

CROAKERS.

A HIGHLY proper, and pious, and thoroughly unexceptionable person is our worthy friend, Mrs. Rueful—but oh! the depressing influence of her presence! Unquestionably she must carry an invisible supply of "low spirits" bottled up and stored in her reticule. The cork is extracted by the first word she utters, and the *blue demons* escape, and complacently light down upon her neighbours' hearts, and grow heavier and heavier, where they sit, until contentment, and hope, and mirth, are crushed out by their incubus-like weight. Nor do the impish band take their leave when she departs—once introduced, they are apt to haunt the new abode until it becomes a familiar resting-place.

Well may one dread the visitations of good Mrs. Rueful, who leaves such enemies to peace behind her! She glides into your home with tread so light that you think, perforce, upon noiseless footfalls in the chambers of sickness and sorrow. The steady gloom of her countenance reminds you of an autumn sky, when the clouds thicken and darken with the menace of "falling weather" of incalculable duration. She takes your hand with a startling gravity, sits down beside you with a sigh, looks inquiringly and compassionately into your face with misty, smileless eyes. She speaks to you in a voice, soft and plaintive, that often drops into a dolorous whisper, and gives you a sensation of vague uneasiness. Her touch sends through your veins a cold, foreboding shudder—her gaze communicates an indefinable conviction that you must be an object of pity. You may not exactly "think of your sins" when Mrs. Rueful appears, but you involuntarily think of your *griefs*—if you have any—and who has none?

Mrs. Rueful is a prophetic reader of faces, and she is constantly discovering some direful presage in those of her acquaintances. She groans at the sight of a countenance beaming with gaiety, for she is certain it will shortly be clouded with sorrow. She dreads to hear a joyous laugh, for she knows that, in the natural course of events, it must be followed by a sob of anguish. She eschews mirth, because it is the forerunner of affliction. If she sees a friend in a high state of health, she solemnly assures him that he is threatened with a fit of illness. In vain the amazed hearer declares that he never felt better in his life, she tells him that is precisely the way people feel just before they are stricken down; and finally persuades him into fancying that the rose on his cheek is a hectic flush—his robustness the sign of alarming plethora—his vivacity the excitement of fever—and his general healthfulness a premonitory symptom of disease.

Mrs. Rueful always has a "pet sorrow" of her own—she could not live without one! She nurses this darling grief—hugs it to her heart—tricks it out with lugubrious semblances—parades it before the public eye—exaggerates it—and now and then changes it for a lesser or a greater trouble—but without an *incurable woe* she could not exist! Her strong-minded, matter-of-fact friends affirm that her mighty miseries resemble the sorrows of my Lord Plumcake—that a goodly share of this world's blessings has been awarded her—and that she ought to be a very grateful, contented, happy person; but Mrs. Rueful is vexed to the heart at such an assertion. How can she be happy, she inquires, in a tone of irritable reproach, when she knows that countless calamities are in store for her?—when she is haunted by hydra-headed shadows of anticipated misfortune?—by numberless swords suspended from hairs over her hapless head?—by perpetual earthquakes ominously rumbling beneath her very feet?

Mrs. Rueful's sun is under a constant eclipse, and she fairly revels in the dark side of creation. If a friend is ill, her imagination unceremoniously lays him in his coffin; for no figure of Hope sits at the gate of her heart to open its portals to the possibility of his recovery. And when, now and then, her prediction is verified, and a beloved one is freed from anguish and called to joy, Mrs. Rueful makes the most of the affliction. She never bates an inch of the strictest forms of conventional mourning. She is frantic in her lamentations, and encourages the most violent demonstrations of grief in others. She recoils from the faintest approach of consolation. Her gaze is bent steadfastly downward to the grave, and the mouldering ashes that lie there; her eyes resolutely refuse to look upwards and contemplate the enfranchised spirit rejoicing in its newly-awarded felicity. The "garb of woe" is her favourite attire—a knell is the sweetest music to her ears—and if she wore an ornament to correspond with her most cherished state of mind, it could only be a miniature death's head, or cross bones fantastically wrought. And yet she will tell you that she has made open profession

of Christianity, and that she believes in Heaven! Certes, she never acts as though any of her departed friends had gone there!

