

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY - VOLUME V - NUMBER 29 - MARCH - 1860

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Produced by Joshua Hutchinson, David Widger and PG Distributed Proof-readers

THE

ATLANTIC MONTHLY.

A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE, ART, AND POLITICS.

VOL. V.—MARCH, 1860.—NO. XXIX.

THE FRENCH CHARACTER.

The American character is now generally acknowledged to be the most cosmopolitan of modern times; and a native of this country, all things being equal, is likely to form a less prescriptive idea of other nations than the inhabitants of countries whose neighborhood and history unite to bequeath and perpetuate certain fixed notions. Before the frequent intercourse now existing between Europe and the United States, we derived our impressions of the French people, as well as of Italian skies, from English literature. The probability was that our earliest association with the Gallic race partook largely of the ridiculous. All the extravagant anecdotes of morbid self-love, miserly epicurism, strained courtesy, and frivolous absurdity current used to boast a Frenchman as their hero. It was so in novels, plays, and after-dinner stories. Our first personal acquaintance often confirmed this prejudice; for the chance was that the one specimen of the Grand Nation familiar to our childhood proved a poor émigré who gained a precarious livelihood as a dancing-master, cook, teacher, or barber, who was profuse of smiles, shrugs, bows, and compliments, prided himself on la belle France, played the fiddle, and took snuff. A more dignified view succeeded, when we read "Télémaque," so long an initiatory text-book in the study of the language, blended as its crystal style was in our imaginations with the pure and noble character of Fénelon. Perhaps the next link in the chain of our estimate was supplied by the bust of Voltaire, whose withered, sneering physiognomy embodies the wit and indifference, the soulless vagabondage that forms the worst side of

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the national mind. As patriotic sentiment awakened, the disinterested enthusiasm of Lafayette, woven, as it is, into the record of the struggle which gave birth to our republic, yielded another and more attractive element to the fancy portrait. Then, as our reading expanded, came the tragic chronicle of the first French Revolution and the brilliant and dazzling melodrama of Napoleon, the traditions so pathetic and sublime of gifted women, the tableaux so exciting to a youthful temper of military glory. And thus, by degrees, we found ourselves bewildered by the most vivid contrasts and apparently irreconcilable traits, until the original idea of a Frenchman expanded to the widest range of associations, from the ingenious devices of a mysterious cuisine to the brilliant manoeuvres of the battle-field; infinite female tact, rare philosophic hardihood, inimitable bon-mots, exquisite millinery, consummate generalship, holy fortitude, refined profligacy, and intoxicating sentiment,—Ude, Napoleon, Madame Récamier, Pascal, Ninon de l'Enclos, and Rousseau. Casual associations and desultory reading thus predispose us to recognize something half comical and half enchanting in French life; and it depends on accident, when we

first visit Paris, which view is confirmed. The society of one of those benign savans who attract the sympathy and win the admiration of young students may yield a delightful and noble association to our future reminiscences; or an unmodified experience of cynical hearts joined to scencal manners may leave us nothing to regret, up on our departure, save the material advantages there enjoyed. But whoever knows life in Paris, unrelieved by some consistent and individual purpose, will find it a succession of excitements, temporary, yet varied,—full of the agreeable, yet barren of consecutive interest and satisfactory results,—admirable as a recreative hygiene, deplorable as a permanent resource; their inevitable consequence being a faith in the external, a dependence on the immediate, and a habit of vagrant pleasure-seeking, which must at last cloy and harden the manly soul. For this very reason, however, the scenes, characters, and society there exhibited are prolific of suggestion to the philosophic mind.

In every phase of life, manners, and action, we see a characteristic excellence in detail and process, and an equally remarkable deficiency in grand practical idea and consistent moral sentiment. The French chemists have the art to extract quinine from Peruvian bark and conserve the juices of meats; but one of their most patriotic writers calls attention to the wholly diverse motives addressed by Napoleon and Nelson to their respective followers. "Soldiers," exclaimed the former, "from the summit of those Pyramids forty ages are looking down upon you." "England," said the latter, "expects every man to do his duty." In Paris, the science of dissection is perfect; in London, that of nutrition;—Dumas has reduced plagiarism to a fine art; Cobbett made common-sense a social lever;—a British merchant or statesman attaches his name to a document in characters of such individuality that the signature is known at a glance; a French official invents a flourish so intricate that the forger's ingenuity is baffled in the attempt to imitate it;—government, on one side of the Channel, employs a taster to

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detect adulteration in wine whose sensitive palate is a fortune; on the other, the hereditary fame of a brewery is the guaranty of the excellence of ale.

This minute observance of detail has made the French leaders in fashion; it directs invention to the minutiaæ of dress, and confirms the sway of the conventional, so as to give la mode the force of social law to an extent unknown elsewhere. The tyranny and caprice of fashion were as characteristic in Montaigne's day as at present. "I find fault with their especial indiscretion," he says, "in suffering themselves to be so imposed upon and blinded by the authority of the present custom as every month to alter their opinion." "In this country," writes Yorick, "nothing must be spared for the back; and if you dine on an onion, and lie in a garret seven stories high, you must not betray it in your clothes."

The superiority of the French in the minor philosophy of life was curiously exemplified during our Revolutionary War. The octogenarians of Rhode Island used to expatiate on the remarkable difference between the troops of France and those of England when quartered among them. The former speedily made a series of little arrangements, and fell naturally into a pleasant routine, making the best of everything, adapting themselves to the ways and prejudices of the inhabitants, and, in a word, becoming assimilated at once to a new mode of life and form of society; their wit, cheerfulness, and gallantry are yet proverbial in that region. The English, on the other hand, even when in full

possession of the country, made but an awkward use of their privileges, were ill-at-ease, failed to recognize anything genial in the habits and manners even of the Tory families. While the French officers introduced the mysteries of their cuisine, and brightened many a rustic household with song, anecdote, dance, and conversation, the English complained of the simple viands, regretted London fogs and beer, and made themselves and their hosts, whether forced or voluntary, uncomfortable. They exhibited no tact or facility in improving the resources at hand, and relied only on brute force to win advantage. We beheld the same contrast recently in the Crimea; while exposure and impatience thinned the ranks of the brave islanders, their Gallic allies constructed roads, dug where they could not build a shelter, and ingeniously prepared various dishes from a meagre larder, fighting off, meantime, chagrin and ennui with as much alacrity as they did Cossacks.

