

ST. JOHN N. B. SATURDAY, MAY 11 1895.

THE MOTHER IN SOCIETY.

Mrs. Burton Harrison Tells What a Chaperon Should Be—The Afternoon of Woman's Life—A Mother's Social Duties—Introducing a Daughter into Society—Taking Charge of a Debutante—American and French Young Men Compared.

There is a time in a busy mother's life when, her first series of duties to her children over, her daughters grown, her sons launched into school or college, she naturally turns with satisfaction and relief to the prospect of "a little folding of the hands," in the beginning of the afternoon of her days. At this epoch, no attraction of outside society seems, to the thoughtful woman, to vie with that of the home-nook in company with her husband, from whom the agencies of bringing up their children have in a great measure separated her. The quiet drawing-room or library, upon which she has settled, with many years of occupancy, that most charming aspect of daily life by cultivated people, allures her as can no ball-room, with its decorations of an hour, its parquet floor, its uncomfortable seats, its allowance of meagre gossip around the walls with other wailing sufferers. Yet this is what, by the edict of an artificial age, she is compelled to accept as a penalty for introducing her daughter into society, and night after night, during the fashionable season, she goes wearily on her rounds in the train of the pleasure-seeking young person, who, when the race after gaiety has once begun, knows no such word as stop. This is literally the condition of numberless mothers, whose sense of duty leads them to appear always in public with their daughters. Viewed from an outside standpoint, it can seem neither right nor rational.

Sometimes it is the father who undertakes the charge of his debutante in her first season. Almost pathetic is the aspect of these tired elders standing around the doors of dancing rooms, swallowing their yawns, unconsoled even by the supper, which by many men of middle life is eschewed as dangerous to digestion and likely to impair what little is left of their ability to deal intelligently with their affairs of business the next day.

And yet there is no help for it or them. The young lady, to be considered in good form, must have her especial chaperon. To avoid this wholesale sacrifice of parents, what can be done? There is no question of reconstructing the laws of society upon this point. What the Americans have only of late years adopted, has been an iron-clad rule of older civilizations for generations past.

A French gentleman of rank and advanced intelligence, when lately visiting the States with his family, declined to allow his young daughter to join a dinner of young people at the house of a near relative, at which the lady giving the entertainment, to her daughters was, of course, to be present. When urged by his American relatives for an explanation, he said: "I could never think of permitting my daughter to sit at table next a young man, in a party of unmarried people, at which I or her mother was not present." "But why, why?" urged the Americans. "In our eyes it would give the young man virtual permission to say anything he pleased to her," said the Frenchman gravely. "Then, thank God! we are not in France, and it is quite clear you don't know American customs," retorted his questioner. "That may be, dear lady," was his answer. "But I assure you, that were my daughter to do what you suggest, and it were known at home, it would be a serious matter for her in the future."

As an example of widely differing customs, upon the same scale of humanity in modern days, I may cite the naive testimony of a young American girl from a Western city, given recently in an assemblage of foreigners abroad. "Chaperons at balls? I should think we didn't have any! Why, if the young men didn't come for us in hacks, and take us and bring us home again, how do you think we would get there?" This speech, although in matter a bombshell in the ranks, was uttered with perfect sincerity, and was accompanied with the blush of innocence, startled by the passing suggestion of a thing improper, that carried conviction to every heart present. It is fair to say, that made in New York, or Boston, or Washington, at Newport, Lenox, or Tequedo, this announcement would have much the same effect. Society, once conventionalized, is not easily divested of its veneer; and, although recently so, we are ill-coated with this prejudice in favor of chaperons. So much for the commonly-received aspect of the question suggested to me to touch upon. In the society of large cities, and of the summer resorts, the mother should go with her daughter everywhere in public, and should exercise a constant supervision over her relations with the other sex at home and in society. While it is permitted to a young girl to receive the visit of a male friend in the afternoon, and to walk with him upon the streets or in the park, it is always understood that her mother has given her permission to do so, or has otherwise sanctioned the companionship. On the other hand, it is the mother who must write the notes of invitation to young men to dinner or to the opera, who receives them upon their arrival at her house, to whom they extend the first courtesies of every occasion when they desire to seek out the daughter. Surely this is small tribute to pay to the dignity of her position, and to the magnitude of her self-sacrifice. It is all well enough to say that the mother renews her youth in her daughter's gaieties and contests, but the chief part of the service thus exacted of her is a fatiguing one to her body, and there must be moments when the

