

## Literature, &amp;c.

THE BRITISH MAGAZINES.

From the London People's Journal.

## LOOKING UP IN THE WORLD.

AN AMERICAN SKETCH.

By Maria J. B. Browne.

I HAVE made five dollars, good, clean cash, to-day," said Mr Skates, as he walked slowly and complacently into the room where his wife was sitting, and with a consequential and satisfied jingle, hung up the keys of his little shop on their accustomed peg, a strong wooden peg, just by the bed room door. Mrs. Skates made no reply, but kept on sewing, and gave the cradle rather an impatient jog with her foot.

"Five dollars, good, clean cash!" repeated Mr Skates, this second time accompanying the intelligence with a keen and merry whistle, such as he was used to encourage or congratulate himself with during the many hours he sat on his bench, in close and industrious intimacy with his leather apron and lap-stone. Still Mrs Skates made no response, and if her husband had seen her face, he would have justly concluded, from its sealed-up expression, she never meant to speak again on any occasion. But he did not see it, albeit that face was wont to greet him with a smile when he came in, at nine o'clock, from his day's cheerful labor. So he unrolled his shirt sleeves, "tipped back" in his chair, and drummed with his horny fingers' ends on his wife's jappanned work-box.

"How can you make that noise, Mr Skates, when I have had such a fuss to get the baby to sleep?" broke out Mrs Skates, giving to the cradle a more petulant jog than ever. The jog, more than the thrumming, did wake the baby, and he set to screaming at the top of his lungs. Mrs Skates frowned, and rocked and jerked him up higher on his pillows, and then turned him over, which several operations so surprised and incensed the baby, that he held his breath till his face grew red as a lobster, and then, after a few preliminary coughs and chuckles, there rattled out from his throat a full volley of his indignation.

"There, Mr Skates!" said his lady, reproachfully, as she mounted the baby on her lap, with a very unusual disregard of his tenderness and juvenility. She could not make him sit, however—he was too mad and stiff in the joints for that, and she could not keep him covered with his thin cradle-robe, for his saucy little pink feet flew about in as lively a manner as if he had been capering to the merry music of a hornpipe. "I've a good mind to spank him and done with it! Shut your mouth, and go to sleep in one minute, James, or I'll come and trounce you till you don't know yourself," continued the excited mother, in reply to a little voice that called "Mother-r-r!" out of the bed-room. The threat silenced all but a stifled whining, which lasted only a little while, and then the baby had the whole field to himself again.

Mr Skates was sorry enough to be the innocent instrument of so much trouble and confusion, so he made what amiable restitution he could, by whistling, singing, and performing sundry imitations of cats, dogs, cows, cockerels, &c., for the diversion and propitiation of the baby, till he finally relaxed his angry tearfulness into a smile; from a smile he consented to the gratification of his fleshly appetite, and under such soothing influences he was gradually cheated into a deep slumber again. When the calm was sufficiently established to allow safely the inbreaking of a human voice, Mr Skates ventured in a low tone, to commence conversation again with his wife; for this was the most social and chatty of dispositions.

"Did you hear me say I had made five dollars to-day, Katy?"

"Yes, I did," replied Mrs Skates without looking up.

"You didn't say anything, and I reckoned you didn't hear," returned Mr Skates, a good deal disappointed; he hardly knew what tack would incline his wife to conversation. At length he said,

"What is the matter, Kate? I am afraid you don't feel well—do you?"

"Yes; I feel well enough, but I don't feel happy," replied Mrs Skates, and she had more than half a mind to cry outright;—I think she would, but for the dread of another "tussel" with the baby.

"What's happened? Have I done anything?" inquired the alarmed and simple-hearted husband; and when Katy only answered with a sort of lingering, undecided "No," and her tears really began to start, his own were ready to start, too, for he loved Katy with the whole wealth of his simple, unsentimental nature, and he had never seen her so evidently unhappy before. He drew nearer to her, and asked softly and anxiously—

"Katy, what is the matter?"

"I don't feel contented! I want to be somebody, James!" sobbed Mrs Skates as she laid the baby back in his cradle, and covered her face with her apron.

Ah, there was the mischief—the silence—the rough handling of the little one—the scolding of James to his slumber—all traceable to this! Not at all like Mrs Skates was this impatience and reproachfulness, for she was one of the most thrifty and lovable little wives in all the village. True, in her girlhood, which was scarcely past, she had been an ambitious maiden; and if she could have had the choosing of her destiny, I don't know that she would have married James Skates

the shoemaker; for in personal appearance, in mental endowments, if they had been properly balanced, and in ambitious purposes, he was any distance behind her. If Mrs Skates was accountable for ten talents, at a random estimate, her husband's reckoning never would have stretched beyond five, in any state of the market; and from the dawn of her womanhood, when she first began to take the lead among the village girls, the notion invincibly quartered itself in her head, that she was "born to be somebody."

