himself. It is not courteous in an author to suppose his readers so 'lazy and incompetent as not to point for themselves the moral which is unfolded in the tale he adorns.

Mary Green, a lively London girl, who has not seen her twentieth birth day, went to spend a certain January with some relations of her mother, who lived in the large and flourishing town of Thriveham. We need not specify in which portion of the British isles Thriveham raises its factory chimneys and its church and chapel steeples; suffice it to say that Thriveham works hard in the midst of an idle region—that Thriveham is rich in the midst of poor people; and, as 'much will have more,' Thriveham is growing larger, wealthier and happier every year. There is nothing antique about the place; it has grown up almost like an American city, and its citizens have the wide-awake, go-ahead, keen, money scenting countenances of the Yankees. They are more than half of Scottish extraction; and by the blessing of St. Andrew, they have retained in full vigor their best characteristics—industry, persistency, prudence and a spirit of enterprise.

Mary Green's uncle Mackenzie was a merchant (for Thriveham is a seaport as well as a manufacturing town,) and although he was not so rich as some of his neighbors, he was respected because he was a man of larger views and more extended knowledge than most of them.

Mary, who belonged to the church of England, was at first a little overpowered by the modes, shows and forms of Presbyterianism. In their chapels she thought the Presbyterians looked very severe, stiff and formal; in their houses they were too grave for her taste—they chilled her, and made her uncomfortable. She heard often of the acts of goodness and self denial, the piety and benevolence of Mrs Mac, this, and Mrs Mac, that: she admired the acts, but she could not admire the rigid, formal people who performed them.

'Oh,' she thought, 'if they would but exercise their goodness and benevolence in little things as well as great!—if they would but indulge in a little innocent mirth now and again just by way of a change! There is that six-feet high Mr Machomily, who never bends a muscle, and who looks as if he never took off his neckcloth or his pulpit manners—does he ever laugh, I wonder? I know he has three children, and his wife is a mild pretty looking little woman, though sadly disposed to turn up her eyes in sermon time; but then the minister is her husband, and I dare say she likes him. Oh dear, oh dear! Thriveham is rather dull for girls, I'm sure.'

As she sat thinking thus one morning, dividing her attention pretty equally between these thoughts, a crotchet collar which she was working, and the people who were calling at the opposite houses—for we are sorry to say Mary Green was not given to reading the sermons and commentaries on the Assembly's catechism, which lay on the drawing room table—she was addressed by her aunt, Mrs Mackenzie.

'I have news for you, Mary, my dear—Mr Machomily has been here to day to ask me to form one of a committee for getting up a soiree among the congregation.'

'A soiree? Do you mean a dance, or a musical soiree?'

'Oh, no, my dear. We do not approve of dancing parties exactly. Mr Machomily thinks that it would be a good thing for the congregation if they were to meet in a social way sometimes—to talk a little and laugh a little.'

'Does Mr Machomily approve of laughing? I should have thought he considered it a snare of Satan.'

'You do not quite understand the presbyterians, and Mr Machomily yet. However, if you will go to this tea drinking party, or congregational soiree, you may chance to pick up an idea or so.'

'I should certainly like very much to go, aunt.'

The fact was, Mary would have liked anything better than the usual formal walk, formal visits, and dreadfully quiet evenings with one or two friends of the good elderly Mackenzies.

'How many people will be there? and what sort of people? and where is it to be?' asked Mary.

As the congregation consists of four hundred members, and some are absent, while some who are here will be allowed to introduce a friend, I dare say there will be about four hundred persons present. Then, as our congregation consists of all classes, there will be persons of all classes present. They will all be admitted by tickets, and the expense of the entertainment will be defrayed by the

richer members, and the poor will pay nothing.'

'That is quite right,' said Mary, approvingly.

'Then we shall hire the large room of the school as the scene of the feast, and it will, most likely, take place next Wednesday evening.'

'And what time will the "swarrey" be on the table?' inquired Mary, thinking of Sam Weller and the Bath footmen; but keeping her little laugh to herself, as she was aware that her aunt knew less about Sam Weller than she did about John Knox. 'I mean, when will tea be served?'

'At seven o'clock. Each lady of the committee will preside over a tea table, and will be allowed to take a friend with her to assist in making tea.'

'Oh, if I may make the tea and be useful, I am quite certain I shall enjoy the evening very much.'