Finesse characterizes servants not less than courtiers, the cab-driver as well as the notary, the composition of a dish as well as the drift of a comedy. This quality seems a result of the conflict of intelligences in a state of great, material civilization; nowhere is it more observable than in Paris life. What bullyism is to the English, shrewdness to the Yankee, and intrigue to the Italian, is finesse, which is a union of insight and address, to the French. This normal attribute is another proof how the economy of Gallic life is reduced to

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an art. It is the expression in manners of Rochefoucauld's maxims, of Richelieu's policy, of Talleyrand's cunning. It is favored by the tendency to minuteness of excellence and love of system before noted. To understand what superior range is afforded to such a principle in France, it is only requisite to consult the memoirs of a celebrated woman, or even an old Guide or Picture of Paris, such as in former days the provincial gentlemen used to study over their breakfast, in order to learn the savoir vivre of the metropolis. Itineraries of other cities merely describe streets, public institutions, the fairs, the courts, and the places of fashionable amusement; one of these curiosities of literature now before us, published less than a century ago, describes, as available resources to the stranger, Gouvernantes,

Emeutes, Rêves Politiques, L'Art de Diner, Bureaux d'Esprit, —corresponding to our modern blue-stocking coteries, femmes de quarante ans, with their "deux ressources, la dévotion et le bel esprit"; Contre Poisons, —indispensable in those days of jealousy and assassination; Pots de Fleurs form an item of the most limited establishment; emblems, such as Rubans and Bonnets Rouges, are described as essential to the intelligent conduct of the visitor; and a chapter is devoted to Gallantry, of which a modern author in the same department pensively remarks, "Cette ancienne galanterie qui vivait d'esprit et d'infidélités est complètement éteinte."

It is curious how municipal, economical, and social life are thus simultaneously daguerreotyped and indicate their mutual and intricate association in the French capital. Its history involves that of churches, congresses, academies, prisons, cemeteries, and police, each of which represents domestic and royal vicissitudes. What other city furnishes such a work as the Duchess D'Abrantes' "Histoire des Salons de Paris"? The salons of Madame Necker, Polignac, De Beaumont, De Mazarin, Roland, De Genlis, of Condorcet, of Malmaison, of Talleyrand, and of the Hôtel Rambouillet, etc., embrace the career of statesmen

and soldiers, the literary celebrities, the schools of philosophy, the revolutions, the court, the wars, diplomacy, and, in a word, the veritable annals of France. Society, according to this lively writer, in the proper acceptation of the term, was born in France in the reign of the Cardinal de Richelieu; and thenceforth, in its history, we trace that of the nation.

Throughout the most salient eras of this history, therefore, is visible female influence. Cousin has just revived the career of Madame de Longueville, which is identified with the cabals, financial expedients, and war of the Fronde; tournaments, which formed so striking a feature in the diversions of Louis XIV.'s court, owed their revival to the whim of one of his mistresses; Montespan fostered a brood of satirists, and Maintenon one of devotees, while that extraordinary religious controversy which initiated the sect of the Quietists had its origin in the example and agency of Madame Guyon. Even now, although, as a late writer has quaintly observed, "no lady brings her distaff to the council-chamber," the influence of the sex on political opinion, in

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its operation as a social principle, is recognized. A friend of mine, returning from a dinner-party, described the free and witty sarcasm with which a fair Legitimist assailed the Imperial rule; a week afterwards, meeting her at the same table, she related, that, a few days after her imprudent conversation, she received a courteous invitation from the chief of police. "When they were seated alone in his bureau,—Madame," said he, "you have position, conversational talent, and wield the pen effectively; are you disposed to exert this influence, henceforth, in behalf of, instead of against the government?" Before her indignant negative was fairly uttered, he opened a drawer that seemed full of Napoleons, and glanced at them and her significantly. Thus Montesquieu's observation continues true:—"The individual who would attempt to judge of the government by the men at the head of affairs, and not by the women who sway those men, would fall into the same error as he who judges of a machine by its outward-action, and not by its secret springs"; and the old base system of espionage is revived under the new despotism.

It has become proverbial in France, that the life of woman has three eras,—in youth a coquette, in middle-life a wit, and in age a d'évoté,—which is but another mode of expressing that economy of personal gifts, that shrewd use of the most available social power, which distinguishes the Gallic from the Saxon woman, the worldly from the domestic instincts. There only can we imagine a royal favorite admitting her indebtedness to a royal wife. "To her," wrote Madame de Maintenon of the Queen of Louis; "I owe the King's affection. Picture a sovereign worn out with state affairs, intrigues, and ceremonies, possessed of a confidante always the same, always calm, always rational, equally able to instruct and to soothe, with the intelligence of a confessor and the winning gentleness of a woman." It is peculiar to the sex there to escape outward soil, whatever may be their moral exposure; for one instinctively recognizes a Frenchwoman by her clean boots, even in the muddiest thoroughfare, her spotless muslin cap, kerchief, and collar. She retains also her individuality after marriage better than the fair of other nations, not only in character, but in name, the maiden appellative being joined to her husband's, so that, although a Madame, she keeps the world informed that she was née of a family whose title, however modest, she will not drop. The maxims, so

prevalent in France, which declare matrimony the tomb of love, are the legitimate result of a superficial theory of life and the mutual independence of the sexes thence arising; accordingly we are assured, "C'est surtout entre mari et femme que l'amour a le moins de chance de succ'ès. Ils vieillirent ensemble comme deux portraits de famille, sans aucune intimit'é, aucun profit pour l'esprit, et arriv'és au dernier relais de leur existence, le souvenir n'avait rien `a faire entre eux."

