

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Godey's Lady's Book for February.

THE SYMPATHY MEETING.

'Two hours after the appointed time, a fleet footstep was heard upon the stairs; and Arthur begged to be 'excused for an instant.' His face was no brighter when he rejoined us; and before long we sat down to an elegant repast, had it been served out in time. Annie ran in, like a playful kitten, as we reached the dining room, with,—"I told you so, Arthur! I said I would be ready as soon as you were!"

'He interrupted her by presenting a gentleman with whom she was not acquainted.

'I am afraid you think me shocking unpunctual,' she ran on, pouring out the words and the soup at the same time, 'but that darling little pony made me forget every thing else—and then a real live tiger leaped out upon a man! I screamed, but they said it was a part of the show—and then the monkeys! I never laughed so in all my life—and oh, Arthur! I rode upon the elephant!"

'The perspiration thickened upon Merry's forehead with each fresh course of dishes.

'You don't know how mad he is,' whispered Annie to me. 'I tell you he scolded! But I don't care. I had a splendid time at the menagerie.'

'But once did Arthur look glad or at his ease—when we took our hats to leave. We walked down the street, talking of anything rather than our dinner, when Tom Hinton, whose fun-making propensities are incurable, burst forth with—'well, boys, its my impression that, if Mrs. Merry does go elsewhere to 'see the elephant,' poor Arthur need not stir from home to indulge his curiosity in that respect.'

'How could she be so careless of his feelings, and for such childish nonsense! How absurd!' exclaimed Lizzie.

'Of Mrs. Lane's *menage*, I know nothing,' continued George. 'Her philippic against her stronger half may be just. My intercourse with him has been chiefly confined to business matters, but I do not think him ill-natured. Mrs. Sherman's piteous lamentations, however, border upon the ludicrous when one remembers that she was a respectable maiden lady, already past the bloom of life, when Sherman found her living on a snug farm in the country, with no male protector, and no companion except an orphan niece, ten years of age. She looked after her broad acres with a vigilant eye; and the savings of years of thriftiness supplied, in her lover's eyes, her want of personal attractions. I am not surprised at her pretended petty fears. We are apt to assume the appearance of qualities in which we know ourselves to be deficient. This will account also for Prescott's sensitiveness on the score of being ruled. The man is henpecked to such a degree that his very dress shows it. His collar hangs over his stock with a limp helplessness only equalled by the meek droop of his eyelids, and the corners of his mouth, and his hat! I could single it out among a thousand as that of a man who dared not entertain a sneaking notion that his soul was his own. But my gossip is generating into scandal. Have I disposed of all your difficulties?"

'Yes. How silly to have let them annoy me! But they all joined, either by word or look, in the condemnation of men in general, and husbands in particular; all except Mrs. Parks and Mrs. Oram.'

'Mrs. Oram!' he repeated, with a start. 'You did not tell me that she was there.'

'She had to go home to a sick child before nightfall; but what of her? Is she not a fit associate for me?"

'A fit associate! Ah, Lizzie, she is one of a thousand; deserving of a far happier fate than the one which awaits her.'

'Is her husband unkind?"

'No—that is, not habitually. I do not fear to intrust to your discretion a secret known to a very small number of his friends. He is a man of shining qualities and powerful, but perverted energies. He failed in business about two years ago; and being in want of a confidential clerk, I offered the situation to him until he should procure more lucrative employment. His able discharge of duty and engaging demeanor so won upon my esteem and affection that, at the end of twelve months, I made proposals of co-partnership. He listened with downcast eyes and a face in which gratitude struggled with shame, expressions which preplexed and mortified me.'

'Mr. Cushman,' said he, as I finished, 'I am more than grateful for this new manifestation of confidence, unmerited though it is. It is an act worthy of yourself, my best, my only friend! You took me by the hand when all others turned away from the outcast, and restored me to apparent respectability—apparent!' he repeated, with a stinging emphasis of self-reproach.

