

THE HABILIMENTS OF GRIEF, FROM A COMMERCIAL POINT OF VIEW.

On the occasion of a recent visit to London, whilst I was debating with myself over the breakfast things as to how I should spend the day, I received by the post a letter deeply bordered with black, evidently a messenger of affliction. I tore the white weeping willow upon a black background which formed the device upon the seal, and read the contents. It proved to be an intimation from a relative of the sudden death of her brother-in-law, and a request that under the circumstance of the sudden bereavement of the widow, I should undertake certain sad commissions relative to the articles of mourning required by the family.

I at once set out upon my sad errand. I had no difficulty in finding the *maison de deuil* to which I had been referred. It met me in the sad habiliments of woe; no vulgar colors glared from the shop-windows, no gilding amazed with its festive brightness. The name of the firm scarce presumed to make itself seen in letters of the saddest gray upon a black ground. Here and there beads of white set off the general gloom of the house-front, like the crape pipings of a widow's cap. The very metal window-frames and plates had gone into a decorous mourning—zinc taking the place of what we feel under the circumstances would have been quite out of character—brass.

On my pushing the plate-glass door it gave way with a hushed and muffled sound, and I was met by a gentleman of sad expression, who, in the most sympathetic voice, inquired the nature of my want, and, on my explaining myself, directed me to the Inconsolable Grief Department. The interior of the establishment answered exactly to the appearance without. The long passage I had to traverse was panelled in white-black borderings, like so many mourning-cards placed on end; and I was rapidly becoming impressed with the deep solemnity of the place, when I caught sight of a neat little figure rolling up some ribbon; who, on my inquiring if I had arrived at the Inconsolable Grief Department, replied, almost in a tone of gayety, that that was the half-mourning counter, and that I must proceed further on until I had passed the repository for widows' silk. Following her directions, I at last reached my destination—a large room draped in black, with a hushed atmosphere about it as though somebody was lying invisibly there in state.

An attendant in sable habiliments, picked out with the inevitable white tie, and with an undertakerish eye and manner, awaited my commands. I produced my written directions. Scanning it critically, he said:—

"Permit me to inquire, sir, if *it* is a deceased partner?"

I nodded assent.

"We take the liberty of asking this distressing question," he continued, "as we are extremely anxious to keep up the character of our establishment by matching, as it were, the exact shade of affliction. Our paramatta and crapes give satisfaction to the deepest woe. Permit me to show you a new texture of surpassing beauty and elegance, manufactured specially for this house, and which we call the *inconsolable*. Quite a novelty in the trade, I do assure you, sir."

With this he placed a pasteboard box before me full of mourning fabrics.

"Is this it?" I inquired, lifting a lugubrious piece of drapery.

"Oh, no," he replied; "the one you have in your hand was manufactured for last year's affliction, and was termed 'The Stunning Blow Shade.' It makes up

well, however, with our *sudden bereavement* silk—a leading article—and our *distraction* trimmings."

"I fear," said I, "my commission says nothing about these novelties."

"Ladies in the country," he blandly replied, "don't know of the perfection to which the art of mourning genteelly has been brought! But I will see that your commission is attended to to the letter." Giving another glance over my list, he observed: "Oh! I perceive a widow's cap is mentioned here. I must trouble you, sir, to proceed to the Weeds Department for that article—the first turning to the left."

Proceeding, as directed, I came to a recess fitted up with a solid phalanx of widows' caps. I perceived at a glance that they exhausted the whole gamut of grief, from its deepest shade to that tone which is expressive of a pleasing melancholy. The foremost row confronted me with the sad liveries of crapen folds, whilst those behind gradually faded off into light, ethereal tarlatan, and one or two of the outsiders were even breaking out into worldly feathers and flaunting weepers. Forgetting the proprieties of the moment, I inquired of the grave attendant if one of the latter would be suitable.

"Oh! no, sir," she replied, with a slight shade of severity in the tone of her voice; "you may gradually work up to that in a year or two. But any of these"—pointing to the first row of widows' weeds—"are suitable for the first burst of grief."

Acquiescing in the propriety of this sliding scale of sorrow, I selected some weeds expressive of the deepest dejection I could find, and, having completed my commission, inquired where I could procure for myself some lavender gloves.

"Oh! for those things, sir," she said, in the voice of Tragedy speaking to Comedy, "you must turn to your right, and you will come to the Complimentary Mourning counter."

Turning to the right accordingly, I was surprised, and not a little shocked, to find myself amongst worldly colors. Tender lavender I had expected; but violet, mauve, and even absolute red, stared me in the face. Thinking I had made a mistake, I was about to retire, when a young lady, in a cheerful tone of voice, inquired if I wanted anything in her department.

"I was looking for the Complimentary Mourning counter," I replied, "for some gloves; but I fear I am wrong."

"You are quite right, sir," she observed. "This is it." She saw my eye glance at the cheerful-colored silks, and with the instinctive tact of a woman guessed my thoughts in a moment.

"Mauve, sir, is very appropriate for the lighter sorrows."

"But absolute red!" I retorted, pointing to some velvet of that color.

"Is quite admissible when you mourn the departure of a distant relative. But allow me to show you some gloves?" and, suiting the action to the word, she lifted the cover from a tasteful glovebox, and displayed a perfect picture of delicate half-tones, indicative of a struggle between the cheerful and the sad.