It is a curious illustration at once of the mobility and the isolation of the French mind, that, while it assimilates elements within its sphere which in other nations are kept comparatively apart, it rejects the process in regard to foreign material. Thus, in no other capital are

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politics and literature so interwoven with society; the love-affairs of a minister directly influence his policy; the tone of the salon often inspires and moulds the author; the social history of an epoch necessarily includes the genius of its statesmanship and of its letters, because they are identified with the intrigues, the bon-mots, and the conversation of the period; more is to be learned at a lady's morning reception or evening soir'ée than in the writer's library or the official's cabinet. On the other hand, how few threads from abroad can be found in this mingled web of civic, literary, and social life! The vicinity of England and the influx of Englishmen have scarcely brought the ideas or the sentiment of that country into nearer recognition at Paris than was the case a century ago. Notwithstanding an occasional outbreak of Anglomania, the best French authors spell English proper names no better, the best French critics appreciate Shakspeare as little, and the majority of Parisians have no less partial and fixed a notion of the characteristics of their insular neighbors, than before the days of journalism and steam. The attempts to represent English manners and character are as gross caricatures now as in the time of Montaigne. However apt at fusion within, the national egotism is as repugnant to assimilation from without as ever. The stock seems incapable of vital grafting, as has been remarkably evidenced in all the colonial experiments of France.

The excellence of the French character, intellectually speaking, consists in routine and detail. How well their authors describe and their artists depict peculiarities! how exact the evolutions of a French regiment, and the statements of a French naturalist! how apt is a Parisian woman in raising gracefully her skirts, throwing on a shawl, or carrying a basket! In loyalty to a method they are unrivalled, in the triumph of individualities weak; their artisans can make a glove fit perfectly, but have yet to learn how to cut out a coat; their authors, like their soldiers, can be marshalled in groups; means are superior to ends; manners, the exponent of Nature in other lands, there color, modify, and characterize the development of intellect; the subordinate principle in government, in science, and in life, becomes paramount; drawing, the elemental language of Art, is mastered, while the standard of expression remains inadequate; the laws of disease are profoundly studied, while this knowledge bears no proportionate relation to the practical art of healing; the ancient rules of dramatic literature are pedantically followed, while the "pity and terror" they were made to illustrate are unawakened; the programme of republican government is lucidly announced, its watchwords adopted, its philosophy expounded, while its spirit and realization continue in abeyance: and thus everywhere we find a singular disproportion between formula and fact, profession and practice, specific knowledge and its application. The

citizen of the world finds no armory like that which the institutions, the taste, and the genius of the French nation afford him, whether he aspire to be a courtier or a chemist, a soldier or a savant, a dancer or a doctor; and yet, for complete equipment, he must temper each weapon he there acquires, or it will break in his hand.

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In every epoch a word rules or illustrates the dominant spirit: citizen in the Revolution, moustache during the Consulate, victoire under the Empire, to-day la Bourse. "To a Frenchman," says Mrs. Jameson, "the words that express things seem the things themselves, and he pronounces the words amour, gr[^]ace, sensibilit[^]e, etc., with a relish in his mouth as if he tasted them, as if he possessed them. They talk of "le sentiment du m[^]etier"; in travelling, Paris is the eternal theme. A sagacious observer has remarked in their language the "short, aphoristic phrase, the frequent absence of the copulative, avoidance of dependent phrases, and disdain of modifying adverbs. Naivet[^]e, abandon, ennui, etc., are specific terms of the language, and designate national traits. When Beaumarchais ridiculed a provincial expression, the Dauphiness, we are told, composed a head-dress expressly to give it a local habitation and a name."

The mania for equality, in the first Revolution, De Tocqueville shows was not so much the result of political aspiration as the fierce protest against those exclusive rights once enjoyed by the nobility, (shown by Arthur Young to have been the primary impulse to revolution,) to hunt, keep pigeons, grind corn, press grapes, etc. For a long period, the man of letters was never combined with the statesman, as in England. In France, speculation in government ran wild, because the thinkers, suddenly raised to influence in affairs, had enjoyed no ordeal of public duty. Hence certain imaginary fruits of liberty were sought, and its absolute worth misunderstood. And now that experience, dearly bought, has modified visionary and moulded practical theories, how much of the normal interest of the French character has evaporated! Even the love of beauty and the love of glory, proverbially its distinctions, are eclipsed by the sullen orb of Imperialism; the Bourse is more attractive than the battle-field, material luxury than artistic distinction. One of their own philosophers has summed up, with justice, the anomalous elements of the versatile national character:—

"Did there ever appear on the earth another nation so fertile in contrasts, so extreme in its acts,—more under the dominion of feeling, less ruled by principle; always better or worse than was anticipated,—now below the level of humanity, now far above; a people so unchangeable in its leading features that it may be recognized by portraits drawn two or three thousand years ago, and yet so fickle in its daily opinions and tastes that it becomes at last a mystery to itself, and is as much astonished as strangers at the sight of what it has done; naturally fond of home and routine, yet, when once driven forth and forced to adopt new customs, ready to carry principles to any lengths and to dare anything; indocile by disposition, but better pleased with the arbitrary and even violent rule of a sovereign than with a free and regular government under its chief citizens; now fixed in hostility to subjection of any kind, now so passionately wedded to servitude that nations made to serve cannot vie with it; led by a thread

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so long as no word of resistance is spoken, wholly ungovernable when the standard of revolt is raised,—thus always deceiving its masters, who fear it too much or too little; never so free that it cannot be

subjugated, never so kept down that it cannot break the yoke; qualified for every pursuit, but excelling in nothing but war; more prone to worship chance, force, success, éclat, noise, than real glory; endowed with more heroism than virtue, more genius than common sense; better adapted for the conception of grand designs than the accomplishment of great enterprises; the most brilliant and the most dangerous nation of Europe, and the one that is surest to inspire admiration, hatred, terror, or pity, but never indifference?"[1]

What other social sphere could afford room for the vocation so aptly described in the following sketch of his "ways and means," given in a recent picture of life in Paris by a sycophant of millionnaires, at a period when interests, not rights, are the watchwords of the nation?—"Mon rôle de familier dans une véritable population d'enrichis me donnait du crédit dans les boudoirs, et mon crédit dans les boudoirs ajoutait à ma faveur près ces pauvres diables de millionnaires, presque tous vieux et blasés, courant toujours en chancelant après un plaisir nouveau. Les marchands de vin me font la cour comme les jolies femmes, pour que je daigne leur indiquer des connaisseurs assez riches pour payer les bonnes choses le prix qu'elles valent. Mon métier est de tout savoir,—l'anecdote de la cour, le scandale de la ville, le secret des coulisses." And this species of adventurer, we are told, has always the same commencement to his memoirs,— "Il vint à Paris en sabots. "

[Footnote 1: De Tocqueville.]