'I was bewildered. He had never been an outcast. His character stood as high when he entered my office as it now did. But his distress was real, whatever was his imaginary cause; and I tried by argument and assurances

to dispel the unhappy hallucination. I alluded to his talents; his integrity, as displayed in every act of his past life; to his faithfulness in my service; and added that my offer was prompted by a desire to evince my recognition and appreciation of these things.

'Oh, cease, for pity's sake!' he exclaimed.—'You drive me mad! I faithful! I upright! Look here!' and he pulled rather than led me to his desk. 'There!' tossing out a bundle of papers. 'Examine those.'

'I opened the package. It contained copies of deeds, etc., executed in the neatest manner. 'I see nothing wrong in them,' I said, after inspection. I seem to feel now the look he fastened upon me.

'You gave me the originals to copy?"

'Certainly.'

'And what, sir, do you say of the wretch who permitted his tenderly-nurtured wife to bend for entire nights over them, doing his work while he lay snoring in drunken unconsciousness?"

'Alfred!' I ejaculated, ready to believe his senses wandering. 'You were never guilty of such a deed!"

'He laughed like a maniac.

'I tell you I have done it again and again! I learned to drink long ago, and she concealed it. When I came here, she knelt to me—knelt to a fend and a brute! and prayed me to abandon the accursed practice. Then as she found me going down, down, night after night (for I only indulged at night and in secret), she said not a word, only asked me to bring my writing home in the evening instead of remaining down town. One morning I awoke late, to the horrors of a day succeeding a night of debauchery; and superadded was the recollection of unperformed duty. It was necessary that my task should be accomplished. I have never yet stained my soul with a lie; and ignominious expulsion was before me. With shaking hands I untied the papers and looked mechanically over them. They were ready-written in a bold hand, a surprisingly accurate imitation of my own; but there were, now and then, delicate strokes that betrayed the woman. She had done it all. I might die a thousand deaths without experiencing the agony of that moment. It is a common occurrence now.'

'The poor fellow's face worked frightfully with emotion. 'This is my integrity,' he said, hoarsely—'my fidelity! Why do you look at me so sorrowfully? Spurn me from your door. I am not fit to dwell with honest men. I make but one request. Do not let my ill-used Mary know that the shame which is killing her is public.'

'Oh, George!' pleaded Lizzie, lifting her tear-laden eyes to his. 'You did not let him go!"

'No, dearest. I told him that I would not withdraw my trust. Had my friendship been less strong, regard for his noble wife would have led me to befriend him by every means in my power. The partnership scheme was abandoned, but he retains his clerkship; and although my opened eyes can trace the ravages of dissipation, his books are still kept with strict exactness. But this cannot last forever; sooner or later he will sink to the level of a common drunkard.'

'And she has this weight always upon her mind?' mused Lizzie. 'This has given her face its sorrowful cast. I cannot sufficiently admire her prudent silence.'

George shook his head doubtfully.

'Do you commend her prudence only? I do not wish to excite in you uncharitable feelings towards your acquaintances of your own sex, but it is enigmatical to me how a woman, who has one atom of love or respect for her husband, can make his faults or foibles the subject of conversation, even in a coterie of her picked friends. It has, to me, the semblance of a violation of her marriage vow. She is bound to 'honor' as well as 'love.' His failings should be sacred—locked up in her bosom; not held up to ridicule and censure.'

'Just what I felt all the time they were speaking!' interrupt Lizzie, eagerly. 'I cannot think that I could even discuss your peculiarities and offences with my dearest friend. How can I, when my husband is my nearest—my sole confident?"

'There spoke the right mind and the true woman's heart!' replied he, with an affectionate kiss. 'Confidants are dangerous indulgences to both husband and wife. A man who breathes a syllable of disapprobation of his partner to other ears than hers, is a fit candidate for the pillory; and from female cabals the Fates preserve me! I had rather stand with him in the same honorable position than be flayed and dissected in a 'Ladies' Sympathy Meeting.'

SCRAPS.

FROM A MODERN DICTIONARY.

The Grave—An ugly hole in the ground, which lovers and poets very often wish they were in, but at the same time take precious good care to keep out of.

Modesty—A beautiful flower, that flourishes only in secret places.