mind of the most pliant chaperon becomes sated with the chit-chat of young society. The people falling to her lot with whom to while away the hours of duty are fathers and mothers themselves yearning for the hour of release to come, and, at 3 a. m., while a collision is still in progress, their company can hardly be called exhilarating. It must be admitted that as our society grows at its present rate of speed every season adding new and desirable families to the list of people to be invited, the exaction that mothers shall accompany their daughters to evening parties in private houses has been perceptibly modified. The size of the rooms in ordinary houses is responsible for this. A leader in lavish entertainments in New York observed recently: "My ball room is of a good size, but I can only 'dance' one hundred. Therefore, if I invite fifty girls and fifty men, what can I do with mothers?" So it is simply understood among my friends that I look after their daughters while under my roof. The girls come with their maids, who wait in the dressing rooms until the dance is over, and return in the same way. What makes it especially hard upon the mother who expects to be present with her daughter in society, is the fact that in America we know no such word as "moderation" in our social pleasures. Early in the season, say from mid-October, when people come back to town to put houses in order for the winter fray, till November, when with the Horse Show and opera gaieties there is a brief immunity from engagements for the evening. There are no dinners, no dances, and the theatres are filled with strangers passing through town. The mother, who at this epoch might find rest, spends her time in the care of household renovation and restoration, and in following up delinquent workmen pledged to accomplish in days what weeks find unfinished. At night she goes weary to bed, glad that there is no imperative call upon her to buckle on social armor, and repair to some scene of hilarity in the wake of her daughters.

By December the girl is "booked" to appear in public night after night. There is no breathing space to follow, until the family leaves town in June or July. In England, the "season" as in the spring and summer months, May, June, and part of July being the concentration of successive gaiety in London. After that, the great haunts of rural Britain close upon the women who lead or share in society. They are heard of at Cowes in yachting week, in house-parties on Scotch moors, or in northern castles. In the winter they go abroad, or else live quiet and health-preserving lives in their own homes in the country. They walk daily, ride, interest themselves in tenants, in the village poor, in country neighbors, but such a thing as our ceaseless chase after pleasure in America is unknown. For, in summer with us, as it is well known, society seeks "resorts."

At Newport life speeds as in New York. The same magnificence of a few, imitated by the many. The same perpetual appearance before the world of mothers and daughters. At Bar Harbor, existence is more natural, but fashion has that lovely spot in her gyves, and the exactions of form yearly increase there. Other summer places of equal popularity are governed by the same laws, and bitten with the same zeal for continual entertaining. Therefore, we have virtually no season when we are free from the artificial demands of modern society, under which circumstances, to be a chaperon to a pretty and popular daughter, or daughters, means to be a slave. No doubt many of our honest American dames sigh in secret for the "good old days" when a daughter chaperoned herself—and then are checked by the reflection that society in their girlhood was as a mere placid duck-pond compared to the rushing current of today!

The only remedy for this list of maternal grievances would appear to be in the usefulness of the daughters, but our modern society is not a training-school for consideration of parents. Besides, it may justly be urged that the mother is often, despite her wisest judgment, as anxious as the daughter can be, to have her child appear upon all the parade grounds of fashion in succession; and will spare no pains to secure her presence there. But this condition of things takes me and my paper beyond limits, and the discussion of it is rather in the domain of the preacher than of the essayist, who merely points out aspects of the passing show.

To a moderate degree—in a family of moderate pretensions—among girls who expect to become the wives of average men—and, after all, what can any American girl look forward to in marriage better than an average American man?—I think the presence of the mother as chaperon, is the most beautiful and inspiring spectacle. To assume her proper place as head and guiding influence of the social experiences of her girls, to join in their fun and smile upon their frolic, to be consulted in their plans, to help them conjure up costumes appropriate and becoming, to provide entertainment for their friends, and to make their home so attractive that they carry out of it the knowledge how to lay the foundations of their husbands' wives, these seem to me the true functions of the American mother in society.

CONSTANCE CARY HARRISON.

Origin of an Odd Name.

The christening of Sir Francis Knollys' little son brings to our mind, says a London writer, the curious name which his baby daughter received on a similar occasion seven years ago. The name chosen was Louvina, and it originated in the desire to call her after the three young Princesses of Wales. Louise Victoria Maud being considered too long, the three names were amalgamated into one by uniting the first three letters of Louise, and the two first of Victoria and Maud, thus making the quaint combination of Louvina.

BRIGHT NEWSPAPER WOMEN

"Bab's" Sensible Writing and "Nelly Bly" as a Conversationalist.

Among the many bright lady contributors to the New York papers, perhaps Mrs. Mallon, who writes under the nom-de-plume of "Bab," is best known and most widely read, at least in the lower provinces. There is a fascination about her writing which brings her very near to the hearts of her admirers, and the absolute freedom from conventionality with which she wields her pen is most pleasing indeed.

"Bab" writes of every shade and condition of New York life, and while one day we find her attending a baseball game under the protection of a party of newshoys, or becoming a member of a street gamins' whist club, the next day we read her pleasant portrayals of incidents in the more aristocratic portions of the city. She is one of the very few writers whose words go straight to the heart and leave one wishing that she hadn't stopped just when she did.

