

## A GLEANER.

By MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS.

" WHY do you stand by the stile, lassie?  
Why do you wait by the stile?  
Is your bundle of ears so heavy  
'Tis needful to rest awhile?"

" Nay, I've carried heavier burdens,  
And found them lighter loads;  
But I'm weary of stooping and gleaning  
Fields nigh as bare as the roads.

" I've followed the sickle-armed reapers—  
Picked up rare bundles of corn.  
Yon new machine leaves nothing to glean,  
Though one toils from early morn.

" So I've left the labour to others  
Who care to pick scattered ears;  
I've no patience to linger for nothing  
'Mong stubble as sharp as spears."

" My lass, if you've patience to loiter  
Idle and cross by the stile,  
Whilst leaving your chances to others,  
Who meet their toil with a smile,

" You will find a burden to carry  
That grows with the growing years—  
A sheaf of ill-habits and tempers,  
A harvest gathered with tears."



## ANSWERING LETTERS.

OF all the minor social civilities, not one, perhaps, is so much neglected as the simple courtesy of answering letters, and it is a remarkable fact that, although other less important matters are punctiliously attended to in society—or if disregarded the delinquent would be made to feel the penalty by the proverbial "cold shoulder" or the "cut direct"—yet careless correspondents escape without reproof; for, excepting in the case of a relative or very intimate friend, it would be considered an affront to be reminded that a letter had remained unanswered, or to hint that any inconvenience had been caused by undue delay. Formal calls must be returned, "thanks for kind inquiries" must be sent, and all such little attentions are scrupulously observed; but the forgetful or idle correspondent may fail to answer letters, and no notice must be taken of the omission without the risk of giving dire offence. Thus, the real delinquents in such a case, as in most other cases, escape blame; but the sufferers, who are put to much inconvenience, dare not complain.

It is worth remark, as throwing some little light on this subject, that, while some persons have very great facility in the use of the pen, and can readily express their thoughts on paper, yet others, though fluent in conversation, find great difficulty in constructing a few sentences in writing; they will take any amount of trouble of another kind to avoid the task of penning a few words. People have been known to walk a long distance in order to accept in person a friendly invitation, rather than write a brief note in reply.

But setting aside such extreme cases—of positive repugnance to the use of the pen—there are individuals in whom mere indolence is often a cause for neglect of letter-writing;

a habit of procrastination is thus formed, so that from day to day the duty is put off, till at length the convenient excuse occurs that it is then "too late" to reply. People who are thus habitually indifferent to the convenience of others, are wanting in that most valuable quality, sympathetic imagination, which would enable them to fancy, and almost realise, the feelings of their correspondents. How little such indifferent people think of the daily, hourly waiting and watching for the answer that never comes. The anxious mind fancies that illness may be a cause of silence, or the thought may arise that some unintentional offence may have been conveyed in an unanswered letter; and all such annoying doubts might be avoided by a few lines, if only to acknowledge the receipt of a letter, which acknowledgment is undoubtedly required, not only as a mere act of courtesy, but as a duty.

I do not wish to make an apparently trivial matter too serious by carrying the question into the domain of social ethics, but I think it may reasonably be asked whether thoughtless and indolent individuals do not commit a wrong by causing needless inconvenience and anxiety to those with whom they associate; and in the matter of letter-writing a small expenditure of time and trouble would suffice to avoid the evils described.

Postcards ought to be a great boon to lazy correspondents, but, strange to say, it is the most tardy and unwilling letter-writers who seem to have the strongest prejudice against the use of postcards; it is true they are sometimes misused, but that is not a good argument against their proper use; everything is liable to abuse. Some of the devices that are adopted for the purpose of baffling curiosity are questionable; the best plan is to

write a plain message straight off, as brief as possible, and so worded that no unnecessary information can be afforded to servants and others not concerned. For instance, a lazy or a busy writer might say, "Your letter received, will attend to *your request*;" or, "Will write more fully in a day or two." Such a message on a postcard would be a very good substitute for a letter *pro tem*.

Correspondents, of course, always arrange between themselves the method, whether secret or open, most convenient to them to carry on. The object of the suggestion is to put in a plea for the postcard as a very convenient institution, and to show that the prejudice which is entertained against the system may be chiefly due to the objectionable way in which messages are sometimes written, and such objections could be removed by the exercise of a little thought and care on the part of the senders.

Of course, numbers of letters are received that do not require any notice or acknowledgment—not even by postcard. Such are applications for votes, charitable appeals for money, etc., etc., and, unless when a stamped envelope is enclosed, those may be ignored. There are, however, letters which do require some answer and yet remain unnoticed. In pity for the writers of unanswered letters, these remarks have been penned.

It is said that "consideration for the feelings of others is the essence of true politeness." So, testing the subject by that rule, it may be insisted on that the courtesy of answering letters should be made a point of etiquette of as much importance as some other social civilities which are punctiliously observed by those who claim to belong to "polite society."

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