My Dear—An expression used by man and wife at the commencement of a quarrel.

Joining hands in Matrimony—A custom arising from the practice of pugilists shaking hands before they begin to fight.

The Politician.

THE BRITISH PRESS.

From the London Times.

PRACTICAL STATESMENSHP.

In the life of every man they are certain periods when overcome by some bodily weakness, led aside by some strong passion, or engrossed by some favourite pursuit, he seems to lose his grasp over his destiny, to relax his efforts after the end at which he is straining, and to sink back into ease, indolence, and self-complacency. Much such a period has this country passed through since the establishment of free trade in 1846. Immersed in the pursuit of material wealth, proud of the extension which our noble principle gave to our commerce, and happy in the relief from pauperism and the increased facility of finding employment, we have been only too well content with things as they were, and too little disposed to inquire what they should be. The revolutions of 1848, and the crimes, miseries, and absurdities to which they gave rise, had produced a reaction against liberal sympathies and opinions, and a tendency to submit without inquiry to whatever authorities might be placed over us. The election of 1852 was a struggle for a principle virtually condemned already and practically obsolete, and the nation only sought to strengthen the hands of those in whose adhesion to free trade they felt entire confidence. From different circumstances it came to pass that at no period since the Reform Bill had the aristocratic families obtained so firm a hold on office, place, and patronage as in the commencement of the year 1854. They had conducted our business for many years without any extraordinary miscarriage or misfortune, and we were content to leave them the field of politics as their peculiar vocation and monopoly. But war has always been noted as an unsparing innovator, the destroyer of conventional respectabilities, and the overthrower of all manner of snug and comfortable cliques and coteries. The experience of the last few months has awakened the people of England from their dreams of wealth and prosperity, from their traditional self-gratulations over the naval and military exploits of the late war, and from the supposition that men invested with high rank and clothed with great office, are possessed of faculties equal to the direction of our affairs whenever there is more than an ordinary strain on the vessel of the state. Our eyes are open, and we behold that we are naked. We ask for talent sufficient to conduct great affairs to successful conclusions, and instead of talents we are offered pedigrees. We ask for merit, and we are offered in exchange high connexions, or, at best seniority. The cold shade of aristocracy is over us all, and nothing can grow beneath it except the offshoots of the tree itself. Up to the middle of November this country believed itself to have armies, generals, statesmen, departments, all equal to their several duties all of the very best the world could afford, and now, in the middle of February, in three short months, all is changed, or rather all is reversed. We have awoke from our dream of hope, prosperity, and success, to disaster and dismay. Our generals have turned out worse than useless, our ministers something more than incapable; every public department has been crushed into hopeless imbecility by the weight of unbending routine and worthless formalities, and no one occasion that we are aware of, has the right man been selected to fill the right place. Everything has been mismanaged to a degree which if predicted, would have been deemed incredible; yet, so far as the public are aware, no single official has yet been recalled, and after a week's interregnum, government has been reconstituted and strengthened only by the omission of three of its leading members, and the promotion of one who is at least as guilty as any of those omitted.

The people of England have remained quiet under all these things. They have felt—as how should they not feel?—the mortality which has brought mourning to every hearth. They have noted—as how should they not note?—the incredible and inexplicable confusion and stupidity which have presided over every department, giving reality to absurdities such as the most extraordinary imagination could never have painted, and occasioning miseries such as the gloomiest prophet could never have foreboded. Why the people has been so long silent has been to most reflecting men a matter of wonder and astonishment. They feel most acutely, but they have remained hitherto passive spectators of the method in which their best hopes and dearest interest have been both squandered and betrayed. Perhaps they have cherished a hope that at the meeting of Parliament all things would be well. Perhaps they have been content to read their sentiments faithfully reflected in the columns of the press. Whatever be the cause of their silence, that cause exists no longer and we have to look for an expression of public opinion from one end of this country to the other which will convey to our governing classes a most clear and intelligible warning that the patience of the nation is exhausted, and that the necessity of widening the area from which our Executive is to be taken is great and