The numerous avocations of women in the French capital explain, in a measure, their superior tact, efficiency, and force of character. This is especially true of females of the middle class, who have been justly described as remarkable for good sense and appropriate costumes. The participation of women in so many departments of art and industry affects, also, the social tone and the manners. Sterne, long ago, remarked it of the fair shopkeepers. "The genius of a people," he says, "where nothing but the monarchy is Salique, having ceded this department totally to the women, by a continual higgling with customers of all ranks and sizes, from morning to night, like so many rough pebbles in a bag, by amicable collisions, they have worn down their asperities and sharp angles, and not only become round and smooth, but will receive, some of them, a polish like a brilliant."

How distinctly may be read the political vicissitudes of France in her literature,—classic, highly finished, keen, and formal, when a monarch was idolized and authors wrote only for courts and scholars: Bossuet, with his rhetorical graces; La Bruyère, with his gallery of characters, not one of which was moulded among the people; De la Rochefoucauld's maxims, drawn from the arcana of fashionable life; Racine, whose heroes die with an immaculate couplet and speak the faint echoes of Grecian or

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Roman sentiment! When politics became common property, and the walls of a prescriptive and conventional system fell, how wild ran speculation and sentiment in the copious and superficial Voltaire and the vague humanities of Rousseau! When an era of military despotism supervened upon the reign of license, how destitute of lettered genius seemed the nation, except when the pensive enthusiasm of Chateaubriand breathed music from American wilds or a London garret, and Madame de Staël gave utterance to her eloquent philosophy in exile at Geneva! "Napoléon e-

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voulu faire manoeuvrer l'esprit humain comme il faisait manoeuvrer ses vieux bataillons." Yet more emphatic is the reaction of political conditions upon literary development after the Restoration. The tragic

horrors and protracted fever of the Revolution, and the passion for military glory exaggerated by the victories of Napoleon, legitimately initiated the intense school, which during the present century has signalized French literature. The prestige of the scholar revived, and literary eclipsed warlike fame; but with the revival of letters came the revolutionary spirit before exhibited on the battle-field and in cabinets. For the artificial and elegant was substituted the melodramatic and effective; lyrics from the overwrought heart broke in dreamy sweetness from Lamartine and in simple energy from Béranger; fiction the most elaborate, incongruous, and exciting, here quaintly artistic, there morbidly scientific, revealed the chaos and the earthquakes that laid bare and upheaved life and society in the preceding epochs; the journal became an intellectual gymnasium and Olympic game, where the first minds of the nation sought exercise and glory; the feuilleton almost necessitated the novelist to concentrate upon each chapter the amount of interest once diffused through a volume; criticism, from tedious analysis, became a brilliant ordeal; egotism inspired a world of new confessions, political questions a new school of popular writing, the love of effect and the passion for excitement a multitude of dramatic, narrative, and biographical books, wherein the serenity of thought, the tranquil beauty of truth, and the healthful tone of nature were sacrificed, not without dazzling genius, to immediate fame, pecuniary reward, and the delight d' éprouver une sensation . Even in the history of the fine arts, we find the political element guiding the pencil and ruling the fortunes of genius. David was the government painter, and regarded Gros and Girodet as suspects . He effected a revolution in Art by going back to severe anatomical principles in design. There were conspiracies against him in the studios, and war was declared between color and design; the palette and the pencil were in conflict; David, the Napoleon of the former,—Prud'hon, Géricault, Delacroix, and others, leaders in the latter faction. Each party was surrounded by its respective corps of amateurs; and military terms were in vogue in the atelier and academy. " S'il est permis " says Delacroix, speaking of his Sardanapalus, "de comparer les petites choses aux grandes, ce fut mon Waterloo. Je devenais l'abomination de la peinture; il fallait me refuser l'eau et le sel." "If you wish to share the favors of the government," said an official to another artist, "you must change your manner." From the tyranny of external influences have arisen the incongruities of the

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French schools of painting, and especially what has been well called "that meretricious breed which continue to depict the Magdalen with the united attractions of Palestine and the Palais Royal." The large pictures which Gros painted during the Empire were consigned to long obscurity at the Restoration. The lives, too, of many of these cultivators of the arts of peace had a tragic close. Haydon's fate made a deep impression in England, because it was an exceptional case; while, of the modern painters of France, whose career was far more harmonious and successful than his, Gros drowned himself, Robert cut his throat, Prud'hon died in misery, and Greuze was buried in Potter's Field. The side of life we naturally associate with tranquillity thus offers, in this dramatic realm, scenes of excitement and pity. It is the same in literature. Witness the fierce struggle between the Romantic and Classic schools,—the early victories of the enfant sublime , Victor Hugo. And we must acknowledge that " les lettres et les arts ont aussi leurs

'emeutes et leurs r'evolutions ," and accept the inference of one of the Parisian literati ,—that " l'esprit a toujours quelque chose de satanique ." Every revolution is identified with some musical air: when Louis XVIII. first appeared at the theatre, after his long exile, he was greeted with the "Vive Henri IV.," and the new constitution of 1830 was ushered in by the "Marseillaise." The Vaudeville theatre, we are told, during the Revolution and under the Empire, was essentially political. An imaginary resemblance between la chaste Suzanne and Marie Antoinette caused the prohibition of that drama; and the interest which Cambac`eres took in an actress of this establishment led him to give it his official protection.

In the family of nations France is the child of illusions, and excites the sympathy of the magnanimous because her destinies have been marred through the errors of the imagination rather than of the heart.

Government, religion, and society—the three great elements of civil life—have nowhere been so modified by the dominion of fancy over fact. Take the history of French republicanism, of Quietism, of court and literary circles; what perspicuity in the expression, and vagueness in the realization of ideas! In each a mania to fascinate, in none a thorough basis of truth; abundance of talent, but no faith; gayety, gallantry, wit, devotion, dreams, and epigrams in perfection, without the solid foundation of principles and the efficient development in practice, either of polity, a social system, or religious belief,—the theory and the sentiment of each being at the same time luxuriant, attractive, and prolific.

The popular writers are eloquent in abstractions, but each seems inspired by a thorough egotism. Descartes, their philosopher, drew all his inferences from consciousness; Madame de S'evign'e, the epistolary queen, had for her central motive of all speculation and gossip the love of her daughter; Madame Guyon eliminated her tenets from the ecstasy of self-love; Rochefoucauld derived a set of philosophical maxims from the lessons of mere worldly disappointment; Calvin sought to reform society through the stern bigotry of a private creed; La Bruy`ere elaborated

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generic characters from the acute, but narrow observation of artificial society; Boileau established a classical standard of criticism suggested by personal taste, which ignored the progress of the human mind.