Mr Skates had but a very little beforehand when they were married, and Katy's father could give her only the scantiest outfit; but James was industrious and careful, and his wants were few and very easily satisfied. His boots and shoes never ripped, and "wore like iron," so of course they gave entire satisfaction to everybody, and he had all the making and "capping" and "specking" for miles and miles around. Indeed, so popular was he, that his patrons gave him no time at all to idle away, even if he had been disposed to indolence. How could such commendable industry fail to insure success?

And Katy loved him dearly when once she had married him, and become accustomed to his simple and unassuming ways. Yes, she did love him dearly, and she entered heart and hand into his plans for prosperity, and suggested many more from the stores of her superior calculation. She was very happy, indeed, when the last penny was paid for their house and garden, and they could call it indisputably their own; and her next ambition was to have it repaired and painted straw-color, with the ornamental addition to its neatness of pretty light green blinds. Gradually she became the mistress of a carpet for her parlor and best bed-room, and one article after another accumulated till their house was tastefully and suitably provided with furniture—not the richest mahogany and rosewood, and damask, to be sure, but such as comported with her means and station. Long before all this came to pass, the matrons of the village, who had shaken their heads doubtfully over the promise of her giddy girlhood, declared themselves "happily disappointed!" Katy had really settled down into a steady woman, and made a first rate housekeeper. Only they thought "she was none the better for some of her high notions; she dressed 'most too well, and laid out 'most too much of Skates's earnings to fix their house, when it would do just as well without—theirn did—and the money ought to be put at interest 'ginst a rainy day; they might be sick or be burned out—who could tell?"

Now it is not to be supposed, that all this was wholly untraceable to the idea she had nursed from her childhood, that she was "born to be somebody," or that the development and growth of matronly virtues had eradicated the foibles which were interwoven with the constitution of her mind. The luxuriance of the virtues might have overtopped the follies, if she had hated the follies; but the truth was, their roots were deeply struck, and strong, and she was only waiting for the opportunity in the progress of her history, to prove that nothing but the painful lessons of a severe experience can destroy the interlacings of a false ambition—that kind of ambition which sees no loveliness in its own pathway, no honor in the quiet and faithful discharge of its own private, and it may be, humble duties, nothing really desirable or satisfying, unless it is stretched often into another and a higher sphere.

Mrs Skates had a very dear cousin and friend, to whose influence she readily submitted herself; although the unequivocal tendency of that influence was to kindle up her discontent, and lead her mind to the revolving of projects which alone she never would have thought of. Cousin Sophronia Thompson, though a number of years Katy's senior, had always taken her greatly into favor, and they had long sustained the most confidential intimate relations. Sophronia was brought up a near neighbor to Katy, had learned the "tailor's trade" in all its mysteries, and was marvellously endowed with a faculty at the "Shears," the "goose," and the "cabbage." By and by, Sophronia had a good chance to go into a large, "ready-made clothing establishment" in the city, and with her upward tendencies—it seemed they almost ran in the family—here was an opportunity by no means to be neglected. She threw up her country business at once, and went; and by her correspondence, she kept Mrs Skates intelligent on every branch of her success. What "sights" of money she made, and what "sights" she spent—how richly she dressed, how she wore a "gold" watch and chain, and had rings and pins and bracelets to wear on all occasions, proper or improper—at any rate to wear. O, how these communications from time to time, albeit they were in defiance of "orthography, etymology, syntax and prosody," made Katy's heart flutter. She wished—how many things she did wish! But she seldom said anything to her husband about these aspirations; indeed, he never could be made to realise that the letters were of any interest at all; so, by and by, he did not take the trouble to read them. But Katy read them, and feasted upon the fine things they described, and the genteel practices they explained. And when Sophronia at length wrote a letter on a "mourning sheet," all bordered and sealed with black, to communicate to Mrs Skates that Solomon Thompson her only brother, was dead, and had left her five hundred pounds (the proceeds of his industrious peddling of mop-handles, washboards, and other "wooden ware," together with the product of a fortunate speculation), and that she had quit tailoring for ever, and taken genteel boarding in one of the "genteel,

est boarden houses" in the city, and was going to be a lady, and nothing but a lady, for evermore, Katy Skates thought she would faint away with surprise and envy. Katy bit her lips, and her heart throbbed impatiently; and she had, in feminine parlance, "a good cry!" To think that Sophronia Thompson had stepped right up on such a pinnacle—the very pinnacle where she, all her life, had been longing to stand; and yet she was only a shoemaker's wife, and obscure at that! O, it was humiliating—it was vexatious. What had she done to deserve it? And then she cried again.