The dread of accidents keeps Mrs. Rueful in a perpetual fever of anxiety or chill of terror. She never thinks of ships without shipwrecks—steam-boats always conjure up an image of bursting boilers, and dismembered limbs flying through the air; railroads are synonymous with crushed heads and mangled bodies—every mode of locomotion is the medium of lurking peril—every place of rest the abode of a concealed danger. Mrs. Rueful firmly believes that earthquakes and tornadoes will spread to every part of the world, and no being living will escape their destroying fury. When war commences, she is certain it will extend over the whole globe, and that peace can never be restored. She is sure that lightning always strikes. She is constantly on the lookout for fatal epidemics, and beholds cholera and yellow fever taking rapid strides towards her own especial habitation. No locality is salubrious—no haven safe. Country roads, to her, are infested by imaginary snakes, phantom mad dogs, and shadowy crazed bulls—and city streets teem with risks too manifold to enumerate. Robbers dog her steps by day and shake her shutters at night. She burns her own home and the houses of her friends (in fancy) at least once per week, and determinedly buries herself and them in the ruins. To be sure, they all rise again, phoenix-like, from the ashes, but only to go periodically through the same illusory process of annihilation.

She has no faith in palmy days and prosperous times—indeed, she totally ignores prosperity. To her thinking, trade never thrives—professions mean beggary—art is a dead standstill—literature is, and always will be, stagnant. The rich are on the verge of bankruptcy—the poor are daily growing poorer—everything and everybody is going to speedy destruction.

Then, Mrs. Rueful has such a propensity to dream! And she teaches others to dream—and she interprets their visions and her own—and the prognostics always bode evil! Good omens there are none—there is no "good time coming," according to her creed! It is useless to remind Mrs. Rueful that in these days of spiritual disorder, dreams are chiefly the whisperings of fantastical spirits, and that, if there are any exceptions to this rule, there is no accredited, infallible, Heaven-illumined expounder given to the world. Mrs. Rueful will quote Scripture to prove that dreams are of more importance than positive realities, and will give you abundant instances testifying to the dexterity of the key by which she opens those secret chambers of marvel, and drags forth their hidden skeletons.

Mrs. Rueful's faith in signs and wonders exceeds that of any ancient Roman. It is a rock upon which she leans with the complacent conviction that it can never be shaken. The spilling of salt—breaking of looking-glasses—ticking of death watches—sitting down of thirteen at table—forming of winding sheets in candles—passing under ladders—lowing of cows—moaning of dogs, &c. &c., are not trivial and accidental occurrences, but events, to her mind, pregnant with coming calamity. She is always peering into the future—always predicting—always foreseeing—and not only seeing "through a glass darkly," but beholding all the world covered with sable.

In short, Mrs. Rueful is a walking cloud, in female guise—a perambulating wet blanket of womanhood, whose especial vocation it is to convince the world that life is but a compound of miseries—a thing made up of groans and sighs, a burden ever accumulating in weight, until it breaks the back that bears it; and that disasters and afflictions are the only rational anticipations in which humanity can safely indulge.

Is there no philanthropist who will undertake the task of reasoning with Mrs. Rueful? Will no one prove to her, that if any man ever *actually encountered one half* the evils he dreaded, and expected, and fretted over, no man's fardel would be endurable? Will no one tell her that there is wealth, which can meet no bankruptcy, in a patient spirit—that a serene temperament is an aegis impenetrable to misfortune—that a trustful nature is a weapon in the hand of Faith to disarm Sorrow? Will no one persuade our doleful-visaged friend that there is religion in a contented heart, and gratitude in a cheerful face, and that he upon whom Heaven smiles approvingly, will reflect the brightness of that radiant token upon all the world?

THE Hindoo mothers do not slay half so many babies from the inculcations of a false religion as ours do by overfeeding.

Scientific Notes.