The redeeming grace of the nation is to be found in its wholesome sense of the enjoyable and the available in ordinary life, in its freedom from the discontent which elsewhere is born of avarice and unmitigated materialism. The love of pleasing, the influence of women, and a frivolous temper everywhere and on all occasions signalize them. "Why, people laugh at everything here!" naively exclaimed the young Duchess of Burgundy, on her arrival at the French court.

The amount of commodities taken by French people on a journey, and the cool self-satisfaction with which they are appropriated as occasion demands, give a stranger the most vivid idea of sensual egotism. The p^at'e , the long roll of bread, the sour wine, the lap-dog, the snuff, and the night-cap, which transform the car or carriage into a refectory and boudoir, with the chatter, snoring, and shifting of legs, make an interior scene for the novice, especially on a night-jaunt, compared to which the humblest of Dutch pictures are refined and elegant.

The intrinsic diversity and the national relations between the French and English are curiously illustrated by their respective history and literature. Compare, for instance, the plays of Shakspeare, which dramatize the long wars of the early kings, with the account given in

the journals of the reception of Victoria at Paris and of Louis Napoleon in London; imagine the royal salutation and the official recognition of the once anathematized Napoleon dynasty; General Bonaparte becomes in his tomb Napoleon I. No wonder "Punch" affirmed that the statue of Pitt shook its bronze head and the bones of Castlereagh stirred in protest. "The English," says a celebrated writer, "like ancient medals, kept more apart, preserve the first sharpness which the fair hand of Nature has given them; they are not so pleasant to feel, but, in return, the legend is so visible, that, at the first look, you can see whose image and superscription they bear." This is a delicate way of setting forth the superior honesty and bluntness and the inferior smoothness and assimilating instinct of the Anglo-Saxon,—a vital difference, which no alliance or intercourse with his Gallic neighbors can essentially change.

A century ago there were few better tests of popular sentiment in England than the plays in vogue. As indications of the state of the public mind, they were what the ballads are to earlier times, and the daily press is to our own,—generalized casual, but emphatic proofs of the opinions, prejudices, and fancies of the hour. Now a large English colony is domesticated in France; it is but a few hours' trip from London to Paris; newspapers and the telegraph in both capitals make almost simultaneous announcements of news; the soldiers of the two nations fight side by side; the French shopman declares on his sign that

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English is spoken within; the "Times," porter, and tea are obtainable commodities in Paris; and fraternité is the watchword at Dover and Calais. Yet the normal idea which obtains in the conservative brain of a genuine Anglais, though doubtless expanded and modified by intercourse and treaties, may be found still in that once popular drama, Foote's "Englishman in Paris." "A Frenchman," says one of the characters, "is a fop. Their taste is trifling, and their politeness pride. What the deuse brings you to Paris, then? Where's the use? It gives Englishmen a true relish for their own domestic happiness, a proper veneration for their national liberties, and an honor for the extended generous commerce of their country. The men there are all puppies, the women painted dolls." Monsieur Ragout and Monsieur Rosbif bandy words; the former is said to "look as if he had not had a piece of beef or pudding in his paunch for twenty years, and had lived wholly on frogs,"—and the latter pines to leap a five-barred gate, and is afraid of being entrapped by "a rich she-Papist." His fair countrywoman is invited by a French marquis to marry him, with this programme,—"A perpetual residence in this paradise of pleasures; to be the object of universal adoration; to say what you please,—go where you will,—do what you like,—form fashions,—hate your husband, and let him see it,—indulge your gallant,—run in debt, and oblige the poor devil to pay it."

As a pendant, take the description of one of the last French novels:—"

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Paris tout s'oublie, tout se pardonne. Par convenance, par d'ecence, quelquefois par crainte, on s'absente, ou fait un entr'acte: puis le rideau se r'eleve pour le spectacle de nouvelles fautes et de nouvelles folies; toute la question est de savoir s'y prendre."

Comedy is native to French genius and appreciation; it follows the changes of social life with marvellous celerity; it is the best school of the French language; and is refined and subdivided, as an art, both in degree and kind, in France more than in any other country. The prolific authors in this department, and the variety and richness of

invention they display, as well as the permanent attraction of the Comic Muse, are striking peculiarities of the French theatre. No capital affords the material and the audience requisite for such triumphs like Paris; and there is always a play of this kind in vogue there, wherein novelty of combination, significance of dialogue, and artistic felicities quite unrivalled elsewhere, are exhibited.

It is quite the reverse with the serious drama. In England this is a form of literature which goes nearest to the normal facts and conditions of human nature; it teaches the highest and deepest lessons, wins the most profound sympathy, and is remarkable and interesting through its subtle and comprehensive truth to Nature: whereas in France the masters of tragic art are but skilful reproducers of the classical drama. French tragedy is essentially artificial, grafted on the conventionalities of a distant age. It gives scope either to mere elocutionary art or melodramatic invention,—not to the universal and existing passions. There is but a slender opportunity to identify our sympathies—those of

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modern civilization—with what is going on. Figures in Roman togas or Grecian mantles rehearse the sentiments of fatalism, the creed of ancient mythology, or Gallic rhetoric in a classic dress; and these disguises so envelope the love, ambition, despair, hate, or patriotism, that we are always conscious of the theatrical, and it requires the extraordinary gifts of a Rachel to enlist other than artistic interest.

The French have manuals for breathing and composing the features to secure artistic effects; they offer academic prizes for every conceivable achievement; their very lamp-posts are designed with taste; a huckster in the street will exhibit dramatic tact and wonderful mechanical dexterity. "Quand il paraît un homme de génie en France," says Madame de Staël, "dans quelque carrière que ce soit, il atteint presque toujours à un degré de perfection sans exemple; car il réunit l'audace qui fait sortir de la route commune au tact du bon goût." And

yet in vast political interests they are victims,—in the more earnest developments of the soul, children. A new artificial lake in the Bois de Boulogne, a grand military reception, news of a victory in some distant corner of the globe, the distribution of eagles to brave survivors,—in a word, an appeal to the love of amusement, of display, and of glory,—quiets the murmur about to rise against interference with human rights or usurpation of the national will. Political interests of the gravest character are treated with flippancy: one writer calls the formation of a new government Talleyrand's table of whist; and another casually observes that "tous les gouvernements nouveaux ont leur lune de miel."

