

## ABIGAIL SHOUT'S PROTEST.

BY C. A. C. H.

I AM Abigail Shout, and this is my testimony. I have been wronged, robbed, cheated, defrauded. Not once, or twice, or thrice, but scores of times. Not by tradesmen, or beggars, or brigands. Not by hotel-keepers, ticket vendors, or the gentlemen who will take you anywhere in the city for one dollar, and then charges five. Nor yet by rich relations.

No, not by any or all of these; that is, it is not of these I complain. True, they have each a fashion of their own of taking money out of your pocket and putting it into their own without giving what, to you, seems a fair equivalent; but you expected *that* if you had anything to do with them, besides, what they take from you profits them, and that reconciles you partially, and does not interfere with the laws of equilibrium, for you could do the same thing by them if you had a mind to be mean enough.

But all is different in this case. There is not the least chance for a tit-for-tat game. The parties are respectable and respected. Everybody looks up to them and envies them, I suppose. I know I do—or *did*. Indeed, so much have I stood in awe of them hitherto that, had I been brought face to face with one, I should not have dared to say my soul was my own; and as to writing to one, truly, in my own mind, I should have deserved a ticket of admission to the Asylum for Idiots and Feeble Minded Youth for the bare suggestion. But all that is passed. There is a point where forbearance ceases to be a virtue, and I have reached it. Had I the chiefest of these offenders here at my elbow, I am sure I should express my sentiments far more freely than I am doing now. Not that I am feeling more outraged than usual, on the contrary, the aggravation has oftentimes been greater, and of course my indignation proportionably greater. But I have found a place to strike, a vulnerable point in their armor, and to that I put my pop-gun and fire away, certain of hitting one, perhaps more of the covey. To have done this before, would have been firing in air so far above me, so unapproachable seemed they, and even within reach, what were my puerile weapons against their mail-clad? But now, as Paddy says, "I think I have 'em."

You see, I am talking of authors—those authors who write books for the million and adulterate their English with whole pages of French, and Latin, and Greek, and I don't know what else, for I don't know a word of either, nor one from another when I see it. (Oh, yes, like Gough, I know "*ignoramus*," and am sure I shall get the term applied to me for my confession, but I don't care.) The practice has spoilt many an otherwise rich treat for me, and I doubt not for many another. I venture to say that not one in a hundred of

the whole number who read these books know anything of what are called the "dead languages" (I wish in conscience they *were* dead and *buried*), and it makes a delightful break to come upon two or three pages of this nummery right at a place where the interest of the chapter—perhaps of the whole plot—culminates, or just at the moment when you feel like embracing the author for the wonderful assimilation of tastes and feelings with your own humble self. I have a distinct recollection of a splendid volume from a circulating library spinning across the room into the wash-basin for no other offence. There was no one present, and I was sick and nervous, or I should not have done it. Now I only lay the book away face downwards, wide open (I know it is not the right way, but I don't care, it's good enough for *that* book), and, leaning back, ask languidly for the smelling-bottle, "I'm very tired."

But the other day an attendant, who has no business to know so much, reversed the book, and glancing at a page beginning with "*Ce en est que pas un je homme*" (I quote from memory), smiled back impertinently, as much as to say, "I knew it, you've come across something you don't understand." So I must contrive some other way to conceal my anger and chagrin.

My chiefest consolations under these trials is in making a fresh resolution at each recurrence, that I will *never buy, borrow, or draw from the library, another book containing a line of this gibberish that does not in brackets, supplement, or addenda, convert said gibberish into intelligible English*. I will not be so imposed upon. I cannot risk the spoiling of a naturally sweet temper for all the pleasure or profit to be derived from a perusal of these works. There are writers enough, and good ones, too, who are exempt from this baneful habit. Hereafter, any who take this way to advertise the extent and variety of their acquirements, do so under my solemn protest, and with the full assurance that they will have one the less reader, perhaps *buyer*. (While I think of it, let me ask your "reviewer" to state, by a single line, whether the book under notice is purely English, or a mixture of English, Chinese, and Arabian. Any other paper or magazine doing this and sending me a marked copy, will be entitled to an article from my pen of not more than twenty-four columns, and as much less as I please and the editors desire.) If this does not answer, and my feelings go on gathering intensity and force in anything like the ratio of the past two years, I shall get up a Mutual Indignation Society with by-laws adapted solely to the furtherance of this plan.

