

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Chambers's Journal for February.

THE WINDFALL.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.—CHAP. I. CONTINUED.

THE first week or two in my new house was entirely devoted to business. I arranged to keep all the servants of my predecessor; and this was my first mistake; for, after a while, I was reminded that such and such things had not been done in the time of their late master, and I found that the consumption of strong beer and beef had always been *ad libitum*. I generally conceded the point when a dispute arose, for my income was so ample for a bachelor, that it really did not seem worth while to cause discontent in the servants-hall for the sake of a few pounds a year. The three first visits I had the honor of receiving from my neighbours were from three medical men. The first of these possessed a priority of claim on my attention, for he had attended my deceased cousin; and his want of foresight, perhaps, I was indebted for being heir-at-law to his intestate patient. My second medical visitor was a vulgar little man, who talked of nothing but pills and potions, except when he dilated more at large upon some horrible operation, which it had been his good-fortune to perform or assist at. He reminded me of the following lines:—

He seldom talked but of his trade,

Of lungs, of lights, of livers;

The living he carved, and gashed, and slashed,
And the dead he cut to shivers.

I felt a kind of horror when I glanced at the card of the third visitor, and perceived that it was another practitioner, Dr. Leech. Surely, thought I, I must have presented a very unhealthy appearance yesterday at church, or these three worthies would not have been in such a very great hurry to pay their compliments, and make their expectations known to me. I began to fancy that the undertaker would be the next announced. However, my fourth visitor was one of that order who are supposed to care more for the soul than the body. The worthy rector of my parish did not lose much time in making my acquaintance. He expressed, in the course of conversation, the hope of finding me a better coadjutor in parochial reform than the late owner of Langton had been. He enlightened me as to a few of my cousin's peculiarities which seemed to be characteristic of a reserved and unimpressible nature. I found that he had lived much to himself; keeping up a certain dignified state in his appointments and household; but shunning sociability or intimacy. Part of his life he had spent abroad; whether he disliked the female sex as much as I did, I knew not, but he lived a bachelor life at Langton Hall. My cousin, it appears, had been ratherrotchety, and, as friends and relatives often do, he discussed his failings freely. The rector amused me with a few domestic anecdotes about my neighbours, and in a short time I found my mind localised into a gossiping dissertation on the merits and pretensions of half the families round. I found the rector a key to much useful knowledge. As the dinner-bell rang just as he was about to depart, I pressed him to remain, which he did; and we talked parochial and other matters over our port—for which I found my friend had a clerical liking.

The next day brought some of my more aristocratic neighbours to inspect the new comer. We had few subjects in common. The squirearchy are not an intellectual race; they form a sort of rear-guard to civilization; their interests and ideas are local: they think more of preservation of game than the enfranchisement of a state. I found my neighbours were not much frequenters of London; for in metropolitan circles a few thousand a year is a mere mediocrity of wealth, and the squire of ancestral acres has seldom much other claim upon the notice of society. Though true it is that society cares little for pedigree without patrimony, the genealogy of a race horse is of more importance than that of the man who gives dinners. The individual who comes into the world without any cognizance of a grandfather, may give better champagne and venison than the descendant of one of the freebooters of William the Conqueror. What a god-send is our variable English climate to the inane conversation of the natives! My visitors were true chroniclers of the barometer; my politics, principles, and prejudices were unknown to them, and country society is not the sphere for that kind of mental friction which elicits truth. If a person does not conform to the orthodoxy of that part of the country he lives in, he is pronounced to be eccentric and peculiar, which means a great deal from the lips of the utterly respectable.

The next horde of visitors were more definite in the expression of their sentiments.—They were tenants, and wanted their rents lowered, their farmhouses repaired, and a host of grievances redressed. Country-life was new to me; I set about my work *con amore*.—After toiling over my newly acquired acres, to inspect the wants of my tenant-rulers, I came

to the conclusion, that if all I heard was true, the present was the worst season that had ever been known; that the agriculturists were the most ill-used interest in the country, and that my particular estate was singularly unproductive; that the rents were too high; and that the farm-buildings had been tumbling down for the last twenty years. I was told that the game destroyed the crops when in the ground, and the tithes and taxes swallowed the greatest of that which was gathered. Very shortly, the industry of the whole neighbourhood was put in requisition, and I found myself maintaining an army of masons, bricklayers, and carpenters. Langton Hall itself required repair. A hurricane took place a few weeks after my installation there. After being rocked through the live-long night, my servant appeared early in the morning at my door, saying: "If you please sir, it has been a terrible night."