That great principle of the division of labor, which the English carry into mechanical and commercial affairs, the French also apply to the economy of life and to Art; but, as these latter interests are more spontaneous and unlimited, the result is often a perfection in detail, and a like deficiency in general effect. Thus, there are schools of painting in France more distinct and apart than exist elsewhere; usually the followers of such are distinguished for excellence in the mechanical aptitudes of their vocation; the figure is admirably drawn, the costume rightly disposed, and sometimes the degree of finish quite marvellous; but, usually, this superiority is attained at the expense of the sentiment of the picture. French historic Art, like French life, is apt to be extravagant and melodramatic, or over-refined in unimportant particulars; it often lacks moral harmony,—the grand, simple, true

reflection of Nature in its nicety. Delaroche, who, of all French painters, rose most above the adventitious, and gave himself to the soul of Art, to pure expression, was, for this very reason, thought by his brother artists to be cold and unattractive. There is one sphere, however, where this exclusiveness of style and partition of labor are productive of the most felicitous results: namely, the minor drama. In England and America the same theatre exhibits opera, melodrama, tragedy, comedy, rope-dancing, and legerdemain; but in Paris, each branch and element of histrionic art has its separate temple, its special corps of actors and authors, nay, its particular class of subjects; hence their

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unrivalled perfection. Ingenuity, science, and Art are concentrated by thus assigning free and individual scope to the dramatic niceties and phases of life, of history, of genius, and of society. At the Opera Comique you find one kind of musical creation; at the Italiens the lyrical drama of Southern Europe alone; at the Variétés a unique order of comic dialogue; and at the Porte St. Martin yet another species of play. One theatre gives back the identical tone of existing society and current events; another deals with the classical ideas of the past. Satire and song, the horrible and the brilliant, the graceful and the highly artistic, pictorial, elocutionary, pantomimic, tragic, vocal, statuesque, the past and present, all the elements of Art and of life, find representation in the plot, the language, the sentiment, the costume, the music, and the scenery of the many Parisian theatres. Yet how much of this superiority is fugitive! how little in the whole dramatic development takes permanent hold upon popular sympathy! Much of its significance is purely local, and of its interest altogether temporary. Scholars and the higher classes can talk eloquently of Corneille and Racine; the beaux and spirituelle women of the day can repeat and enjoy the last hit of Scribe, or the new bon-mot of the theatre: but contrast these results with the national love and appreciation of Shakspeare,—with the permanent reflection of Spanish life in Lope de Vega,—the patriotic aspirations which the young Italian broods over in the tragedies of Alfieri. The grace of movement, the triumph of tact and ingenuity, the devotion to conventionalism, either pedantry or the genius of the hour, also rules the drama in Paris. With all its brilliancy, entertainment, grace, wit, and popularity,—there exists not a permanently vital and universally recognized type of this greatest department of literature, familiar and endeared alike to peasant and peer, a representative of humanity for all time,—like the bard around whose name and words cluster the Anglo-Saxon hearts and intelligence from generation to generation.

But nowhere do life and the drama so trench upon each other; nowhere is every incident of experience so dramatic. Miss H.M. Williams told the poet Rogers that she had seen "men and women, waiting for admission at the door of the theatre, suddenly leave their station, on the passing of a set of wretches going to be guillotined, and then, having ascertained that none of their relations or friends were among them, very unconcernedly return to the door of the theatre." A child is born at the Opera Comique during the performance, and it is instantly made an event of sympathy and effect by the audience; a subscription is raised, the child named for the dramatic heroine of the moment, and the fortunate mother sent home in a carriage, amid the plaudits of the crowd. You are listening to a play; and a copy of the "Entr'acte" is thrust into your hand, containing a minute account of the death of a statesman two squares off whose name fills pages of history, or a battle in the East,

where some officer whom you met two months before on the Boulevard has won immortal fame by prodigies of valor. So do the actualities and the pastimes, the real and the imaginary drama, miraculously interfuse at 14

Paris; the comedy of life is patent there, and often the spectator exclaims, "Arlequin avait bien arrangé les choses, mais Colombine d'étrange tout!"

The Parisian females are "unexceptionably shod,"—but the agricultural instruments now in use in the rural districts of France are of a form and mechanism which, to a Yankee farmer, would seem antediluvian; the cooks, gardeners, and other working-people, have annually the most graceful festivals,—but the traveller sees in the fields women so bronzed and wrinkled by toil and exposure that their sex is hardly to be recognized. When the Gothamite passes along Pearl or Broad Street, he beholds the daily spectacle of unemployed carmen reading newspapers;—there may be said to be no such thing as popular literature in France; mental recreation, such as the German and Scotch peasantry enjoy, is unknown there. The Art and letters of the kingdom flourished in her court and were cultivated as an aristocratic element for so long a period, that neither has become domesticated among the lower classes; we find in them the sentiment of military glory, of religion in its superstitious phase, of music perhaps, of rustic festivity,—but not the enjoyments which spring from or are associated with thought and poetic sympathies such as national writers like Burns inspired. An exception comparatively recent may be found in the popular appreciation of Béranger and Souvestre.