paramount. The enthusiastic meeting at the town of Derby has led the way, and the remaining towns of England will not be slow to follow. The cry is for practical statesmanship, for opening a free career to talent, for placing our resources in hands equal to the emergency. The Derby petitioners hold no extravagant or exaggerated language;—they declare their confidence in the justice of the war, they express their humiliation and regret at the disasters which have occurred, they pray for a searching inquiry into their cause, and suggest remedies adequate to the emergency which we have to meet. While ministers are debating how to fill the most important offices with the least competent persons and considering the claims of rank, of family, and of connection—of everything except merit and capacity—while the friends of "rising young statesmen" of the true breed are indefatigably soliciting their advancement from office to office, the people of England who care for none of these things, are gravely taking the matter into their serious consideration, and coming to conclusions but little favourable to the stability of the present governing classes. We have been ready to allow place and patronage to be monopolised by a few great families. We have been content to live in our own country, strangers to our own government, excluded from the working of our own institutions, but it was only on condition that our national pride should be respected and our interest and position in the great family of nations remain inviolate. This our aristocracy have failed to secure to us, and therefore the people of England will, we hope demand, in no spirit of wild and theoretical levelling, in no spirit of hatred or animosity to any of the community, but in the spirit of practical reform of an urgent and intolerable grievance, that the system which excludes plebeian talent from high office shall henceforth be discontinued, and that in the army, at the desk, and in the council, those men shall be called to the public service who are best able to serve the public.—We wish all success to this movement. It has been our painful lot to witness more nearly than others and to obtain more ample information as to the manner in which this war is conducted, and we do not hesitate to express the opinion that without an entire change of system, a substitution of youth and energy for age and decrepitude—unless some plan can be hit upon by which merit shall be the only criterion in the filling up of civil and military offices—without, in fact, a complete abandonment of the claims of wealth, of family, and of interest, in favor of that higher nobility which the hand of God has impressed on the forehead of every man of talent, it is vain for us to continue the present contest, and better to accept any conditions, however degrading and however humiliating, since no degradation and no humiliation suffered at the hands of the enemy can exceed those which our own servility and meanness have inflicted, and are about to inflict, upon ourselves.

From the London Daily News.

COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY.

Is Mr Roebuck to have his committee? Is the inquiry into the management of the war, voted by a majority of more than two to one of the House of Commons, to go on? These are among the first questions that the country will expect to have answered by the parliament which re-assembles this day. Either such inquiry is necessary and proper, or it is not. If it is necessary and proper, the House of Commons, by allowing it to drop, betray their constituents. If it is not necessary and proper now, it cannot have been so two weeks ago, and the vote which dissolved a cabinet and has kept public business in abeyance, must have been a recklessly factious demonstration. Honourable members have placed themselves on the horns of this dilemma: how they are to get off is their concern. The objection to the prosecution of inquiry which is most insisted upon is, that it will be—inconvenient to whom? All culprits and delinquents, who are in danger of having their misdeeds exposed to the light of day, feel inquiry a very inconvenient thing; but is their convenience to be consulted, to the detriment of the common weal? Some inconvenience to the public there may be; but nothing in comparison to the benefit that is to be derived from a searching investigation. It is clear that our administrative government, civil and military, has got into a lamentably inefficient condition. Reforms is necessary, and the only legitimate instrument of reform is the great council of the nation—Parliament. But how can parliament reform our administrative government, if it does not begin by ascertaining where the defects lie? To set to work to amend the machinery of executive government without previous inquiry, would be to run the risk of altering the sound parts, and leaving the rotten untouched. Mr. Sidney Herbert spoke very sensibly yesterday, at the nomination for South Wilts. He congratulated the country on the accession of Lord Palmerston to the Premiership. He congratulated it upon the appointment of Lord John Russell to conduct the negotiations at Vienna. Upon another blessing, for which the country is at least equally thankful, Mr. Sidney Herbert forgot to congratulate it—the removal of the Duke of Newcastle and himself from the War-office. Mr. Sidney Herbert went on to remark that the only way to obtain an honourable and satisfactory peace was to carry on the war with