HOME AND SOCIETY.

Young Men and "A Modern Instance."

It is curious to hear the young people of the period discuss the qualities of Mr. Howells's story, especially the young man who, coming in late at night, sits up still later to finish it, and who, when you find him turning its pages in the day, blinks at your discovery. In his more confident morning hours he attempts a certain defense of Bartley, and intimates that a wider experience of the world might alter the writer's treatment.

"There isn't a single thing that Bartley Hubbard did," he declares, "that was so very bad,—not a thing which might not occur in almost any young fellow's life, and not send him to the devil either. It is nonsense to pretend that he is a much worse fellow than another, as the world goes, or that he isn't as much of a man any day as that photograph-keeping, conscience-wrestling Halleck. Talk about his knocking Henry Bird down! Talk about his using that history of Kinney! Talk about his beer! Talk about Sally Morrison even! What I am trying to say is —what I mean is—just this: Take most any man, even those who finally turn out all right, and show him up in that cold-blooded way,—all his secrets, his mean moments, and every little chance action,—and he won't appear much better than Bartley Hubbard. I tell you, all the facts remaining the same, his nature need not be so deeply tainted, and there is no use pitching into him and knocking the bottom out of his merits. Take these goody-goody fellows themselves, who have had their legs broken and their hearts smashed, but not their eye-teeth cut, and I guess you'll find places in them of just as doubtful gentility. What I mean is, that to brand Bartley Hubbard and spare Ben Halleck, coddling a baby's cold nose under his chin, while he shakes with love for the baby's mamma and scorn for the weakness of the baby's papa, shows what a chance it is where contempt shall fall. You needn't tell me that if the right sort of person had taken hold of him, and helped him along, Bartley wouldn't have made the better fellow of the two. Or is there no great good in any of us? Mr. Howells seems to think not. Look at the work Bartley had in him,—his good nature, his wit! It is the fashion to decry men with clever social qualities. I am not trying to say he is all right; but I know if I had to live with such a woman as that Marcia, with her crude passion, her sudden furies, her country stiffness, her exactions, her want of tender attributes, I doubt if we should ever reach the point of keeping house together in the spring. What I mean to say is"— and as this young man goes on his voice rises, and his hand, following his voice, rises and shakes with emphasis.

But deep in his heart he feels accused, and for the time at least, as he returns to his business, some perception of his low tone stirs within him. He has never before had his qualities so clearly presented to him, his motives so closely scrutinized. He is accustomed to think well of himself; to measure carefully the lengths he may go, and preserve a moderate self-respect; to make small account of the absence of stern integrity, and frequently to remark in a swelling tone, "That is not the kind of a man I am." "A Modern Instance" attacks his sort of moral structure at the foundation. It smiles at him, snubs him, discovers to him that his recurring derelictions are the outcrop of an unsound nature, and that, when he no longer has power to stay the decay, he may realize the importance of their evidence.

But in his self-defence he suggests the most assailable point of the story. One would like to believe that the men and women who preserve their moral sense, their correct instincts, their probity, their veracity, should sometimes be allowed to enjoy these virtues,—that they should be raised, supported, elevated by them,—that they should know moments when life would be sweet, and that the breaths which they draw through an atmosphere kept pure by these qualities should sometimes make their hearts beat full and strong. But in this story Mr. Howells has admitted nobody with any reach of spirit,—nobody with what he himself calls the poetic lift; and his excellent New Englanders suffer from a more bitter aridity than that which corruption produces in his hero. It might be said that an exception should be made in the case of the old squire,—in that last scene where he holds the stage in the double character of lawyer and father. If it were not that the lawyer so dominated the father,—if the desire to make a telling point against the plaintiff were not so apparent,—there would be something fine about it. As it is, the natural pathos of the situation is sacrificed—and perhaps rightly—to preserve the consistency of the character to its general hardness and lowness of tone.

The side characters of Kinney and Ricker are touched with a saving grace. They have a native spirit which keeps them out of the commonplace. They are alive, sentient, and in a sense sweet. While the Hallecks, the Gaylords, the Witherbys, know no moment of superiority to circumstance, no days that are not bleakish Mondays, they are essentially New Englanders in the constancy with which their thoughts dwell upon detail, in the grip which their environment has upon them, in their cohesion with facts, in their want of lightness and imagination. Mr. Howells does not seem to create them, but merely to present with ease what he has readily found.

S.

Diaries and Journals.

"Oh, that I had had time and patience to keep a diary!" declares the late Charles James Mathews, in the first chapter of that beginning of an autobiography which the present Mr. Charles Dickens edited and completed in 1879. "What a world of trouble it would have saved me, and what endless odd details and incidents, now forgotten, I should have been able to record! Harley kept one for some forty years. I have seen three volumes, all regularly bound and

lettered. They contain a most interesting account of what he had for dinner each day, and what he paid for coach-hire, and not a word of anything else. I doubt whether their publication would interest the public of the present day. I find that I, too, commenced a journal regularly on the first of January every year, and invariably broke down after a few weeks; then resumed, and finally dropped it altogether. My intentions were good, but my perseverance faulty."