There is not a natural object too beautiful or an occasion too solemn to arrest the French tendency to the theatrical. Even one of their most ardent eulogists remarks,—"All that can be said against the French sublime is this,—that the grandeur is more in the word than in the thing; the French expression professes more than it performs"; and old Montaigne declares that "lying is not a vice among the French, but a way of speaking." Both observations admit too much; and indicate an habitual departure from Nature and simplicity as a national trait. Who but Frenchmen ever delighted in reducing to artificial shapes the graceful forms of vegetable life, or can so far lay aside the sentiment of grief as to engage in rhetorical panegyrics over the fresh graves of departed friends? Compare the high dead wall with its range of flower-pots, the porches undecked by woodbines or jessamine, the formal paths, the proximate kitchen, stables, and ungarnished salon of a French villa, with the hedges, meadows, woodlands, and trellised eglantine of an English country-house; and a glance assures us that to the former nation the country is a dernier ressort, and not an endeared seclusion. Yet they romance, in their way, on rural subjects:

"A la campagne," says one of their poets, "où
à chaque feuille qui

tombe est une élegie toute faite." Through an avenue of scraggy poplars we approach a dilapidated chateau, whose owner is playing dominoes at the café of the nearest provincial town, or exhausting the sparse revenues of the estate at the theatres, roulette-tables, or balls of Paris. People leave these for a rural vicinage only to economize, to hide chagrin, or to die. So recognized is this indifference to Nature and inaptitude for rural life in France, that, when we desire to

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express the opposite of natural tastes, we habitually use the word

"Frenchified." The idea which a Parisian has of a tree is that of a convenient appendage to a lamp. The traveller never sees artificial light reflected from green leaves, without thinking of his evening promenades in the French capital, or a dance in the groves of Montmorency. The old verbal tyranny of the French Academy, the painted wreaths sold at cemetery-gates, the colored plates of fashions, powdered hair, and rouged cheeks, typify and illustrate this irreverent ambition to pervert Nature and create artificial effects; they are but so many forms of the theatrical instinct, and proofs of the ascendancy of meretricious taste. It is this want of loyalty to Nature, and insensibility to her unadulterated charms, which constitute the real barrier between the Gallic mind and that of England and Italy, and which explain the fervent protest of such men as Alfieri and Coleridge. Simplicity and earnestness are the normal traits of efficient character, whether developed in action or Art, in sentiment or reflection; and manufactured verse, vegetation, and complexions indicate a faith in appearances and a divorce from reality, which, in political interests, tend to compromise, to theory, and to acquiescence in a military régime and an embellished absolutism.

It is this incompleteness, this comparative untruth, that gives rise to the dissatisfaction we feel in the last analysis of French character. It is delusive. The promise of beauty held out by external taste is unfulfilled; the fascination of manner bears a vastly undue proportion to the substantial kindness and trust which that immediate charm suggests. "Just Heaven!" exclaims Yorick, "for what wise reasons hast thou ordered it, that beggary and urbanity, which are at such variance in other countries, should find a way to be at unity in this?" The bearing of an Englishman seldom awakens expectation of courtesy or entertainment; yet, if vouchsafed, how to be relied on is the friendship! how generous the hospitality! The urbane salutation with which a Frenchman greets the female passenger, as she enters a public conveyance, is not followed by the offer of his seat or a slice of his reeking pâté,—while the roughest backwoodsman in America, who never touched his hat or inclined his body to a stranger, will guard a woman from insult, and incommode himself to promote her comfort, with respectful alacrity. It is so in literature. How often we eagerly follow the clear exposition of a subject in the pages of a French author, to reach an impotent conclusion! or suffer our sympathies to be enlisted by the admirable description of an interior or a character in one of their novels, to find the plot which embodies them an absurd melodrama! Evanescence is the law of Parisian felicities,—selfishness the background of French politeness,—sociability flourishes in an inverse ratio to attachment; we become skeptical almost in proportion as we are attracted. If we ask the way, we are graciously directed; but if we demand the least sacrifice, we must accept volubility for service. Thus the perpetual flowering in manners, in philosophy, in politics, and in economy, is rarely accompanied by fruit in either. To enjoy Paris, we must cease to be in earnest;—to pass the time, and not to wrest from it

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a blessing or a triumph, is the main object. The badges, the gardens, the smiles, the agreeable phrase, the keen repartee, the tempting dish, the ingenious vaudeville, the pretty foot, the elegant chair and becoming curtain, the extravagant gesture, the pointed epigram or alluring formula, must be taken as so many agreeabilities,—not for things performed, but imaginatively promised. The folly of war has been demonstrated to the entire sense of mankind; at best, it is now deemed

a painful necessity; yet the most serious phase of life in France is military. Depth and refinement of feeling are lonely growths, and can no more spring up in a gregarious and festal life than trees in quicksands; citizenship is based on consistent acts, not on verbosity; and brilliant accompaniments never reconcile strong hearts to the loss of independence, which some English author has acutely declared the first essential of a gentleman. The civilization of France is an artistic and scientific materialism; the spiritual element is wanting. Paris is the theatre of nations; we must regard it as a continuous spectacle, a boundless museum, a place of diversion, of study,—not of faith, the deepest want and most sacred birthright of humanity.

The want of directness, the absence of candor, the non-recognition of truth in its broad and deep sense, is, indeed, a characteristic phase of life, of expression, and of manners in France. A lover of his nation confesses that even in "galantes aventures l'esprit prenait la place du coeur, la fantaisie celle du sentiment." Voltaire's creed was, that "le mensonge n'est un vice que quand il fait du mal; c'est une grande vertu quand il fait du bien." "L'exagération" says De Maistre, "est le mensonge des honnêtes gens."

In every aspect the histrionic prevails,—by facility of association and colloquial aptitude in the common intercourse of life,—by the inventive element in dress, furniture, and material arrangements, plastic to the caprice of taste and ingenuity,—by the habitudes of out-of-door life, giving greater variety and adaptation to manners,—and by a national temperament, susceptible and demonstrative. The current vocabulary suggests a perpetual recourse to the casual, a shifting of the life-scene, a recognition of the temporary and accidental. Such oft-recurring words as flâneur, liaison, badinage, etc., have no exact synonymes in other tongues. All that is done, thought, and felt takes a dramatic expression. Lamartine elaborates a "History of the Restoration" from two reports,—the one monarchical, the other republican,—and, by making the facts picturesque and sentimental, wins countless readers. Comte elaborates a masterly analysis of the sciences, proclaims a fascinating theory of eras or stages in human development; but the positive philosophy, of which all this is but the introduction, to be applied to the individual and society, eludes, at last, direct and complete application. A popular savant dies, and students drag the hearse and scatter flowers over the grave; a philosopher lectures, and immediately his disciples form a school, and advocate his system with the ardor of partisans; a disappointed soldier commits suicide by throwing himself from Napoleon's column, while a grisette and her

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lover make their exit through a last embrace and the fumes of charcoal; a wit seeks revenge with a clever repartee instead of his fists or cane.