"I should think I knew that," said I.
"Yes, certainly, sir; but, if you please, the whole stack of kitchen-chimneys has been blown down; the kitchen is full of bricks and mortar; the outhouses are a good deal damaged, and part of the stable roof is blown off; the two elms at the east side of the house are rooted up; and I think, sir, there are not six whole panes of glass in the conservatory: altogether there's a sight of mischief done by the wind, to be sure!"

"Well, anything else?" said I, flinging off my night-cap.

"No, sir; nothing in particular. I suppose the shoot has burst, for one side of the wall of the large drawing-room is streaming with wet, and the soot has come down the library-chimney all over the place."

"Pleasant news this," I remarked. "Bring me the hot water; I must get up and see what can be done."

In truth, I found the elements had a kind of free republic at the picturesque altitude of Langton Hall. The witches of Macbeth might have found the neighbourhood vastly convenient, both as to time and place, for their meeting; and, to judge by the hallabaloo made nightly by bats, beasts, wind and rain, one might suppose those ancient ladies had made the park their 'blasted heath.' I often sighed for the humanised noises of the rattling streets of London. There is a sense of civilisation in the midnight rumbling of carriages, which gives a feeling of peopled security to one's slumbers; but to hear all night long those frightful owls interrogating the solitude with their eternal 'Who—who-oo?' as though asking the name of some spectral murderer from the dark night, is indeed horrible. Less supernatural horrors assail one in the morning, when you hear that a fox has carried off some choice water-fowl; or the poachers have snared some pheasants you had partially tamed, and that the garden has been cleared of all the early fruit and vegetables. O London! London! centre of civilisation, comfort and economy, why was I induced to leave thee and competence? Why did my thoughtless cousin die without a will, and leave me heir-at-law to such a detestable possession as a country-house?

What are country neighbours but another word for conflicting interests? If the shadow of your trees fall upon another man's land, he is your enemy. If you are a new man in the country, he sneers at you; if you are the descendant of an old family, ten to one but there is an accumulation of the jealousies of your mutual progenitors. Now, in London, one never has neighbours: and, unless you happen to keep a lucifer match manufactory, you are a subject of perfect indifference to the man who lives next door to you. In the country, one's respectability costs so much; whatever your income may be, you are obliged to keep up an establishment that runs away annually with something more, so that mortgage seems to be the all and end-all of a large country gentleman. So folks are wont to call the squire of the land.

How friendship warms in the sunshine of prosperity! The post-bag rarely arrived without containing several congratulatory letters from people whom I had been in the habit of considering mere acquaintances. One hinted that a few days' shooting would be pleasant; another found that he should be in my neighbourhood, and would look in upon me for a day or two. I had shortly the pleasure of seeing my house full of visitors. But neither the dinner parties these arrangements involved, nor the fact of seeing 'the hospitalities of Langton Hall' alluded to in the County Chronicle, reconciled me to the misery of having my habits disturbed and my quiet invaded.

As far as my neighbours were concerned, I was, of course, feeted by them. In vain do country-people arrange their dinner-parties for that date when the almanacs tell them the moon will lend them light; the moon, like other she things, is obstinate, and always hides behind an impenetrable mass of dark clouds on those occasions.

So, on a January evening, when the 'air is murky,' you drive twelve miles in the dark to partake of a stiff pompous dinner, where the gastronomic labours are never seasoned by a bon mot or lightened by a hearty laugh. We English are not a joyous nation; our amusements are solemn, exclusive, and ostentatious. At eleven o'clock you are again in your carriage driving homewards. But the coachman, having enjoyed himself more in the servants-hall

than you did in the dining-room, gets oblivious, and drives into a ditch, about three miles from home. The carriage is broken, and one of the horses lamed; so you walk home the rest of the way in a dress-coat and thin boots, catch a severe cold, and wish country dinner-parties—somewhere else.

