

## TALKS WITH WOMEN.

LETTERS TO MY DAUGHTER.

BY JENNY JUNE.

## GOING INTO SOCIETY.

**P**ROTESTS against customs to which, at the same time, we yield a blind obedience, are very little worth. Simple adherence to the principles which form the rule of our own conduct, irrespective of the verdict of society, is much better.

Every one laughs at Society; every one abuses Society; yet few who are amenable to its criticism, dare do anything which Society does not sanction.

Among other absurdities is the popular fiction that young girls know nothing of Society until they are launched upon it at a certain age, and that, from this time until they marry, they must subordinate all other claims to those of Society, or rather, in plain English, to their chances of securing the attentions of young gentlemen, with a view to matrimony.

Such ideas are false, such a course is degrading; it is subversive of honor and dignity, and it leaves out of sight altogether the human uses which Society was intended to answer, or subordinates them to selfish, individual instincts.

Society is the outgrowth of the family; its use is to broaden our sympathies, expand our ideas, and extend our efforts beyond the limits of our own household circle; and to use it merely as the instrument of personal gratification and vulgar display, or as a trap to catch a husband, is evidence of gross ignorance, or a very low conception of life, and of our duties towards all those who share with us its gifts and its responsibilities.

The first glimpse of Society which girls truly and wisely obtain is in their own home—in the house of their parents—which should be a centre for the interchange of such thought, the development of such ideas, the strengthening of such sympathies, as are most in accordance with them and their surroundings.

The first glimpse, beyond her own home, which the girl naturally gets of Society, is in the houses

of the friends of her parents, each one of which is a world in miniature, and prepares her for that larger experience to which she is admitted when observation has increased her knowledge of human motive, and the development of moral power has crystallized impulse into principle, and made it the guide of life.

But under none of these aspects does Society become a mistress to whom all other considerations must be subordinated.

Under no circumstances does it become necessary to sacrifice to it any higher duty, or in other words, any ordinary daily duty, which is part of the routine of family household life, and upon which the comfort of the family, or any member of it, depends.

It is only in very exceptional cases that the cultivation of Society needs to be made a business of, and it is never so in the case of young girls, whose inexperience unfits them for it, whose duties are waiting for them, and which duties ought to be of the first importance.

These consist mainly of caring for and brightening the lives of those who have struggled and labored for their sakes, and of preparations for the future, of patient effort and willing endurance, such as falls to the lot of most women.

Nor are they to consider this necessity exceptionally hard—it is the lot of life—it comes in some form or other to those who are seemingly favored, as well as those who are neglected by fortune, and is either borne or fought against, or made the excuse for perpetual complainings by all.

There is no such human life—as it has been the habit of novelists to portray—in which existence is a perpetual round of gay *fêtes* and summer pleasures, broken in upon by a few mishaps, which all end in marriage, as does also the interest which attaches to the parties according to this code.

Marriage is the beginning of living, not its termination. It grows out of the instinct for companionship, and should not condemn either of those who are party to it, to isolation.

The deeper interests of life grow out of the struggles of men and women for bread, for home, for children, and also for money and power; not out of whether Miss So-and-so can coax a dress out of her papa, or attend Mrs. So-and-so's party, and how often Mr. Jones or Mr. Robinson calls upon her.

Undoubtedly those little preliminary facts are important to her, but they should not interfere with her duty to others: they are not the corner-stones upon which the fabric of our social life depends.

The modern method of launching girls upon society, and allowing them half a dozen seasons more or less of social dissipation, before entering upon the duties of life, is utterly absurd and highly injurious.

The interval between girlhood and womanhood is a golden time, which should be improved to the utmost by acquiring knowledge of useful arts, of sweet household ways, and giving something back for the love and care which have guarded and guided so far, and are still engaged in the task of providing for and protecting.

The "society-girl," on the contrary, is of necessity idle and selfish. Her nights are spent in heated rooms, her mornings in bed; her afternoons in the street, parading the last cut of polonaise or the newest Grecian bend. The result is despicable, and at the same time pitiable. All that is brightest and best and noblest in her withers, and perhaps is lost forever; her health is sacrificed, and her future rendered valueless to herself and injurious to others.

Not that the girl has no part to play in society, but it should be a subordinate one. Society, to be worthy of the name, should consist of the mingling together of the best, and most opposite elements, led by experienced women who have the happy art of putting all these elements in solution, and making a draught refreshing, cheering, inspiring alike to the philosopher, the man of science, the poet, the artist, the busy woman, and the woman of fashion.

In a circle like this, the girl, if she knows how to take advantage of her opportunities, receives an important part of her education. She gets the result of the study, the labor, the experiences of the best, and the wisest, and she gives them in return association with her youth, her freshness, her interest in what no longer possesses for them the charm of novelty.

A woman of society must possess wealth, tact, social position, intelligence, quick perception, and rather ability to comprehend and appreciate the ideas of others, than originality of her own.