'You cannot fail to enjoy the evening, my dear. You will see and probably converse with Dr. MacStuff, and Miss Daunder, and Mrs Mac Able, besides meeting some of the richest and most influential people of Thriveham; then there will be the speeches of the ministers after tea.'

Good aunt Mackenzie, who dreamed not that the lassie thought in her saucy heart the speechmakers might abstain from speech-making on such an occasion, dilated on the rhetorical powers of her favorite Boanerges, Mac Tympanum; the respectability and large incomes of the rich members, and the industry, honesty and rising fortunes of the poorer members. She showed Mary what an advantage it was in a worldly sense to decent people to belong to Mr Machomily's congregation, because they got the custom of the richer people, and the richer people took an interest in them.

'At this soiree,' continued Mrs Mackenzie 'there will be no profane dancing and singing, I am sure; yet Mr Machomily seemed to desire that some sort of amusement should be provided for the young people.'

Mary thought that Mr Machomily looked as if he did not understand the word amusement. But Mary was young, and did him injustice. She had much to learn in the way of distrusting her own judgment of new things and new people.

That same evening she met with a passage in Goldsmith which set her laughing aloud in the midst of the stillness which usually prevailed in her aunt's drawing room.

'What are you laughing at, Polly?' enquired her uncle, smiling too, a little, though he was enjoying his usual dull after-dinner state. 'What is it? let us have the benefit of it, too.'

'Now, you must not be angry, aunt, but this does so remind me of what I thought when you told me about the congregational soiree to day. Listen:—'

'We have at the Muzzy club no riotous mirth, no awkward ribaldry, no confusion or bawling—all is conducted with wisdom and decency; besides some of our members are worth forty thousand pounds; men of prudence and foresight, every one of them. These are proper acquaintance; and to such I will to night introduce you! I was charmed at the proposal. To be acquainted with men worth forty thousand pounds, and to talk wisdom the whole night, were offers that threw me into rapture.'

'Ah, Miss Mary, I am almost asleep just now,' said her uncle, good naturedly; 'but I can see with half an eye that you will never find out what is best in any people, as long as you love to ridicule what is new and strange instead of giving it respectful consideration. If you go to this tea-drinking you will make fun of the whole affair, I dare say; but don't be too sure that it is ridiculous. Suppose you go with a disposition to admire and be pleased—eh, Miss Polly? I don't want to find fault; but I'm afraid you think yourself uncommonly clever.'

Mary began to defend herself with vigor, and ended by acknowledging that she had been nursing a joke against the tea party, but promised to attend it in a very different spirit. Mary loved her uncle; he was an honest, large-hearted, thoroughly sensible man, full of kindness. He had a certain sort of dry Scotch humor, too, which he brought to bear upon his niece occasionally, when she was disposed to think there could be no loving kindness in a Calvinist, and no mirth in a Methodist. Mary learned a great deal of toleration and liberality from her Presbyterian uncle; and the art of unostentatious usefulness from her aunt. She first began to enjoy her visit to Thriveham on the night of this soiree, which she thus describes in a letter to her brother:—

'Dearest Tom,

'You want to know how the "pious tea-drinking" went off, do you? Well, promise not to turn it all into fun and I will tell you. The fact is, Tom, there is a great deal more enjoyment among the Presbyterians and Dissenters of the *unco guid* stamp than you and most orthodox folk suppose. A very snug, warm, comfortable sort of religion is your Presbyterianism, Tom. But for the soiree, it was really a very pleasant little affair; and all I can say is, that I wish we had one every week. I beg leave to recant nearly all my former sayings against the coldness and rigidity of Presbyterian manners. This soiree has *change tout cela*.

