

but—” She paused, and laughed a little affectedly. “Tell me, Nell, is this patch well placed?—here on my cheek, or should it be a trifle higher?”

She went to the mirror, and stood before it adjusting the patch, and continued speaking from thence with her back to her niece.

“Somehow no one but my Lord Langley would have suited me. I could afford to be capricious then, which you cannot. He came back at last—your father always said he would come back—things were changed. Your mother had been long dead; you were growing tall (people thought you were my younger sister), and the troubles had begun. You know how it was; how all the money went—mine went first, it was more easily laid hands upon; and the Restoration, to which we all looked forward with confidence, seemed further off than ever.

Your father got into trouble, and we had to fly the country. Do you remember, Nell? I had but one gown, and you scarce that. It is all over now. Lord Langley came back when we were on the eve of departure.”

“Dear Aunt Betty!” said Eleanor, rising and putting her arm round the shaking figure.

“I tell you, Nell, women are only born for self-sacrifice; the money was all gone, your father had lost his health as well, so we agreed that it was useless to think of it. He behaved like the true gentleman he was. He kissed my hand—nobody kissed a hand with such grace as he—and we said good-bye, and we crossed the sea. It was his doing that my brother obtained leave to return, and escaped confiscation of this estate. That sort of service a lady may accept, no other.”

“And then?” said Eleanor, gently.

“He married one of the Fleetwoods of Gilbert Hall; their mother was a Murray. I hear they have several children, all very plain indeed. Mistress Mary Fleetwood was a very ugly woman, so it might have been expected. I have a cold in my eyes, Nell; the wind to-day has been very trying; I will go and bathe them with rosewater. Nay, do not kiss me, and do not cry; it spoils the complexion, and—and—”

Poor Mistress Betty broke into tears in spite of all her efforts.

Eleanor knew her aunt well; she knew that it was the actual relief from the most wearing anxiety that had unsealed her lips, and made her tell her little story; and she grieved not to have known it before, thinking that the knowledge might have made her more tender to this aunt, who was at once so frivolous and so brave.

(To be continued.)

WHY PERSONAL REMARKS ARE TO BE AVOIDED.



THE fact that we can all of us recall innumerable instances where personal remarks may be made without any breach of the laws of courtesy, and without entailing any results that are undesirable, by no means entitle us to question the value of the injunction—never to make a personal remark.

When, for instance, in one of George Eliot's novels, the Radical hero breaks a long silence by suddenly saying to Esther Lyon, “You are very beautiful!” the remark is certainly a personal one, but it is raised out of the sphere of the ordinary personal remark by the relations between Esther and Felix, and by the train of thought in the latter's mind.

For, the next moment, Felix Holt falls to wondering whether the subtle measuring of forces will ever come to measuring “the force there would be in one beautiful woman, whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful—who made a man's passion run in one current with all the great aims of his life.”

The intention at the back of the personal remark here justifies it, for Felix does not wish to flatter, or ingratiate himself with Esther, he only wants to keep her from being one of those women “who hinder

men's lives from having any nobleness in them.”

Clearly the condemnation of personal remarks does not extend to such cases as these; but then, we must remember, such cases are exceptional. Those which most frequently present themselves are of the kind where the provocation to the remark has its root in some trivial impulse or petty interest. Now directions for our guidance in social matters have to be more or less generalised—that is to say, they have to overlook the many occasions when the directions can safely be disregarded. Rules of conduct, in short, have to be laid down on the lines of universality, and the necessary modifications have to be made as one's experience widens, just in the same way as in enlightened methods of teaching languages, rules have to be taught first, and the exceptions have to be left to be gleaned later on by the intelligence of the student acting on what comes before him.

Why personal remarks must for the most part be deprecated, we can very easily see. Personal remarks of the objectionable kind fall into three classes:

1. The Offensive, or those which unduly disparage the person addressed. Ignorance of all that constitutes individual merit, and petty envy and spite are generally at the bottom of this kind of remark.

2. The Fulsome, or those which unduly flatter the person addressed. Desire to stand well with one's fellows, no matter at what cost, and a general lack of conscientiousness in social intercourse engender these.

3. The Embarrassing, or those which cause a feeling of awkwardness to spring up in the assembled company, as when, by complimenting one lady on the exquisite clearness of her complexion, attention gets painfully, albeit unwittingly, drawn to the sallowness of the lady sitting next her. Obtuse sensibilities are clearly responsible for these.

On the other hand, the qualities which issue in the acceptable kind of personal remarks—in those we may exhaustively classify as the Kindly Appreciative, the Instructively Critical, and the Pleasantly Introductory—such qualities plainly are high in character and rare in occurrence.