In Charles Mathews and in Harley, two old actors, we have the exact opposite of Fanny Kemble, who started a journal early in life and has made a voluminous appearance in literature on the strength of it. Omitting her plays and poems and her latest book of Shaksperian criticism, all of Mrs. Kemble's books are made out of her journals, or out of the letters which were a substitute for it. First came the "Journal of a Residence in America"; then "A Year of Consolation," which was a transcript from a journal kept during a journey to Italy; then again the "Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation"; and last of all come the two charming volumes of "Records of a Girlhood" and "Records of Later Life." But we need not come down to modern times for examples. Pepys lives in literature solely because he kept a diary. The journal of Judge Sewall sheds a light on the thoughts and feelings of our New England ancestors, not elsewhere to be found so fully focused.

It is, however, because most people want to imitate Pepys and Sewall, not to mention Mrs. Kemble and Charles Greville, that most people break down and give up their journals in the first few months, if not weeks, after the fair start has been had. Most people have not the opportunities of Sewall or Greville; most people lead quiet lives, and mix little with the great ones of the world and have but little to record out of the way or important. Yet every man's life is of importance to him and to his. Only one must not attempt too much. Charles Mathews failed because, characteristically enough, he made a great flourish at the outset. Harley failed as dismally, because, although he kept on heroically, he never set down what was really important, even to him. A country schoolteacher, leading a humdrum life in a little village, does not need a diary large enough to set down the doings of court and king; but she will probably find much pleasure in jotting down a brief record of her daily life. And our aim is to suggest how this brief record may best be written, with the least expenditure of time and with the utmost benefit in result.

It is not necessary to buy a diary. Any blank book will do. The date can be written at the head of each day's entry. This has the advantage of allowing a long and elaborate entry whenever anything happens to demand it. But it is convenient to have a diary regularly laid off, with dates properly printed and a space for each and every date. There is something in the assured and stable look of a well-arranged blank diary which sustains the beginner in the task of keeping it up. No one who has kept a diary through a year ever needs help to keep at it the next year and the year after. The habit once formed, it is really easier to keep a diary than not. This, of course, is on the supposition that the diary is what has been suggested—a brief record. Indeed, the record can hardly be too brief. I have seen a diary full of interesting personal details, the page of which was not larger than two inches by three, and each page contained the record of a full week of seven days. This, however, is a little too small. Perhaps the best book for a beginner has a page about four inches high and three inches broad, and gives two pages (facing each other) to a week,— Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday on one page, and Friday, Saturday, and Sunday on the opposite page; this allows a double space for Sunday. In such a diary there is a space a little more than an inch high for every week-day.

Now, as to the things to be set down. Bearing in mind the fact that the diary is to be a brief record, the first question to be considered is—"What happenings in your life are worth recording?" And the answer to this varies with the individual. Every person must determine for himself or herself what he or she deems of most importance. A few general suggestions may be made. Most people take an interest in the weather: it may be well therefore to note first the extreme of temperature, with the general state of the weather. It is advisable to specify all visits paid or received and all letters written or read. Then it is well to record any special payment of money and any change in health, and lastly, to make note of the books read, setting down the day of beginning and ending. For example:

JAN. 1st, 1883, Monday.
36°, slight snow-storm. Went to Newsboys' Lodging House. Sent $50 ck. to Children's Aid Society. Made eleven calls. Dined with father.
Read Stedman's "Poe."

That of course is the record of a gentleman's New Year's day. Here is a lady's entry later in the year:

APRIL 13th, 1883, Friday.
51°, disagreeable wind. Caught slight cold. Called on Dr. From Mary; to her. Mrs. Brown called.
Began Aldrich's "Story of Bad Boy."

The words "from Mary; to her," mean, of course, that a letter was received and answered. Obviously there are days when the record is brief to the point of meagerness and there are others when of necessity it must be full and ample. When a lady is going to Europe, the entry of a day on shipboard will probably be short. But, on her arrival in Paris, it may extend to any limit.

JUNE 20th, 1883, Wednesday.
On board SS. "Gallia." Run 343. Head winds. Heavy rain. Quite sea-sick. In berth all day.
Tried to read Trollope's "Eye for an Eye."

JULY 16th, 1883, Monday.
Paris. Continental Hotel. Warm and clear. From Mother and Mary. To Father and John. Mr. Whyte and M. Blacque called. Went to Cluny Museum and the Bon Marché. Tried on at Worth's. Dined at the Lion d'Or. Saw Coquelin in "l'Aventurière" at the Théâtre Français. Headache went away.

A diary with memorandums as concise as these is no tax on the time. As it can be written in a minute every night before going to bed, it is no tax on the memory. It costs neither time nor trouble nor money. It may save all three. After keeping one for more than ten years, I can testify to the great advantage of having a brief record.

Arthur Penn.