'At a quarter to seven on the appointed evening aunt Mackenzie and I repaired to the room. I wore my blue silk frock, and aunt her dead-leaf silk and white lace cap; we were dressed as if we were going to take tea with a friend in a quiet way. It was a cold, frosty night as we trotted round the

square to the — rooms. They looked invitingly brilliant outside; and we enjoyed the pleasant warmth and light as soon as we entered. There were several rooms appropriated to the cloaks and bonnets of the less worthy gender. We soon deposited ours, and repaired to the great room to find out which was our peculiar tea table. I was struck with the plain but very pleasant *coup d'œil* on entering. The room was very large; I do not know how many feet by how many—but large enough to hold forty tables for ten people each, and leave ample space for walking round and between the tables. The room was supported by slight pilasters, which with the walls and ceiling were painted of a light cream color, and reflected the light well from the many gas lamps which were distributed about. In fact, it was as well lighted as you could desire a ball room to be—and this is an important thing in a social assembly. 'Get people together in a dimly lighted room and they will find it up-hill work to be gay—the physical gloom is reflected in the mind,' says my uncle. That's a 'wrinkle' for my housekeeping when I'm married, and give parties. To return: there were a good many people already assembled; but we had no difficulty in finding my aunt's table. This, like all the others, was furnished with an abundance of cups and saucers, two teapots, a quart jug of rich new milk, such as in London would be called cream, and two huge bowls of fine white sugar. Last, but not to be forgotten, was half a pound of capital mixed tea. Along the table in a portly row stood dishes and baskets piled up with buns, pieces of cake, biscuits, tea cakes, &c.—there was abundance of everything. Fresh parties came trooping in at every moment; grey haired men and women; tall, healthy young men—some handsome; pretty girls, with their smooth hair and rosy cheeks; little girls and boys, by the hand of father, or mother; some were handsomely dressed, some were moderately, some poorly dressed—indicating various grades in the social scale; but all came with smiling looks, such as I had not seen on their faces before; and I knew most of them by sight, having seen them every Sunday at the meeting house. Here, they all looked as if they had come to enjoy themselves; determined, though 'man was made to mourn.'

To be pleased and please,

as Pope or Swift says. That long, thin Mr Machomily, the clergyman, whom I have already described to you, welcomed the fresh arrivals with a kind, benevolent face. His pale, rigid features were expanded with smiles; his pretty, prim wife stood near him, and greeted the mothers and the children in a gentle, still fashion, that I thought perfect in taste and real politeness. All the little ones seemed to be happier when they had been smiled upon by Mrs Machomily, the minister's wife—it was almost as great an honor as being patted on the head by the minister himself. The buzz of conversation was growing louder over the room. Groups of elderly men, with bald heads, and a well-to-do look, walked up and down the room, arranging the guests at the different tables; with much quiet merriment about ladies not sitting with ladies, and gentlemen not sitting with gentlemen.

In general, however I observed that the people formed themselves naturally into coteries, and chatted in animated whispers, waiting for the moment when the tea dispensing should begin. It was a pleasant thing to me to see the poor and the rich sitting at the same table, exchanging friendly words, with no evidence of a painful social distinction. At our table we had a mixture of this kind; but there were three who attracted my attention more than the others; a respectable poor woman and her grown up daughter—a pretty, modest girl, with a Jenny Deans air—and, beside them, a lively little man about forty, who had watched for their coming in, and waited to see where they sat down. He was much marked by the small-pox; but by no means unpleasant to look at. He was evidently better furnished with this world's gear than his female friends; but he paid them great respect—especially the mother, beside whom he sat, and across whom he occasionally stole glances at the daughter. She never looked at him but once, when the minister stopped for a moment at our table, and said to her admirer, 'Very happy to see you here, Mr Donald; I shall call upon you presently to tell the company what you know about the want of schools in —.' Mr Donald did not lose his self possession at being addressed thus by the minister, but replied, 'I shall be very glad to tell the company, sir, if you think telling them of the evil will be a step towards remedying it.' My Jenny Deans gave a glance of pride and approval at her adorer, and I think he caught it, for he turned red and brightened all over as he looked at her. I may as well say he did tell the company, in good, plain language, some very interesting facts connected with the educational deficiencies of a certain district; and that a rich man in the company got up after him, and said he would begin a subscription for the establishment of schools in that district, and would head it with a donation of fifty pounds—whereupon Jenny Deans clapped as loud as any one.