Criticism and appreciation demand generosity and insight, as well as a kindly interest in humanity; while it is tact alone which will

enable one to make such judicious personal remarks as shall put people at their ease under circumstances of difficulty. It is obvious, then, that personal remarks which are the outcome of such qualities as these—qualities not possessed by the majority of men and women—will much less frequently be heard than that other kind, which springs out of prevalent petty failings.

Hence, in order to guard against this last sort, it becomes expedient, in the first instance, to lay an embargo on all personal remarks whatsoever.

Thoughtless egotists who, thinking only of the gratification of being popular, pay exaggerated compliments to every person with whom they come in contact, do much more harm than they ever realise. More especially do they inflict a serious injury on young and impressionable girls. To these, in their youthful inexperience, the false coin of current flattery must always seem to ring true. Assure the average young girl that she has a lovely voice, that she looks charming, and that her conversational inanities are flavoured with wit and seasoned with vivacity, she unhesitatingly accepts what she takes to be an involuntary tribute to her perfections, and straightway tends to become self-sufficient and arrogant. The inevitable result then is not long in showing itself. Supremely satisfied with herself and her small achievements, she relaxes all further efforts towards self-improvement, and so loses every chance of ultimately becoming what her flatterers have assured her she already is.

It is not that praise itself is harmful—the harm arises out of the reckless, unthinking way in which the praise is administered. People who say glibly to a young girl, radiant in all the freshness of sixteen years and a summer toilette, “How nice you look!” do not pause to inquire if hers is a temperament which will derive benefit from such remarks as these. If she be of a shy and retiring disposition, apt to take an unduly low estimate of her personal attractions, and so, to be brusque and curt in society, the stimulating effect of these complimentary words may be entirely good. She may be induced by them to lay aside that excessive diffidence which so often is scarcely distinguishable from stiffness and an unamiable temper, and may exert herself to be genial and pleasant to those around her. On the other hand, let her be a girl with a weak and foolish

nature, and this very same remark may send her to study airs and graces in front of the looking-glass, and may make her imagine that her share in this world's work is to be limited to displaying her pretty face to the utmost advantage.

But to both these most opposite contingencies the person who makes the personal remark is thoroughly indifferent. She says what she does, either because it is the first thing that comes into her head, or worse still, because she likes to be liked, and is careless what means she adopts to ensure being so.

She makes the complimentary speeches for her own ends, and not with any view to the pleasure or welfare of those to whom she speaks. Hence she works evil both to herself

and others, lowering her own character and injuriously affecting theirs.

But it must not be supposed that an almost equal measure of harm is not done by the personal remarks issuing from that very large class of persons who "like to speak their minds," and who deem an offensive rudeness justified the instant they can aver "It's perfectly true."

Toute vérité n'est pas bonne à dire, and obvious as it may be, for instance, that a young woman of thirty is no longer a girl, she will scarcely enjoy being told, when some plan is under discussion, that "she is quite old enough to be able to decide for herself," or being assured that she need not trouble about her bonnet being shabby, as "no one is likely to notice her."

The harm involved in personal remarks of this kind is just the harm of causing pain, a result we have no right to produce, unless we can plead specific good aimed at as our excuse.

And I venture to think, fewer outspoken speeches of this unkind character would be heard in daily life if people only realised a little more fully that "a small unkindness is a great offence," and if, in their professed reverence for truth, they took care to appreciate the vital truth contained in Hannah More's homely couplet:

"To spread large bounties, though we seek in vain,
Yet all may shun the guilt of giving pain."

ADA HEATHER-BIGG.

THE SERVICE OF BEAUTY.

BEAUTY VERSUS UGLINESS.



In the old fairy tales there is such a fund of true poetic insight, and their strange guesses at truth, so much which our latest knowledge cannot contradict, that we seem never to outgrow the charm they had for us as children. Their suggestiveness grows with

our understanding, and to the end we may find in these life-parables a mysterious undercurrent of meaning.

—Such a fairy tale is "Beauty and the Beast." Besides its mythological meaning, besides the literal acceptance of it as it sank into our childish minds, receptive and unquestioning, we may trace in the dear old story a deep, significant truth. Beauty does not reach her completion while she remains absorbed in herself. Not until she foregoes all else to give herself away in pure devotion, does she gain supreme happiness. Beauty gives herself to redeem her father's promise to the Beast, and then again, by her self-surrender to him, transforms the Beast into a higher nature. And this old, old story is still being played at, if we have eyes to see it. We have preached beauty in all her excellence, as worthy of our service; but we must not close without pointing out how that excellence is best attained. We must not persuade our readers to dwell in the House Beautiful, without warning them of the danger of remaining there wrapped in lonely contemplation. It must be used as a point of vantage whence we may sally to attack ugliness, in the war which is the chief service beauty imposes on us. We have, indeed, no right to stay in our soul's quiet retreat of loveliness, until we have redeemed our Father's promise to that beast of want and ignorance and disease, which is still in our midst; a living contradiction to all we hold dear in the world of imagination, to all the beauty that should be "in man and the earth he dwells on." We are no true lovers of beauty if we selfishly stay behind, shutting our eyes to all necessity of action, while this beast in vain demands our self-surrender. Our devotion alone can transform him. The poor Beast in the story was under an evil spell, and his coarse exterior hid a noble nature. Let us have faith in our wretched fellow-creatures, and we shall find how to break the spell of degradation by the enthusiasm of our love.