Ah! I remember, as if it were but yesterday, the keenness of the disappointment with which I stopped at the letter, in the hated hieroglyphics of Monsieur Héger to Mr. Brontë. That



Charlotte's school *devoirs* were not translated was bad enough, but this was worse. My sympathies had been so aroused, and I had kept so close in her wake through all, that the dead girl seemed a living, palpable presence, whose hand I might take, and whose ears I might reach with words of appreciation and praise. No line of hers in English escaped me, and then to come upon these blank, blind paragraphs—it throws everything out of harmony and me into paroxysms. Did you ever come suddenly on a broad river rolling bridgeless between you and the particular point you had walked miles and miles to reach? Did you ever speculate two hours on what you *could* eat if you had it, and when, after much trouble it was procured and directions given, and your anticipations raised to the highest, go down to find that instead of a delicious roast there is a tasteless stew—something your stomach would *never* manage in its *anaconda-est* days? Do you remember how you felt at the end of a certain chapter of a certain tale, to be told that this story would be discontinued while the author went to the locality (a great way off) to gather incidents and *et ceteras*? or how sorrow for the death of the dear Thackeray was mingled largely with disappointment that *you* would never get the rest of *that* story? Well, all of these things are tame compared with the emotions with which I turn over a leaf to find it blotted with this foreign *diablerie*.

It must be that my stupidity, thus far, has saved me from insanity. I think I came very near to it, however, when in "The Minister's Wooing" I fell on that flighty French woman's phrases. I flew to the dictionary, but found no relief. I could not go to the minister or the doctor, for I feared the sentiments were not—exactly—somehow—quite—explainable in English, even in a book, much more *that* way. The minister's wife was as ignorant as I, and the only one I knew who *could* help me out of the difficulty, was in a seminary twelve miles away. True, there were, among my acquaintances, several who had been graduated at popular institutions, but in the interim they had managed to graduate so many of their acquirements, that their explanations were about as lucid and satisfactory as the working out of a dark algebraical problem to one who never knew + from —. And to this day I find myself wishing that I knew the meaning of *one* of those expressions of madame's; and wondering *what* was that proposition of Monsieur Héger's relative to his interesting pupil.

These "exercises" of B. F.'s in the Breakfast Table Talks did not exercise me much, but I *do* think the autocrat would have done a good thing to have left them out altogether.

(Wait! Let me get my breath a little. I have criticized *him*—the raciest, pithiest, wittiest, most genial and social of all our writers—the Thackeray of America, with more of his

playful moods, fewer of his cynical. But I couldn't help it. The truth must be told. He is among those who have offended one of the *little ones*, and I herewith hang the millstone about his neck. If he can swim the sea of popular favor with *such a weight*—well, if not, he has but to retrace, forsake the error of his ways, and he shall be restored to his place in my heart, and in the hearts of all his people.)

I don't know—not to be too exacting or dictatorial, I think I will relent so far as to allow the use of the phrases found in the back part of Webster's Elementary Spelling Book beginning with *Ad captandam vulgus*, and ending with *viva voce*. These are enough for all intents and purposes, and there is no excuse for any one, who knows how to read at all, not being acquainted with them. For myself, to give writers a little wider margin for displaying their powers, I would not object to including the "Collection of Words, Phrases, and Quotations from Foreign Languages," found in the large dictionaries, for, thanks to a friend, I have one; but I remember that there are hundreds of readers who are not so fortunate—intelligent, discriminating readers, whose mental natures clamor as loudly for the aliment found in good books as their physical natures for the literal "staff of life"—readers who were not themselves writers only because circumstances put the needle or the hammer in their hands instead of the pen—readers whose pre-expressed opinions and criticisms on a new production often tally remarkably with those standing highest in authority on the same subject, in short, *thinking* readers, and all of them, so far as heard from, of one mind in regard to having this senseless stuff thrust upon them in lieu of the good honest English sentences which would have been so much easier and better for all concerned.

When I unfold a piece of fresh print (calico I mean), and find running all through it a line of discoloration, I take it back to the shopman, and silently, with the blandest of faces, spread it out before him. "Yes, I see," he says, bending close—to the fabric, not to me. "It's not much, though; good many folks wouldn't notice it; material isn't injured, *only a little blot in the figure*." "Just so," I reply; "but it's damaged. It doesn't suit me," and, shoving it quietly aside, proceed to select another. Now this is precisely what I mean to do in the future with my booksellers. I go in and call for a work whose fame is in all the papers, and which, from the notices I have read, I have come to consider the one altogether desirable; but on opening it I find scattered here and there a "*Non c'était*," or a "*Je la crois*," and by and by a whole page of untranslated jargon. There's a *blot in the figure*. I shut the book, and, choking down my rage and disappointment, inquire for "Baxter's Saint's Rest," or "Pilgrim's Progress," determined to have something I can understand, and that will help



me to put behind me this haunting adversary, this man of sin that is forever bobbing up at my elbow when he is least wanted, and when I am most ashamed of being seen in his company. Certainly, if, in asking pardon, it avails anything to offer extenuating circumstances, to plead the great provocations under which the sin was committed, then may I hope for mercy, for never was poor creature so oft and so sorely tried.