But the letter did cast just a glimmer of light and hope upon Katy's future, dark and forbidding as it seemed. Cousin Sophronia promised,—yes, there it was, in black and white penned in scrawls unknown in the history of all chirography—she did promise to come and spend some weeks in the summer with Mrs Skates—it was all the fashion to go into the country in the hot season, and as she had fallen or rather risen in such fashionable circles, it would not do for her to neglect anything that other folks did; so she was coming in June or July, and how many things she would have to tell Katy. Mrs Skates felt that it would come next to her being a city lady herself, to have one for her visiter, and she began to be weary of waiting for the expected honor.

The occasion of the scene which opens my story, was the arrival that morning of a letter from Sophronia, full to the very brim of gentility. Sophronia had actually gone to Saratoga, in company with the "Hon. Captain Powers, lady, and daughters," and she cut out of the Saratoga newspaper a notice of their arrival at the great — Hotel! Mrs Skates thought it was a signal distinction; and then Sophronia wrote, that the "Hon. Captain Powers, lady and daughters, had never done anything in their lives, and they were really the finest and fashionabest people in all the world—as rich as—nobody knows who! and they made it a pint never to do anything." She wrote "for her part she had done doing anything, and had a'most forgotten how!"

Poor Katy! how could she bind the shoes any more! How could she do the housework and the family sewing any more, lest she should some time, through cousin Sophronia or somebody, come into the august presence of the "Hon. Captain Powers, lady and daughters!" and then the stain and roughness of her fingers would disclose the disgraceful fact that she did something! The more she meditated upon Sophronia's letter, the more discontented and dissatisfied she became, and the more impatient and disgusted with everything about her. James was unhappy, and confined himself to his shop almost entirely, because Katy was never smiling and pleasant now; the children became more and more troublesome, and was more turbulent and vexatious, because mamma had done trying to amuse them, and was even hardly gentle. The house must undergo an extra overturning in expectation of cousin Sophronia, and everything in the parlor and best bed-room was arranged and rearranged an incredible number of times before they were just to Katy's mind; and they were not after all—for with the very best aspect she could give them, she feared they would not look genteel—and if they did not look genteel in cousin Sophronia's eyes, she was undone.

At length Miss Thompson, "late from Saratoga," did arrive; and such a quantity of baggage as the coach unloaded before Mrs Skates's door, was a delight and pride to Katy, and an astonishment to all the neighbors who were within the sphere of observation. The lady herself alighted too—a very short, fat, florid-faced woman, gaudily dressed, with an article of jewelry hung on in every place where it could be made to hang—her nose only excepted. All covered with dust, and very stage-sick indeed was Miss Thompson; but a few cups of Mrs Skates's best Young Hyson tea, and some salt fish, toasted brown, with the accompaniment of salad and vinegar, proved a panacea for that difficulty so that before bed-time she was as voluble and communicative as even Katy could desire. The next morning she unpacked her trunks and boxes, and displayed to Katy's admiring eyes, the endless variety of her finery. Oh! there were black dresses, and blue dresses, and red, and green, and purple, and pink, and white, and striped, and figured, and plaided, and spotted dresses; and silk, and lace, and cashmere, and I know not how many sorts of shawls; and ribbons and flowers, and all the varieties of showy and expensive paraphernalia. Poor Katy! how mean her simple wardrobe began to appear, nice and suitable and tasteful as she had made it. She felt very much mortified that she really had nothing fit to put on, and she resolved to have some new dresses, just like Sophronia's, immediately, so that she might "appear like somebody." And oh how small and almost contemptible appeared her cottage and its belongings, when her ambitious imagination contrasted them with the sumptuous palaces cousin Sophronia represented herself to have occupied. To aggravate her discontent, all the "splendid fokes" Sophronia had seen, were honorable, or doctor, or squire, or general, or bore some such delicious and dazzling title; in the estimation of vulgar minds, a sure and unmistakable evidence of greatness, and an almost certain passport to the deference of the admiring circles which revolve about such very equivocal, and oftentimes puff-ball centres. They bewildered Mrs Skates's unpractised mind, till she could no longer see the distinction between folly and wisdom.

