

OLD AND NEW SERVANTS.

As we walk straight on down the great Valley of the Shadow, and amidst our great with bitter tears, there are certain agents appointed to attend on us in our progress, apparently to smooth our path. Happy Eden, where our first parents waited on themselves! With the fall came sin, and death—and servants into the world. Happy the Otabeians and other savages; they can accomplish their simple round of duties without mental aid. Even their prisoners they do not make slaves, as we might reasonably suppose; they eat as they would, indeed, do that kindly office in the instance of "James" and "Charles."

down stairs. The place seems to swarm with the ladies and gentlemen that attend on other ladies and gentlemen. The strictest division is enforced. Our lady's maid, as a guest, is welcomed in the housekeeper's room, and sits with Mr. Cook, the butler, Mrs. Colley, the house-keeper, Jackson, the groom of the chambers, and Mr. Jones, the steward. Here more elegant manners prevail. But afar off our maid bears the piteous laughter in the "servants' hall," the more unrestrained revels, where "James" and "Charles" are giving way to their natural spirits as guests of the world, who know no town life, convulsing the rustic presence by their daintiness of London life and manners. To be a "gentleman" on a visit at one of these great houses must be a great treat, and a welcome change. My lord's valet has nothing but the mere valet duties, in reference to my lord's clothes and hot water; the rest of his time is for himself. The noble person who entertains takes care, for the sake of his own credit, that the entertainment in the way of eating and drinking shall be on a fitting scale of liberality. My lord's valet, who is a fair and rather sickly young man wearing beautiful linen and a gold chain, is much admired by the rosy and buxom ladies who look at him from afar off, from the scullery, but dare not approach nearer. Of a morning we often see him through the trees taking a pensive walk, really as regards dress (he has a shooting coat of my lord's) not to be distinguished from my lord himself. But he is not much favored by the other gentlemen, who say he is "dayvillish line." Who that loves human character would not take any reasonable step, save, of course, unworthy listening at keyholes, etc., to look on at this strange world down stairs? It would be the most entertaining mirth-moving pastime. There is an admirable farce, full of humor, the credit of which a clergyman-schoolmaster assumed, but which really came from David Garrick, that deals with this under-side of life, and which has been too much neglected of late years. Who has not laughed with a genuine enjoyment at High Life Below Stairs, and the quarrel of My Lord Duke and Sir Harry about their respective pretensions to "Lady Bab"? The chord of true humor is touched here, and finds an echo in Reality, the real source of genuine laughter. Not as now, when some poor accident, which is merely absurd and not humorous, some wretched twist of mouth or catchword, is made the basis of a farce. The point in High Life Below Stairs is to be found in our nature, and the play will be understood and relished a hundred years hence.

In a community of this sort, where the menial offices devolve on guests as well as hosts (we are still on the lower level), there sometimes will arise serious causes of quarrel. High words are not so much the result of quarrels as they are between Charles and Miss Cotter, Lady Harriet's own maid. This arises naturally out of a division of duties only imperfectly settled; and the guest betimes, as he lies in bed, has heard an angry conflict on the stairs, alternating with sarcasm and strong personality, together with a sound as of ladies' boots being flung down, with an "it ain't my dooty; I ain't a-going to wait on your Lady Har-yet," with a prompt retort, "Pick 'em up, you leow fellah you!" But in the evenings in the "hall, everything is smoothed away, and Charles forgets the past like a true gentleman and man of the world who he is, who seems to war with the softer sex.

Perhaps the next entertaining and satisfactory of all the lower professions, the most variegated and exciting, must be that of a "water" in elegant practice. It is surprising it is not overstocked. There are many of our sons and brothers in what they consider promising practice at the bar, and making not nearly so much in fees, and they never enjoy perquisites. I speak, of course, of a water with a good connexion, who is on terms of friendship with the leading cooks and confectioners, and who is known to have a light charming touch, and so much respect for the dignity of his order as to take but a moderate tittle out of what is going. There are plenty of your rude coarse hands, whose very air and bearing are an offense to all professions there are the bunglers; the heavy men, who miss the opportunity often offered, and which does not again present itself.