Besides the army of bricklayers, carpenters, masons, drainers, and miscellaneous labourers, of all descriptions, who were repairing my farms and injuring my fortune, I found myself plagued to death by the disorders of my household. Though each individual domestic had his own or her own way, so far as I was concerned, they were the most discontented crew I had ever the misfortune to see congregated under one roof. There is an old saying, that 'too many cooks spoil the broth'; and so I thought when, one day, it was suddenly announced to me, on the eve of a dinner-party, that my cook made an addition to the population, without giving the slightest hint of her intention, or, for aught I can tell, knowing anything about it herself.

CHAPTER II.

Difficulties were accumulating round me, when my worthy friend, the rector, one day proposed a remedy. We were sitting tete-a-tete over our wine and walnuts: a small table was brought close to the fire, which threw its socialising influence around, and exactly warmed one to that degree of the thermometer which makes it pleasant for a rich man to lament the peculiar annoyances of his lot. Under the influences of the first few glasses, the rector talked particularly of the sins of my household, and promised his valuable assistance in correcting their irregularities, by preaching a series of sermons especially for their admonition. But as time went on, and the wine went round, the rector proposed another and a bolder plan of action.

"I tell you what, my dear Gerrard," said he; "it is all very well for me to say what I will do in the pulpit—you can do a great deal more yourself: there is only one real way out of your difficulties. I know what these things are; I have had a great deal of experience of life, and I can safely advise you, even against any little preconceived prejudices on your part."

He paused for a reply, but I had no clear idea of his meaning. I had a dim notion that he meant to propose the revival of the penance of standing in a white sheet for the correction of the cook.

The rector cracked several nuts, and replenished his wine glass; but finding I was silent he continued: "Yes, my dear friend, I have long seen it; it is, I assure you, the only way—I speak as a man of the world; I advise it as a prudent course of action—in fact, you know, as a religious institution. I am bound, as a minister of the church, to recommend it as a general support to virtue and morality."

Still the vision of the unfortunate cook standing in a white sheet came up before me, till at length the drift of the rector's harangue flashed upon my astonished senses.

"I lived a good many years," said he, "as a bachelor, but I can't find words to express to you how much more comfortable I find married life. When I was single, I was never free from the attacks of injurious calumny—my servants were disorderly—my comforts ill attended to—"

"Stop, stop, my good sir!" I exclaimed.—"You do not know what a horror I have of matrimony and everything belonging to it. I have never been accustomed to women; I don't understand their ways; I believe they are violent in their tempers—subject to hysterics and fainting fits on the shortest possible notice. I would rather work in the mines of Siberia than—to say nothing of the 'consequence in itself necessary,' as metaphysicians would say, of having a small family, or rather a large family of small children, an annual succession of wet and dry nurses, and babies that would each have teeth, measles, and whooping-cough! O Heaven preserve me! My good friend you are not aware of my horror on this subject. Think of my peace being disturbed by females, after my having so studiously avoided the sex for so many years! Suggest any remedy for the disorders of my household but hanging and matrimony."

"Ah, Gerrard, I felt as you once, but I can think differently now: I know and feel the happiness and benefits of a married life."

"And where should I find a wife?" I exclaimed petulantly. "I should not look for one in the fashionable world of London, where women think of nothing but dress and amusement. I would rather suffer the fate of Mazeppa than marry one of Sir John Powell's daughters, who ride blood-horses, follow the hounds, and their own inclinations. The gods defend me from having a she-centaur for a wife! You would not recommend me the three spinster-aunts of your curate, who look as if they had spent some of their early days with Noah! Then there is Dr. Leech's sister—she is a dose about as disagreeable as her brother's physic; and the girls at Combe Hall are too young and pretty for me to trust, and would soon cost 'confusing worse confounded' in this household pandemonium!"