Originality generally means assertiveness and individuality, to an extent which hardly admits of that complete self-forgetfulness re-

quisite to success as a society leader. Few indeed have achieved this success. Madame Recamier is one of those whose name has passed into history, simply, and solely on account of her genius in this respect.

Married to a man much older than herself, who gave her the most perfect freedom, as well as his entire respect and confidence, she added wealth, and the dignity of a commanding position, to beauty, a quick intelligence, and remarkable amiability of character. That was all; yet she was honored by sages and potentates, counted her friends among all classes of people, and has been more talked about, and written about, than almost any other woman that ever lived.

Few women are born to the peculiar circumstances requisite to constitute a queen of society, and out of the number only a small minority possess the sympathy, the kindness of heart, the appreciation of ideas, the intuitive knowledge of human nature, necessary to harmonize different elements, and make them show their brightest side. Alice Cary, the good, possessed these characteristics. She had not great wealth, she had not leisure, but she had an all-embracing kindness, and the warmest appreciation of whatever seemed to her noble and praiseworthy. It was this that made her house for years the cherished resort of men and women of the most varied culture and activities. She made no special effort. She did not dine or wine her guests, but, with the help of her sister Phoebe, in the midst of her constant literary work, and the harassing inroads of a mortal disease—she kept her house, and her heart open to any who could find a natural place there. She created an atmosphere of warmth, in which the best things grew and flourished, in which the gifted found recognition and companionship, and the discouraged hope, and consolation.

To have attended for any length of time her réunions, where nothing more than a modest walking-dress was necessary in the way of toilette—distinguished women, and the wives of distinguished men, setting an example in this respect, where visitors slipped quietly in and out gravitating easily and naturally to their place—would indeed have been an education to any girl, if not in the technical branches of the schools, in grace, in charity, in truth, in purity, in the arts of a gentle life, in the cul-

tivation of the highest form of womanhood.

Compare society such as this with the vapid gathering of a couple of hundred newly fledged young men and women whose interest centres directly in themselves and their belongings, remotely in the supper, and the chances for leading in the "german!"

It would be much more advantageous to young girls on entering society, if they were less anxious to display their own attractions and acquirements, and more desirous of learning from what they see that is new around them. Even the customs of an enlarged circle are not wholly familiar to them, and they should seek to acquire ease and self-possession in the practice of them, before trying to become prominent, or venturing outside of them in any odd or eccentric way. Ignorance sometimes tries to make itself respectable by affecting oddity, by professing contempt for usages of which it knows nothing. This is very shallow; there always is, or has been a good reason for an established custom. Persons who live under different circumstances cannot always see it, but to condemn it without knowing, only advertises their ignorance to those whose experience has taught them the necessity or propriety of the observance.

Not that I would advise a slavish adherence to blind or unnecessary forms, but I would advise acquaintance with them, with the condition of society which produced them, before condemning them. When the people who are bound by them have outgrown them, or find them no longer what they want, they are dropped without difficulty, like an old and worn-out garment.

When I was a girl in the country, I thought there was a virtuous necessity in breakfasting at seven, dining at twelve, and taking tea at six. Late dinners had a flavor of profligacy and dissipation, incompatible with ideas of quiet family life and domestic happiness. I indulged, like many others, in profound reflections upon the wickedness of city-living, until experience taught me that our customs, primarily, grow out of our necessities, and that men and women may be conscientious, and try to do their duty, even though their dinner hour be six, or seven, instead of twelve o'clock.

The point, therefore, which I wish to make is this: hold in re-

serve your opinions and your judgments; do not be eager to express them for the sake of showing your smartness. The smile which greets you, and which you consider one of admiration, is more likely to be one of pity or indulgence.

I remember two inglorious occasions, when I expressed myself to my own intense after-mortification and shame. One was, after first listening to an opera; the second, when trying first to read Shakespeare. Unfortunately, I did not begin with Hamlet, which is, to most persons, the key to the sublimer glories of the Bard of Avon, at least it proved so in my case, but drifted aimlessly about, and finally set him down as vulgar. Yes, I, a girl of fifteen, considered Shakespeare unfit reading for young ladies of refinement and taste, and did not hesitate to express my opinion to that effect. Of what constituted his genius and his greatness, I had hardly an idea; I saw only peculiarities of expression, which belonged to his age, and were part of the language of the time.

So of opera, I was too ignorant of art to understand and appreciate the music; so I echoed an opinion which I had heard, declaring opera to be a systematic attempt to render musical sounds hideous! Yet a recognition of the innate power, and beauty, and grandeur of the work rebuked me while I said it, and made me wish I had been silent.

It is common with men and women both, to regret lost opportunities for saying what they consider clever things; but if they have no more cause to regret having said foolish ones, it is happy for them.

I have heard my own crude and unformed opinions echoed many times since by persons whose age entitled them to respect; but the expression of such opinions is only an evidence, to more cultivated minds, of their ignorance and want of power to comprehend.