"There is a pleasing melancholy in this shade of gray," she remarked, indenting slightly each outer knuckle with the soft elastic kid as she measured my hand.

"Can you find a lavender?"

"Oh yes! but the sorrow tint is very slight in that; however, it wears admirably."

Thus by degrees the grief of the establishment died out in tenderest lavender, and I took my departure, deeply impressed with the charming improvements which Parisian taste has effected in the plain old-fashioned style of English mourning.

L. B.



PETTY CHEATING.

WE lately read in a morning paper an account, all too brief and generalised, of more than three-score tradesmen, some of them occupying prominent and "respectable" positions in a certain district of London, all of whom were had up before the magistrates in one day, and fined for using false and fraudulent weights or measures! It is satisfactory to find that the rogues were brought to book and punished; but it is not satisfactory, and not at all right or just, that the names and addresses of these dishonest people should be suppressed. All such offenders should be posted ignominiously in sight of all men, in order that those who deal with them should know with whom they have to do.

It is mortifying to learn that this method of cheating is continually on the increase, and one's indignation fires up on reflecting that it is the humbler and struggling classes who are for the most part the victims of it. One article in which the poor man is victimised continually is that of tobacco. Buying his tobacco in very small quantities, he gets it handed to him ready packed and weighed—in ounces, or half or quarter ounces. But does he often get fair weight in these minute packages? For the sake of information on this point, we lately entered a shop much frequented by labouring men on Saturday night, and brought away three half-ounce packages of "bird's-eye." On weighing them scrupulously without the envelopes, it appeared that, according to shopkeepers' reckoning, there are three half-ounces to an ounce—the whole of the tobacco barely balancing an ounce in the scale. We might be told, perhaps, that all tobacco is moist when taken from the barrel, and dries in paper packets; but fifty per cent. is a rather large allowance for moisture. We might be told, also, that the purchaser of any quantity, however small, can see it weighed if he chooses; but what if the weights are false, like those of the three-score offenders mentioned above?

Then, in the matter of his beer, the poor man is cheated both as to quality and quantity. In the first place, the London publican is given to poisoning the beverage with drugs—doctoring it, as it is professionally termed—by which process it is increased largely in quantity, and so altered in its constituents as to excite thirst instead of quenching it. In the second place, it is often drawn from the tap in pots of short measure—either in the shape of fancy pots that never pass beyond the bar, or in others ingeniously, though to all appearance accidentally, bulged inwards, so that their containing capacity is profitably diminished.

The peripatetic trades of London find their customers

for the most part among the lower middle classes and the poor; and of many of these traffickers it may be said that cheating in some form or other is their normal system of doing business. It would seem that the weights and measures of the out-door traders, are not subject to the supervision of the inspectors—at any rate, we never hear of these gentry being brought to account for their exploits. A pound of cherries bought from a handcart in the street is rarely found to weigh a dozen ounces; oftener, indeed, it may weigh eight or nine. The so-called pound weight of the street fruit-seller is a nondescript lump of metal, manufactured for the purpose, and has no definite relation to a pound avoirdupois, unless in appearance. In selling fruit by measure there is the same sort of sophistication. False wooden bottoms are common, as the buyers of nuts know well. If the measure is correct, which is assuming a great deal, the method of filling it is a delusion. A practised hand will fill a quart pot with a pint of plums or gooseberries, and make it appear as though it were brimful and running over. Watch him narrowly, and you will see how he does it. He lays the measure horizontally, and covers the lower side with fruit; then raising the measure gradually, he heaps a handful of fruit over the top with his left hand; at the same time having a good-sized plum, say between the finger and thumb of his right hand, he ingeniously inserts that as a kind of key-stone to prevent the crowning heap from falling into the hollow beneath: thus the measure appears choke full and filled up, though something like half the due quantity is lacking. This clever piece of cheaterly is executed with astonishing rapidity—two seconds, we should say, affords ample time for it. When the measure, as in the case of strawberries and raspberries, goes with the fruit, the cheating, as everyone knows, consists in filling the lower half or more of the pottle or punnet with some worthless material—grass, hay, fern leaves, or anything that comes to hand—so that half a pint of the fruit shall look like a pint, or a pint like a quart. It would appear that the summer fruits never have been honestly sold in the London streets. We can remember well the occasion on which we bought our first pottle of strawberries in a street in Paddington—*O mihi prateritos!*—it was more than fifty years ago—and the grievous indignation we experienced on finding that the middle and lower strata of the deceitful measure consisted of nothing but fusty grass. It was our first introduction to the rascality of trafficking human nature. Would it had been the last!

But we can trace this phase of cheating much farther back than fifty years ago. There is an old book known by curious readers as the "Diary of Henry Machyn, Merchant Taylor of London," written in 1552, in which there is a record of a man who was placed in the "pelere" for "selling potts of straberries, the whych the pott was not alf fulle, but fylled with ferne (fern)." This brief record is more creditable to our ancestors than any truthful record of similar matters in our day would be to us. The cheat of three hundred years back, it is evident, was regarded and treated as a rogue, and his cheating punished as a crime. We moderns have changed all that, and should no more think of punishing the trader who cheats than the member of Parliament who bribes—though why both of them should not be well trounced is not so clear.

A singular phase of cheating, which makes its appearance in London about the fall of the leaf, and is at its height in the mellow month of October, is one known among adepts as "coming the double," which is effected by a kind of sleight of hand, so cleverly managed as to