A lady is the centre of attraction at a reception, and, upon inquiry, we are gravely informed that the charm lies in the fact, that, though now fat and more than forty, as well as married to an old noble, in her youth she was the mistress of a celebrated poet. Notoriety, even when scandalous, is as good a social distinction as birth, fame, or beauty. Rousseau wrote a love-story, and sentiment became the rage. An artisan has a day to spare, and takes his family to a garden or a dance. Human existence, thus embellished, impulsive, and caricatured, becomes a continuous melodrama, with an occasional catastrophe induced by political revolutions. Louis XIV., the most characteristic king France ever had, is a genuine representative of this theatrical instinct and development.

Herein may we find a key to the riddle of governmental vicissitudes in France. People so easily satisfied with illusions, so fertile in superficial expedients, are like children and savages in their sense of what is novel and amusing, and their love of excitement,—and make no such demands upon reality as full-grown men and educated citizens instinctively crave. Their powers, in this regard, have not been disciplined,—their wants but vaguely realized. Accustomed to look out of themselves for a law of action, to consult authority upon every occasion, to defer to official sources for guidance in every detail of municipal and personal affairs,—the lesson of self-dependence, the courage and the knowledge needful for efficiency are wanting. " Savez-vous ," asks an epicure, " ce qui a chassé la gaîté? C'est la politique ." They rally at the voice of command, submit to interference, and take for granted a prescribed formula, partly because it is troublesome to think, and partly on account of inexperience in assuming responsibility. De Tocqueville has remarked, that, in every instance of attempted colonization, they have adapted themselves to, instead of elevating savage tribes. They have never gone through the process of state-education by the inevitable claim of personal duty, like the Anglo-Saxons. Hence their need of a master, and the feeling of stability realized among them only under legitimacy and despotism. Shallow reasoners argue from the mere acknowledgment of this state of things that it is an ultimate public blessing when the man appears with wit and will enough to regulate and keep from chaos a society thus destitute of political training. But those who look deeper know that this political inefficiency is but the external manifestation or the latent cause of more serious defects: by impeding healthful development in one way, it occasions a morbid development in another. If citizenship in its most free and active privilege were enjoyed, there would be less devotion to amusement, a more virile national character, and the sanctities of life would have observance. Public spirit and a political career are incentives to manly ambition,—to an employment of mind and feeling that wins men from trifling pursuits and vain diversion; they are the national basis of private usefulness; to thwart them is to condemn humanity to perpetual childhood,—to render members of a state machines.

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The social evils and kinds of crime in France are referable in no small degree to the absence of great motives,—the limited spheres and hopeless routine involved in arbitrary government, unsustained by any elevated sentiment. Such a rule makes literature servile, enterprise mercenary, and manners profligate: all history proves this. It is not, therefore, rational to infer, from the apparent want of ability in the nation to take care of its own affairs, that a military despotism is justifiable; when the truth is equally demonstrated, that such a sway, by indefinitely postponing the chance to acquire the requisite training, keeps down and throws back the national impulse and destiny. The man who thus abuses power is none the less a traitor and a parricide.

THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE UNDER DIFFICULTIES; AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

"Mr. Geer!"

Mr. Geer was unquestionably asleep.

This certainly did not indicate a sufficiently warm appreciation of Mrs. Geer's social charms; but the enormity of the offence will be greatly modified by a brief review of the attending circumstances. If you will but consider that the crackling of burning wood in a huge Franklin

stove is strongly soporific in its tendencies,—that the cushion of a capacious arm-chair, constructed and adjusted as if with a single eye to a delicious dose, nay, to a long succession of doses, is a powerful temptation to a sleepy soul,—that the regular, and, it must be confessed, somewhat monotonous click, click, click of Mrs. Geer's knitting-needles only served to measure, without disturbing the silence,—and, lastly, that they had been husband and wife for thirty years,—you will not cease to wonder that Mr. Geer

"was glorious,

O'er all the ills of life victorious."

To most men, an interruption at such a time would have been particularly annoying; but when Mrs. Geer spoke in that way, Mr. Geer, asleep or awake, always made a point of hearing; so he roused himself, and turned his round, honest face and placid blue eyes on the partner of his bosom, who went on,—

"Mr. Geer, our Ivy will be seventeen, come fall."

"Possible?" replied Mr. Geer. "Who'd 'a' thunk it?"

Mr. Geer, as you may infer, was eminently a free-thinker, or rather, a free-actor, in respect of irregular verbs. In fact, he tyrannized over all parts of speech: wrested nouns and verbs from their original shape, till you could hardly recognize their distorted faces; and committed

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that next worst sin to murdering one's mother, namely,—murdering one's mother-tongue, with an abandon that was absolutely fascinating. Having delivered his opinion thus sententiously, he at once subsided, closed his placid eyes, and retired into his inner world of—thought, perhaps.

"Mr. Geer!"

This time he fairly jumped from his seat, and cast about him scared, blinking eyes.

"Mr. Geer, how can you sleep away your precious time so?"

"Sleep? I—am sure, I was never wider awake in my life."

"Well, then, tell me what I said."

"Said? Eh,—eh,—something about Ivy, wasn't it?"

And Mr. Geer nervously twitched up the skirts of his coat, and replaced his awry cushion, and began to think that perhaps, after all, he had been asleep. But Mrs. Geer was too much interested in the subject of her own cogitations to pursue her victory farther; so she answered,—

"Yes, and what is a-going to become of her?"

"Lud, lud! What's the matter?" asked Mr. Geer, wildly.

"Matter? Why, she'll be seventeen, come fall, and doesn't know a thing."

"O Lud! that all? That a'n't nothin'."

And Mr. Geer settled comfortably down into his arm-chair once more. He felt decidedly relieved. Visions of smallpox, cholera, and throat-distemper, the worst evils that he could think of and dread for his darling, had been conjured up by his wife's words; and when he found the real state of the case, a great burden, which had suddenly fallen on his heart, was as suddenly lifted.

"But I tell you it is something," continued Mrs. Geer, energetically.

"Ivy is 'most a woman, and has never been ten miles from home in her life, and to no school but our little district"—

"And she's as pairk a gal," interrupted Mr. Geer, "as any you'll find in all the ten miles round, be the other who she will."

"She's well enough in her way," replied Mrs. Geer, in all the humility of motherly pride; "and so much the more reason why she shouldn't be let go so. There's Mr. Dingham sending his great logy girls to Miss Porter's seminary. (I wonder if he expects they'll ever turn out anything.) And

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