If our natures were rightly tuned, it should indeed be impossible for us to find any harmony of beauty in the midst of the terrible discords about us. But we are all imperfect instruments;

we lack imagination. If our susceptibilities were as keen really as we sometimes imagine, there would be no rest, no comfort for us, while such hideous degradation and dreary ugliness were spread around, even to the very doors of our homes. It is to be feared that many are content with a fool's paradise, and willingly guard their tender susceptibilities from the rude truths of reality. But, however we may fence these off, we cannot cheat that law of our nature by which indifference to the claims of others affects our sensibility throughout. We can never open our eyes fully to the sweet teachings of the book of nature while our hearts are dead to the needs of our fellows, who lie as it were in dungeons far from her sunshine and purity. We shall never enjoy to perfection our pictures and our poems, till we have tasted the pleasure of awakening in another soul a kindred joy of appreciation. We shall never be truly thankful for the peace and grace and harmony of our homes, until we have watched the effect they have wrought on those to whom tumult and disgrace and discord have been like a natural element. We shall never take proper pride in our own dress and manners till we have brought at least decency into those of our poor sisters.

No doubt the finer our perception of beauty, the more exquisite will be our pain in coming into contact with these manifestations of the "Beast," but the pain is soon lost in the pure pleasure of winning, of even striving to win, something over to the evidence of God's beauty and truth in the world.

Many men and women, thank God, are waking to recognise this imperative call, and feeling the cheering reward of acting up to it, in spite of all the discouragements and disappointments which attend such efforts. Noble examples need not long be sought: there are enough to inspire us all of those who have found this "spell to make life beautiful, of loftiest thought to lowliest service bowed."

Mary Carpenter, Octavia Hill, Sister Dora, and a host of others have furnished us with fine ideals of a womanhood which can countercharm the "Beast." It is not given to us all to set on foot great movements, or to work far-reaching social reforms, or to devote our whole lives to the care of the sick, the sad or the sinful. But something we can all do, and it is at our peril we leave it undone. We can each have at least one friend among those to whom life wears an aspect hard and dreary compared to our own, and we can brighten and comfort that sadder lot with many a quiet but effectual touch.

It would not indeed be well for young girls to set about reforming or directing those older and often far wiser in the practical side of life than themselves, simply because they are richer

and better educated. Ruskin in his "Letter to Young Girls," which I wish they would all learn by heart, says:—"Serve the poor, but, for your lives, you little monkeys, don't preach to them! They are probably, without in the least knowing it, fifty times better Christians than you, and if anybody is to preach, let them. Make friends of them when they are nice, as you do of nice rich people; feel with them, work with them, and if you are not at last sure that it is a pleasure to you both to see each other, keep out of their way. For material charity, let older and wiser people see to it; and be content, like Athenian maids in the procession of their Name-goddess, with the honour of carrying the basket."

That is wise advice: to leave the material part of charity to older heads to organise. But mark how Ruskin makes the essential part of a girl's service of the poor, sympathy-feeling with them, weeping with those that weep, and rejoicing with them that do rejoice—through her imagination, putting herself in another's place. Now there is in a sweet girlish nature such tact or keen "touch-faculty" in approaching other natures, and in youth altogether such plasticity, as eminently fit a young girl for this kind of service. If such a girl is endowed also with a true perception of beauty and sensitive taste, by this sympathy her poor friend's ugly and dreary and dirty life will become simply intolerable to her, and she will never rest until she has brought into it some sense of order, some ray of beauty, some touch of grace. It has been said that he is a benefactor of mankind who makes two blades of grass to grow where one grew before. What shall we say of her who quickens the little seed of beauty, which lies dormant in every nature however hard and coarse, and causes it to bear fruit fair and sweet, in hearts and homes? It is just this sort of quiet, almost invisible work which a young girl can do without altering the even tenour of her life, or in any way making herself conspicuous—showing her pleasure in a room cleaned out of deference to her presence, bringing window-gardening into fashion by her influence, teaching and helping to make suitable and pretty clothing, using her sweet voice for singing or reading, to bring within reach of the dull and dreary, songs and stories and poems. There are a thousand and one ways by which each individually may seek and find her best service.

I wonder how many of my young readers have heard of the Kyrle Society and the noble work it is doing. Its object is "to bring beauty home to the people," and its motto: "To the utmost of our power." Its chief agencies are the decoration of clubs, hospitals, meeting-rooms, or any such places used by the poor in London; the securing and planting of