"My dear sir," interrupted the rector, "you should marry some one of sufficient age and experience to conduct your house properly—one who would save you all these troubles which now torment your life out—some one who

would grace the head of your table, and present you with an heir to this fine property, which, otherwise, will go to some distant relative, who does not care a straw for you."

"What you suggest is desirable in the future Mrs. Gerrard, does not, however, point out the local habitation and the name of the happy individual, if such a person does exist. I feel assured that, unless matrimony is 'trust upon me,' I should never seek or find a wife."

"Well," said the rector after a pause, "I do know some one who would suit you exactly; of course I don't like to name names, especially as there is a sort of connection. The lady I mean is not too young for the management of such an establishment as yours, nor is she too old to please your taste. You know George, the Fourth used to say, 'fair, fat and forty.' The lady in question possesses another great advantage—she has had the experience of married life which renders a woman so truly companionable—so superior to boarding-school misses or starched spinsters. A woman who has been once married understands the tempers, the wants, the weakness of our sex; she is prepared to adapt herself to her position. Of course I know some men do entertain foolish prejudices against widows, but, in my opinion, a person who has had that experience of married life would be the most likely to make you happy."

More of this conversation I cannot record, for I have only a confused recollection that our tete-a-tete continued till after midnight; and when the rector's horse was brought to the door, he mounted briskly, with these parting words: "Leave it all to me, Gerrard: I will give the first hint, and you'll find it all plain-sailing after that."

(To be continued.)

FASHIONABLE CHURCH IN NEW YORK.

You enter the church porch. The portly sexton, with his thumbs in the arm holes of his vest, meets you at the door. He glances at you—your hat and coat are new, so he graciously escorts you to an eligible seat in the broad aisle. Close behind you follows a poor, meek, plainly clad seamstress, released from her treadmill round to think, one day in seven, of God! The sexton is struck with sudden business! She stands embarrassed a moment—then, as the truth dawns upon her, retraces her steps, and with a crimson blush, recrosses the threshold which she has profaned with her plebeian feet!

Hark to the organ. It is a strain from Norma slightly Sabbath-ized. Now, the worshippers one after another glides in—silks rattle, plumes wave, satin glistens, diamonds glitter, and scores of forty dollar handkerchiefs shake out their perfumed odor. What an absurdity to preach the gospel of the lowly Nazarene to such a set! The clergymen knows better than to do so. He values his fat salary and handsome parsonage too highly, so with a velvet tread he walks round the Ten Commandments, places the downiest pillow under the profligate's head, and ushers him with seraphic humming into an 'upper ten' heaven.—Finny Fern.

HABITS.

Like flakes of snow that fall unperceived upon the earth, the seemingly unimportant events of life succeed one another. As the snow gathers together, so are our habits formed. No single flake that is added to the pile produces a sensible change; no single action creates, however it may exhibit, a man's character; but as the tempest hurls the avalanche down the mountain, and overwhelms the inhabitant and his habitation, so passion, acting upon the elements of mischief, which pernicious habits have brought together by imperceptible accumulation, may overthrow the edifice of truth and virtue.—Jeremy Bentham.

A WATER QUADRILLE IN AMERICA.

We drove to the bathing sands, where gentlemen take charge of ladies in the surf; it was to me a very singular and amusing scene—numerous carriages, drawn up before a semicircle of small bathing houses, containing gaily dressed occupants, who had taken their marine walk, or were waiting for the ladies, young and old, still frolicking about among the waves, children dancing in and out, gentlemen handing about their pretty partners as if they were dancing water quadrilles, and heads, young and old, with streaming hair, dipping in and out; it was very droll, very lively, and I daresay very amusing to all engaged. No accident has ever occurred here, for the bay is protected by capes on each side, and the water very shallow for some distance out.

GOOD ADVICE.

USE not to-day what to-morrow may want; neither leave that to hazard, which foresight may provide for, or care prevent. Work while it is called to-day, for you know not how much you may be hindered to-morrow. One to-day is worth two to-morrows. No man can be provident of his time that is not prudent in the choice of his company.