Her contributions are particularly free from anything approaching venomous thrusts or sarcastic references to other writers; she never holds anyone, less gifted or less fortunate than herself, up to ridicule and it is this perhaps together with her charming unconventionality which has won for her so high a place in the estimation of the reading public; she is ever bright, and amusing, but at the same time there is a serious undercurrent beneath the sparkling surface, and sweet charity connects the two. Her transitions from gay to grave are very rapid, and while we smile over her dialect of the slums, we are made to feel that those studies of the lower strata of New York have a more serious side.

"Bab" has no patience whatever with the New Woman movement and the many senseless fads which sway the women of the present generation. She is especially severe on the "cramming" system of the common schools, and thinks the school board the one public department in which the services of women might be advantageously used. Women are needed to stem the over-education of children, to look after the crowded school rooms; the high flights of stairs, and the thoughtless treatment of little ones—the men and women of the next generation. Like the writer of this article, "Bab" believes that when a child has only a limited time to spend at school it is wrong to force upon it studies which will be of no practical value to it in after life, and that in such cases chemistry, geometry, and algebra should give way to good spelling books, good arithmetics and good geographies. It is certainly an excellent thing, and parents and teachers are usually proud of a child who can, parrot-like, stand up and recite page after page of history, and mythology, or work out a difficult algebraic problem, but were the test made it would be found that in nine cases out of ten the child is unable to write even a fairly respectable letter, and by that is meant one correct in spelling, writing and composition. Every right thinking parent must acknowledge the wisdom of this suggestion and think quite as "Bab" does upon the subject.

It must not be inferred however, that because Mrs. Mallon ardently longs to be a school commissioner she is a woman suffragist; indeed she is a positive anti-suffragist, and is of the opinion that men were made to represent the state for women, and that the latter's responsibilities are numerous enough, without longing for a vote, though with the sweetness which characterizes her, she, unlike many other writers, does not deem it her duty to hurl uncomplimentary epithets at these ladies who desire a voice in the affairs of the nation.

While upon the subject of New York writers, the writer of this article recalls a little incident of "Nelly Bly," another clever contributor to the World, related by a journalist at present living in Nova Scotia, but whose home is in Philadelphia. While discussing the relative literary merits of the two ladies he said: "Nelly Bly" is a clever writer, but of the two I prefer Mrs. Mallon, although I do not know her personally; I may however claim acquaintance with "Nelly Bly" as it was our fate to be thrown together during a tedious railway journey in Virginia; she is a good conversationalist, but gets decidedly tiresome after a time as she does not give one a chance to get in a word at all, and her constant chatter is like the click, click of a telegraph instrument. She passes from one subject to another very quickly, and frequently breaks off in the middle of a story to note some passing incident and it really is bewildering to see how the smallest incidents are noticed by her. She never for a moment loses sight of the fact herself, nor allows anyone else to forget that she is "Nelly Bly"—a writer; she is not always kind in her remarks either and I was greatly surprised to hear her make farmers and others who entered at the country stations the subject of unkind criticisms."

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There are many other lady writers on these papers who depict life as they find it,—either humorous or pathetic—in wicked and gay New York, and everyone of them seems to have a peculiar hold upon public affection, notwithstanding the opinion so frequently expressed, nowadays, that the best writers are in the magazines. This may be true to a certain extent and yet to the majority of people the deep scientific and social problems, discussed in the pages of women's magazines and journals, are less attractive than the simpler subjects of every day life talked of by "Bab," and hosts of others. Most people are, however, afraid to express a predilection for this style of literature, though it is quite safe to assume that it is very widely read and that, though the names of the writers may never adorn the pages of a magazine their brightness and simplicity is appreciated by hundreds of thousands to whom the magazine with its galaxy of profound contributors, is an unknown luxury.

A SAMOAN MINISTER.

A Man of Some Importance, but his Wife is More Useful.

"We were strolling about one of the Samoan Islands," said a naval officer the other day, "looking about for something interesting. We met many people who did not seem to know anything and could not answer our questions. Finally, we found a man who seemed to be better informed than the others, and had the appearance of being a man of some importance. Though not a native, he had, no doubt, been long in the islands, as his appearance indicated. He wore parts of a German and parts of an English uniform, and I am not sure that he did not have some American clothes on."

"You look like a man of some importance here," one of us said. "Perhaps you can tell us something about the country we wish to know."

"I am a man of some importance here," he replied. "I am minister of agriculture

and labor. If I can give you any information I will do so with pleasure." "Well, he answered a number of inquiries and then said: 'I see by your uniforms you are American; I am always glad to meet Americans; but that was not what I wanted to speak to you about. You will probably be here for some time, and I wanted to tell you that my wife is a first-class laundress, and we would be glad to do the washing for the officers of your ship. I can assure you that it will not be done better by anyone in the island.'"

The house is still standing in Philadelphia in which Joseph Jefferson was born, and recently an inscription was placed over the door as follows: "In this house was born Joseph Jefferson. Here's your good health and your family's, and may they live long and prosper."

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