Something must be done to escape from the evitable disgrace and odium of laboring at such a disgraceful business as shoe-making. James Skates should not be a shoemaker any longer, nor Katy a shoe-maker's wife! "Oh, yes to be sure, something must be done," said Miss Thompson, "it was a shame they were not getting above their neighbors, and looking up into the world, when Katy had natural abilities to make so much of an appearance, and cut such a dash in the city. Mr Skates must be persuaded; and she guessed between them they could manage it, as he was not the readiest with arguments or decision in matters where the odds of logic were so decidedly on the other side. Yes, Skates must be brushed up, and persuaded to go to the city with his family, board them at a hotel or boarding house, and then engage himself in some employment which would furnish spending-money—money was to be made so easy in the city. And then it would be so much more respectable than to burrow in the country, where one never was heard of, and shoemake for a living! She herself would introduce them into the "first society," and bestow favors of that important kind upon them in such profusion, a lifetime would not be long enough to cancel the debt of gratitude they would owe her!"

Katy and Sophronia "cut and dried" the whole affair, while Sophronia sat in the rocking chair with her mis on, and fanned herself; and Katy ran about as if she had been put upon an extra pair of springs, in every limb to wait upon her. When it was all ready, and propped up on all sides with invincible arguments, Mr Skates was cautiously and warily made acquainted with the scheme; while Miss Thompson and her cousin worked vigorously till all obstacles were finally thrust out of the way. Indeed, such had been the silent effect of Sophronia's "continual dropping" about gentility and respectability, even upon a mind so slowly perceptive and so absolutely commonplace as Mr Skates's, that the difficulty of gaining him over to their side, was far less formidable than the ambitious cousins had anticipated. To the unconcealed surprise and consternation of all his neighbors and friends, and in the very face of remonstrance and forebodings of ruin, Mr Skates did let his house and shop, and consent to emigrate upon uncertainties, to the great city—the great city, which stood out in *alto relievo* before the vision of his wife, like the veritable paradise. To his praise, however be it spoken, it was not without many inward misgivings, and hours of almost tearful reluctance, that he started upon such a wildgoose chase.

These arrangements were very suddenly got up, and of course must be executed while at a fever heat, or they would be likely to fail, as Mr Skates, though his neighbors had never called him "shifty-minded" before, might possibly sicken of the prospective change, and overturn the whole just on the very eve of accomplishment. When Katy was so near the enchanted circle, it would be death to be obliged to withdraw. Sophronia considerably protracted her stay a week longer than she had at first meditated, to mind the children, and do some "light chores," to facilitate the preparations which Mr and Mrs Skates were so busy and animated in making. And when the "things" were nearly all removed from their places, and packed away into the chambers, and all the rooms began to look stripped and melancholy, there were gloomy and ill-omened echoes shooting through the unfurnished apartments—echoes that would creak of desolation, and would sometimes strike like a knell on Skates's simple heart in spite of himself—in spite of the bustling and gleefulness of his triumphant little wife—in spite of the glare of cousin Sophronia's fancy paintings, which she took care to hold up before him to the very last moment of her tarrying.

Mrs Skates was happy as a queen when they were all seated in the railway carriage going to the city—the city at last! and when the coach drew up before the splendid entrance of a great castle-like hotel, and the servants came out and overwhelmed them with attentions and services, and conducted them in as if they were indeed the hon. Captain Somebody, and lady, she was quite bewildered with excitement and triumph. "Let my neighbors sneer now if they will," thought Katy, as she tossed her vain little head, and sat down with a mixture of confusion, diffidence and complacency, in the long, brilliantly illuminated, and magnificent drawing-room. Oh, such a gorgeous carpet!—her feet fairly sunk in its plushy softness, as if she had been treading on a bed of fresh moss. Such luxurious furniture! such dazzling lamps and mirrors! While her bewildered vision was struggling to take in all this grandeur at one grasp, another sense carried a throb of bitter mortification to her heart.

"Name, sir?" said a servant to her husband, who was standing still with mouth and eyes wide open, looking about him in amazement, trying to collect himself and to decide whether he was in the body or out of the body, so like an unreal panorama seemed all that was around him to his simplicity. "Name, sir?" politely repeated the servant, his face looking the personation of a subdued chuckle.

"Oh, Squire James and Miss Skates!" replied Mr Skates, very audibly; and then, on second thought, as if something of the most absolute importance had been forgotten, he added—"and the children, too—put them in!" The servant retreated instantly, and saved himself from hemorrhage perhaps, by indulging his overcharged mirthfulness, and recording on the book of arrivals for the morning paper—"James, Esq., and Miss Skates."