While, therefore, it is not necessary to accept and admire anything because other people accept and admire it, yet in instances where it has received high and universal appreciation, reserve a critical estimate until you are able to give a reason that is based upon your knowledge, not your ignorance of the subject.

Young girls are very apt to be the reflectors of the opinions they hear, without much reference to their soundness. They wish to please—to be considered bright and vivacious, and echo what they

think "smart," without thought or even care for its correctness.

But this is an evidence of want of inherent truthfulness, as well as superficiality, of which they would be ashamed if they could see it as others see it. Form as many opinions as you please, but be careful about expressing, and do not let them become prejudices to stand in the way of acquiring knowledge which may induce you to change them.

Moreover, if you meet a person whose habits of life or study have made them acquainted with a particular subject, embrace the opportunity to learn as much about it as you can. People are always interested in their own hobbies, and will consider you much more agreeable as a listener than a talker, while you will be acquiring a fund of useful information, or adding to the stock of facts which will serve you for future reference, and make you something more than one of the small talkers of a brainless Society.

## Diamonds of Thought.

**DRAWING A BEE LINE.**—This is a native Americanism. When a bee has filled itself with honey and wax, it is supposed to go home to deposit its gatherings by the shortest route, flying to its nest as a bullet leaves the rifle for the target. The honey hunters in the backwoods are said to find the hollow trees in which the wild bees have their combs by watching and tracking the flight of a homeward-bound bee. To "draw a bee line," therefore, means to go straight to one's destination.

**THE RICH AND THE POOR.**—What is wealth? Wealth is whatever men can realize from nature for their sustenance and enjoyment. Labor is what realizes it. Prudence saves from it, and the savings become capital, which helps to extend and multiply the operations of labor, and thus creates more capital. The wealthy are composed of those who have inherited property from others, those who have acquired it accidentally, and those who have realized it for themselves. The poor, in like manner, are composed of those who have inherited poverty from others, those who have become poor through accident, and those who have brought poverty upon themselves. The most familiar mode of producing poverty is by idleness. A man will not work; he realizes no wealth; he is of course poor. Or he squanders in some absurd manner the earnings which he does realize, and thus remains equally poor as if he did not work. The poverty arising from idleness will only be curable, as it has ever been since the beginning of the world, by industry. That which comes from wastefulness will only be cured by economy.

**THE MOTHER OF A FAMILY.**—It is an astonishing fact (says Mr. Herbert Spencer) that though on the treatment of offspring depend their lives or deaths and their moral welfare or ruin, yet not one word of instruction of offspring is ever given to

those who will by-and-by be parents. Consider the young mother and her nursery legislation. But a few years ago she was at school, where her memory was crammed with words, names, and dates, and her reflective faculties scarcely in the slightest degree exercised. . . . The intervening years have been passed in practising music, in fancy-work, in novel-reading, and in party-going, no thought having been given to the grave responsibilities of maternity, and scarcely any of that solid, intellectual culture obtained which would be some preparation for such responsibilities. And now see her, with an unfolding human character committed to her charge; see how profoundly ignorant she is of the phenomena with which she has to deal, undertaking to do that which can be done but imperfectly with the aid of the profoundest knowledge.

## Our Spice Box.

WHAT comes once in a minute, twice in a moment, and once in a man's life? The letter M.

It has been decided that a cook's perquisites do not extend to the ownership of her master when he comes home in the wet, and is dripping.

"WANTED, by a hearty boy of fourteen, a severe beating to her husband. He understands the business."—That is a well-ordered advertisement.

**A HINT TO WIVES.**—A lady administered a severe beating to her husband the other night over the banisters, with a broom. She made him believe that she took him for a burglar.

**NO ROOM.**—A five-year-old, staying at the seaside, and obliged to sleep three in a bed, narrated her dream, which, being unfinished, she accounted for fully by not having room to dream the rest of it.

**A WASHERWOMAN'S CERTIFICATE.**—A defendant in a New York court produced a letter from a washerwoman testifying to his good character. This witty stroke of flat irony produced his release.

**WARMING.**—One cold winter morning a very pretty girl stopped and bought a paper of a ragged little Irish newsboy. "Poor little fellow!" said she, "ain't you very cold?" "I was, ma'am, a minute ago," was the reply. The young lady bought his whole supply at double the ordinary prices.

**LOGIC.**—"Eat your bread, Charles—do not fling it away," said a learned and good judge to one of his family the other day; adding, "for who knows, in the vicissitudes of this life, if you may not some day; want it?" The old gentleman had to cough, look learned, and go away, when his youngster answered, more logically than his parent, "If I eat it, how can I have it when I want it?" This is the result of a learned judge having children.

**A HINT TO AUTHORS.**—A would-be author was advised to try the effect of one of his compositions on the folks at home, without confessing its authorship. His mother fell asleep, his sister groaned, his brother asked him to "shut up," as they had had quite a sufficient shower of words without wit; and at last his wife tapped him upon the shoulder, with the sweetest possible "Won't that do?" He then saw how it was himself, buried his portfolio, recovered his digestion, and has been a happy man ever since.