It is surprising how much depends on this "tact," as it may be called. How often has the first brief set the breeze on his road to fame and fortune! Reskine, when so called on in an emergency, felt, he said, his little ones at home tugging at his gown. And often the stray water, obscure, unknown, "had in" on the pressure of the moment, simply and wholly because there was none else to be had, this artist—to speak by the card—has so thoroughly identified himself with the part, thrown himself with such good humor and zeal in the desperation of the crisis, that the place of the absent, being here, there, and everywhere, that he at once attracted the favor of all present; and A. B. (he would not like me to name him), whom we now feel hovering behind us at my lord duke's, nay, even at yet higher jinks, without whom no decent solemnity is complete, who has a clerk to keep his book and take his fees (as in the other profession), traces it all to this humble beginning. But I think it was the occasion, not the cause. His preference must have come. But it may be repeated, of all the less exalted professions, which entail what is called the sweat of the brow, writing is the most calling. Writers are the best and the most intellectual; they hold conversations with the noblest and most gifted in the land—with the premier, the prime, the lord mayor, the poet, the novelist, the orator; they converse in easy fashion on the peripatetic questions as to the choice of wine, whether port, sherry, claret, or madeira—and the reply surely amounts to a conversation! What glittering scenes of splendor they may look on! They, indeed, go out to balls, dinners, and parties, as much as the most fashionable. No wonder that everything else—trade, labor, and even that final haven of public-house proprietorship—should be more or less inspired. By a little fiction they may hold themselves as much in vogue as the guests. And, let it be added, that, without impeachment of guilt, there are certain fittings, in the way of meats and drinks of the choicest sort, to which they are fairly entitled, provided they be taken with delicacy and moderation. There are remnants and surpluses which no host can grudge them, possibly because there can be no restraint of any practical value. But his must be a low, coarse mind that can bring disgrace upon his order by flagrant and helpless intoxication. The emoluments, too, are certainly opulent, not to say luxurious. Many a gentleman that is in good practice receives several retainers for the one night, and with good hands such divided service has its value. Money is put by, and after very few years the cherished goal is reached, and the longed-for "public" opened. This, the longed-for Bar, is what the Bench would be for a member of the other profession.

In contrast to occasional and transient service, who does not know the family treasure, the pearl of price, the faithful retainer, who has been in the family, "man and boy, night forty years" in a short, the old servant, such come very dramatically on the stage; there they are accustomed at seasons of family pressure to bring out their "little hoards" of their life's savings, and with a "it ain't much, miss, but such as it is, you are welcome to it," press their assistance on the young daughter of the family. This is the theatrical view; but some of these ancient retainers have their inconveniences. They are the true old men of the sea—never to be parted with save under conditions of a handsome pension, whose amount is an indignity and cause of injury. Their redeeming merit is a strict honesty; they will not wrong you in what they call "a pin's point." But they are more passive where others are concerned. They think something is due to the credit of the house, and rather stand up for all impositions. They keep us in a decent bondage, the ladies in a sort of terrorism; and grave consultations have to be held, and mutual support conceded, before "John" or "William" can be asked to go out on some message, or worse, have the news broken to him that Mr. and Mrs. Brown are coming to dinner. Dinners, teas, messages, are all so many synonyms for trouble. The face of the ancient retainer, as he opens the hall door to admit some new modern "notion"—say a fern case, carried in by two men—is a worth studying, bearing an expression compounded of disgust, wonder, contempt, and anger. He looks after the object with a muttered "Well, well, after that! Now this ends it!" As for the "Rooshian" system as applied to dinners, that "goes beyond the beyonds," in his eyes, it is next to sitting down like the savages, and pulling the meat with our fingers. The idea of a dinner that is no dinner, a table with nothing to eat upon it! That in its own way was going beyond the beyonds. But when the retainer gets sick and is prostrated and near his end, as he, but no one else, thinks; when he moans and groans over himself, and more than hints in faltering accents that it is the overwork of the cruel family who have brought him to this sorry pass, but whom he forgives, with a "Nawt a word," dating it all from the night of the party, when all that weary, "weary work" was laid on his back. Everything on his back. It is we who are in the service of these "treasures," not they in ours.

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