While the guests were assembling and seating themselves, a regiment of little boys carrying kettles of boiling water were running about to all the tables, asking, 'Do you want any hot water, ma'am?' More water ma'am? As I had made, or as my aunt says, infused our tea, soon after we arrived I began to fear it would be spoiled, and that our party would have reason to complain. I wondered why my aunt would not allow me to

begin pouring it into the cups; and at last ventured to suggest that as our table was full, and all the people sat like good children waiting to be helped, I should begin to perform my office. She laid her hand on my arm—'You forget, my dear, Mr Machomily or one of the clergymen present, will ask a blessing!' I had forgotten that, certainly. In a few minutes Mr Machomily ascended to a sort of reading desk at the upper end of the room, and pronounced a blessing on the feast. It did not sound like an empty form; there seemed an earnest desire in the speaker's heart that the spirit of charity and cheerful-ness should pervade that assembly, and that God would bless every member of it. The grace before the meal was short; and immediately after it all the ladies became very busy pouring out the fragrant decoction. I was delighted to find that my tea was good. Even you, epicure in tea as you are, would have delighted in mine, that night. My aunt had so many persons to exchange a word or two with, that I was obliged to attend to her teapot as well as to my own. What excellent appetites the good folks had! how the children enjoyed the buns! how Jenny Deans' mother enjoyed her three cups of tea! and how she smiled on me, and said, 'Deed, then, it's vera gude!' how Jenny's lover drank seven cups, and grew more eloquent with each! how delightful it was to hear the buzz and hum of conversation, the little silvery laughs of the pretty puritans, and the low ha! ha's! of their fathers and brothers. Mr Machomily seemed to be ubiquitous, and capable of swallowing no end of tea. He and my uncle were generally to be seen together, and they had something to say to every one. I was surprised at Mr Machomily's lively way of capping everything my uncle said. I never should have suspected him of an acquaintance with old jokes and nonsense verses, but for this little occurrence. Once when he and my uncle were standing by our table, the latter held out his cup to me and said—

And hearken now my polly dear—

I prithee give to me,

With cream and sugar softened well,

Another dish of tea:

whereupon, to my surprise, the staid, solemn Machomily thrust his cup gently into my hand saying—

And hear, alas! this mournful truth—

Nor hear it with a frown:

Thou canst not make the tea so fast,

As I can gulp it down.

I knew these doggerel verses were Dr. Johnson's, but the comic look of the minister as he repeated them won my heart as much as if they had been his own. We entered into talk and he told me some of the funniest anecdotes about members of his present and former congregations—all showing a rich vein of humour in the man, but not a spice of it ill-natured. I was quite sorry when he left us, to arrange with some of the old men and the other clergymen present the programme of the after tea amusements. My uncle told me that it would be in accordance with the taste of the congregation, and that if I could project myself out of my sphere of prejudices for a time, into theirs, I might enjoy it too; otherwise he promised me I should find it terribly dull and flat. Upon this hint I acted and became inclined to Presbyterian views of men and things for the nonce. Now, how do you suppose the Company was entertained till eleven o'clock, when it separated? Thus: When the process of eating and drinking was completed, and digestion half gone through with the earliest comers, a clergyman went to the reading desk and 'returned thanks.' After that we were all called upon to sing the hundredth psalm. Now, although this may be somewhat opposed to the habit of tea parties, large or small, among *nous autres*, yet there is nothing shocking to common sense in it, and nothing disagreeable; which I cannot say for our custom of asking young ladies and gentlemen to sing, who sing badly, or good music badly, or music that very few of the people present know or care anything about. Here were a set of people singing together a fine old hymn-tune that they all knew and loved, and had been in the habit of singing together. There was something social—something friendly and sensible in that. True, it was a sanctimonious air; but if the education and associations of these people made them enjoy singing psalms when they were merry, why should they not sing psalms? *Chacun a son gout*. I maintain that it is better for two or three hundred people to sing 'With one consent,' than for the same number to buzz, and chatter, and stare, and wonder, and be indifferent while two people are singing a duet from 'Semiramide,' or 'Lucia.' One is a social and intelligible amusement, the other is not.

After the hymn, Mr Machomily addressed the congregation about themselves, and told many things interesting to them relative to many things interesting to them relative to schools, and clothing societies, and poor pensioners, &c. Then somebody else brought an old MS. book into the reading desk, and read some curious minutes of proceedings at the first meeting, in the year 1721, of the congregation of that very chapel to which they belonged. The language and the objects of interest in that meeting were very strange, when brought in contrast with the present. Then another man got up and gave a short account of all the ministers who had presided over the congregation of their chapel since 1721—and some fine old Christians they had among them. After that speech-making gave place, to the loud buzz of conversation for half an hour, when a strange-looking, humorous old man, a Presbyterian clergyman