Then, dear friends, good friends, kind friends, who have been permitted to drink deep draughts of the Pyrean waters, consider a little us whose lips have but touched the goblet's rim, and who, with thirst all unquenched, stand timidly back, willing you should have all, asking only that in the delicate cups offered us at which we may sip—each drop to be transferred into a smile or a tear, and brought back as incense to your altars—there be mingled no bitter dregs. Babes are fed on milk, not meat. Give us, who are neither babes nor men, the cream of your store—your best, diluted only so much as will suit our undeveloped organizations, and that without adding any nauseous compound.

It is an injudicious nurse that would force lumps of fat down the throat of her charge because fat is good for *her*, forsooth! It may be good for her, but can benefit the other only through the increased vitality and strength which she derives from its use, and which in turn is imparted in imperceptible but none the less efficacious doses to the patient.

Give us books, good books, and a good many of them. The public is clamorous. But I beseech of you let them be English books. Let them be books that are intelligent—I do not say educated. Unfortunately there are many intelligent who are not educated, and, still more unfortunately, many educated who are not intelligent! I say, let them be books that an intelligent reader can understand to the minutest line, without any other key to the unlocking of the mystery than may be had in a thorough understanding of our own legitimate, comprehensive, and beautiful language.

A popular professor once wrote on the margin of a pupil's exercise to this effect: "Never express your own ideas in a foreign language unless there are absolutely no words in our own that will answer. In that case *make some*." Of course there are maxims and proverbs, sayings and saws in various tongues, so familiar that he who runs may read; but most of them are translated or translatable, and so not to be allowed except in cases where the plain English would be inadmissible on the score of its vulgarity, which, I am told, is often the case.

There are others less popular which carry their interpretation on their faces so plainly as to make it impossible that any be deceived in their meaning; but they are a perfect nuisance

to one who attempts to read aloud on account of the difficulty of correctly speaking them, and an incorrect pronunciation is painful alike to both reader and hearer. It is a poor page that needs them for an ornament, and I pronounce them all an unmitigated "bother."

One of these phrases comes now to my mind as being the particular one which my reader with a mania for foreign interpolations has doubtless, ere this, repeated as a sneering annotation to this protest of mine. *Ce monde est plein de fous*.\* Admitted. But here is one just as true: *Interdum stultus bene loquitur*.† What will you do with that? I know I am likely to be laughed at—may get, as expressed in homely phrase, my labor for my pains. But never mind. I have not forgotten how Rome was saved! Who knows what my feeble cackle may avail? If it banish, in ever so small a degree, this blot from the pages designed, not for the *litterati*, but for the masses, then shall I be well repaid and sure of the thanks of several thousands of, at present, exasperated readers. At all events I have spoken and cleared my conscience. That's some comfort. If you don't believe it, try it and see.

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LOVE.

BY EVA M.—

OFT stretch we arms unto some vain ideal  
Empurpled in our dreams; would clasp it, but,  
Ere we can feel the warm heart beat, 'tis gone,  
And leaveth our mad souls to cry alway  
"Come hither!" to a dream that never comes.  
And yet the world moves coldly on; knows not,  
Heeds not if known, how many a weary heart  
Beats to the dull, cold measure of despair,  
Striving with broken wing to leave the vale,  
But to fall back into God's open arms  
A helpless child.

So doth fond woman's heart  
Make idols of her loves that she may kneel  
And worship them, and round each uncouth fault  
Doth wrap the sheil'ring mantle of her love;  
Makes vice concealed to more conspicuous grace  
Add lustre new. If he do sin, she cries,  
With doting love, "To err is human;" but  
*Repentance* makes the fault divine; if man  
Ne'er sinned, then was *forgiveness* never known.  
So blindly dreams she they are gods, and wakes  
To find them—men. \* \* \* \* \*  
We never know what strong links ever bind  
Us to the loved till they are gone; the tree  
That blooms beneath the sun ne'er ripens fruit  
Till frost shall come, and leaves be fallen; *Then*  
Naked bough with bending fruit is clad;  
So live and grow our hearts. Through summer day  
We sing till autumn comes. Then sigh our hearts;  
For with her fervid rays our summer sun  
Looks down on us. Now blushes on our cheek  
Love's rich fulfilment, and within our hearts  
Deeper the strain, and mournfully sublime  
Its death-song o'er the grave of buried love.

\* This world is full of fools.

† Sometimes a fool speaks to the purpose.