THE HYDRAULIC LIFT.—When a ship's bottom requires examination or repair, as it frequently does, it has hitherto been necessary to lay the vessel high and dry in what is termed a "dry dock"—a long, expensive, and laborious operation. Mr. Scott, of Falkirk, has remedied these inconveniences by his ingenious contrivance, the hydraulic lift, by which ships can be lifted bodily out of the water and yet be afloat. To explain: The hydraulic lift at the Victoria Docks, Blackwall, consists of two parallel rows of columns, 60 feet apart, each row containing 16, with an interval of 20 feet between each, thus inclosing a parallelogram 240 feet long by 60 feet in width. Each column, of five feet diameter, and 60 feet in length, is sunk 12 feet into the ground below the water in which it stands, and contains a hydraulic ram of 10 inches diameter and 20 feet stroke, the top of the ram being at the ordinary level of the water. Attached to the tops of each ram, and suspended therefrom, are two iron rods or girders, descending to the bottom of the dock, and rising to join the corresponding ram on the opposite side. This series of connected girders forms an iron frame or "gridiron," lying at the bottom of the dock in 28 feet of water, which may be raised or lowered at pleasure by hydraulic pressure, with a vessel on it. The vessel to be docked, however, is not raised directly on the gridiron. An iron pontoon or tray is towed over the frame, and sunk by opening certain valves in it. The ship is then brought between the columns, when a 50-horse engine, working the hydraulic press, raises the gridiron, pontoon, and vessel, at once, clear of the water. The pontoon is now exhausted of water by opening the valves, and these being again closed, the rams sink with the frame, leaving the ship afloat, standing upright on the pontoon, which may then be towed to another dock, where the vessel may be repaired. After these are completed, she is brought back to the lift; the pontoon, again filled with water, sinks; and the ship, again afloat, departs.

APPETITE OF A COW.—The Rev. W. S. Symonds exhibited to the British Association 30 pebbles of varying sizes, having a total weight of five pounds, taken from the stomach of a fat and healthy cow, lately butchered near Burton-on-Trent. One alone weighed three-quarters of a pound.

WHAT IS AN EGG?—How few of those who chip the shell of an egg at breakfast reflect that it is one of the greatest marvels of Nature—that an egg is the mysterious commencement of all animal organisation! Unity in variety is the law of creation, whether in the production of worlds, plants, or animal beings. Nothing less than Infinite Wisdom could evolve results so diverse, by processes so similar, from materials seemingly so simple; and it is astonishing to reflect that such diversity of forms, habits, and dispositions as is afterwards manifested was already latent in the egg. What is an egg? A delicate existence, inclosed with the food necessary for its temporary nourishment while its organisation is being developed. The distinction between those creatures which bring forth their young alive and others, does not consist in the presence of an egg, but in the mode in which it is vivified. All the superior animals are viviparous, the egg being vivified and nourished in the body of the parent. A delicate membrane incloses, in addition to the principle of vitality, only the small portion of sustenance needed for the first moments of life, ere the parent commences supplying it with that hidden nourishment from her own being which will perfect its organisation. The oviparous animals, on the contrary, extrude their progeny inclosed, with the food necessary to support, in a shell, of sufficient strength to protect it from ordinary accidental injury. Of the eggs thus disconnected from the parent, those of most birds require an elevated temperature to mature, and receive it from contact with the parent in the nest. The eggs of inferior animals are left to be developed by nature, because the young emerge from them perfected, and capable of caring for themselves; whereas the unfledged bird is in need of protection for a time. On emerging to the light, the turtle directs its way to the water; the alligator viciously bites at him who attacks it; the snake is in full possession of its venom. The eggs of most reptiles are vitalised by the heat of the ground or sun; those of insects by the elements, or the natural warmth of the living animal in whose body the careful parent has deposited them; those of fishes are abandoned to the action of their natural element. The dimensions of the egg have no relation to the size of the animal it contains; all, from the fly to the elephant, have nearly the same size when life commences. The variation is in the quantity of nutriment necessary to the animal, that it may attain that