

[From the London Saturday Review.]

THE DEMI-MONDE OF PARIS.

The Paris Journals lately surprised their French, and startled their foreign readers by an announcement for which, after all, both should have been prepared. No one who is at all conversant with the ordinary course of Parisian life—we do not say familiar with its inner mysteries—ought to have been astonished at hearing that certain *grandes dames* of French society had sought for invitations to a masked ball, which was to have been given by a distinguished leader *demi-monde*. We have had, in our country, certain faint and partial indications of the curiosity, revealed in an awkward and hesitating sort of way. English great ladies once made an off-night for themselves, at Cremorne, in order to catch a flying and furtive glance, not of the normal idols of these gay gardens, but of the mere scenic accessories to their attractions and triumphs. But, as yet, we have never heard that the matrons of English society have sought an introduction to the Lais of Brompton or the Phyrne of Mayfair, even under the decorous concealment of mask and domino. Nor has it yet been advertised here that the motive of so unusual a request was a desire to learn the arts and tactics by which the gilded youth—and, it might be added, the gilded age—of the country is subjected to the thrall of venal and meretricious beauty.

THE FRENCH WOMEN.

That such a rumor should be circulated and believed in France is—to use the current slang—"highly suggestive." It suggests a contrast of the strongest, though it is far from a pleasing kind, between the society of to-day and the society of other days. It was long the special boast of the French that with them women enjoyed an influence which in no other part of the world was accorded to their sex, and that this influence was as much due to their mental as to their physical charms. The women of other nations have been more beautiful. To the French women were specially given the power of fascination; and it was the peculiar characteristic of her fascination that its exercise involved no discredit to the sense or to the sensibility of the men who yielded to it. A power which showed itself as much in the brilliance of *bon mots* and repartee as in smiles and glances, a grace of language and expression which enhanced every grace of feature and of attitude, a logic which placed in the form of epigram, and the self-respect was set off rather than concealed by the maintenance of the most uniform courtesy to others—such were the airs and insignia of the empire which the most celebrated French women, from the days of Maintenon and De Seigne to those of Madame Roland or those of Madame Recamier, exercised over the warriors, sages and statesmen of France. The homage paid by the men to the brilliant women who charmed the society which they had helped to create may not always have been perfectly disinterested. The friendship of the women for their illustrious admirers may not always have been perfectly Platonic. There may have been some impropriety—or, as our Puritan friends would say, some sin—in the intercourse of some of the most celebrated French men and French women. Yet even this could not be predicated of all. Madame de Seigne's reputation comes out clear and spotless, even from the foulest assault of wounded vanity and slighted love. We do not forget the comprehensive loves and the deliberate inconstancy of Ninon. But Ninon, corrupt as she may have been, was not venal. She did not ruin her lovers by her covetousness, and then receive their wives and sisters in her salons. She was courted by virtuous and elegant women, because she was the single and solitary instance of virtue.

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEXES.

Whatever may have been the relations between the sexes in those days, it was at least free from grossness. The charms which attracted men to the Maison Rambouillet were not those of sense alone, or were at once spirited, graceful, elegant and vivacious. To an accomplished man there is no greater social treat than to hear good French spoken by educated and clever Frenchwomen. In their hands a language of which both the excellencies and the defects eminently qualify it for the purpose of conversational combat, becomes a weapon of dazzling fence. Those delicate turns of phrase which imply so much more than they express, fly like Parthian shafts, and the little common places which may mean nothing, do what the pawns do when man-

ipulated by a clever chess-player—everything. And in the age when the empire of French women rested upon their grace and power in conversation, there was ample matter to task their remarkable talents. It was an age of new ideas. Government, religion and philosophy; the administration of the kingdom and the administration of the universe; the rights of kings to be obeyed by their people; and the right of the Creator to the adoration of His creatures; the claims of privilege and the claims of prerogative; the pretensions of rank and the pretensions of the *raturier*; the conflict of science and theology—all these furnished materials for the tongues of the clever women, materials of which the clever women availed themselves. The final result was not, indeed, wholly satisfactory. How many a short sharp sarcasm, shot from the tongue of brilliant *causeuses*, resounded on the gilded rooms wherein it was first hurled! How many a satire, sugared with compliment, at which rival beaux chuckled with delight, came back with its uncovered venom to the hearts of those whose admiration had first provoked it! How many a gibe of reckless truth, aimed at courts and nobles, distilled through lackeys and waiting maids into the streets of Paris, to whet the after wrath of that fierce Canaille! Many of those clever women had better been silent; many of those pungent epigrams had better been unsaid. Still, while the spirited talk went, life was illumined by no common brilliance, and vice not only decked itself, but forgot itself, in the guise of intelligence and wit.

THE SALONS OF PARIS.

But what a change is it now! There are drawing rooms in Paris which are more brilliant and gorgeous than any that De Seigne or Recamier ever sat in. But their brilliancy and splendor are not of such airy impalpabilities as genius or wit. They are solid, substantial, tangible. They are the brilliance and the splendor, not of able men and women, but of the upholsterer, the mechanician, and the decorator. There is gold, there is marble, there is lapis lazuli; there are pictures, stains, ormulu clocks; there are rich velvets and cloud-like lace, and a blaze of amethysts, rubies and diamonds. There are trains of imperial dimensions and tiaras of imperial brightness.

THE FEMALE LEADERS OF FRENCH SOCIETY—WHO ARE THEY?

And in whose honor is all this grand display? To whom is the court paid by this mob of sombre clad and neatly gloved men of every age, from 20 to 60? Who have taken the place of the great female leaders of society whose names have added lustre to France? Strange as it may seem, their successors are second-rate or third-rate actresses, operadancers, and singers at public rooms and public gardens. We do not intend to undertake the superfluous task of penning a moral diatribe, or inveighing against the immorality of the age. Sermons there are, and will be in abundance, on so prolific and provoking a theme. In every age actresses and ballet girls have had their admirers. In every age, probably, they will continue to have their admirers. But what is worthy of note is this: Formerly this admiration was of a private kind. The worshippers adored their divinities in secret. The temples of the goddesses were, at any rate, not obtruded on the public eye, nor in possession of the most open, public and splendid streets. The cult, too, was confined to a narrower circle.

HOW ACTRESSES, OPERA DANCERS, ETC., ARE WORSHIPPED—THE BOHEMIANS.

But now all this is changed; the fanes of the divinities are splendid and in the most splendid streets; the cult is open, avowed, public. The worshippers are of every age, and are all equally indifferent to secrecy. There is no restriction and no exclusion, save on two grounds—those of poverty and intelligence. There is a kind of intellect admitted in this gorgeous coterie, but it is intellect in livery. The dramatic authors and the drama are now as much appendages to the dramatic courtesan as her coachman and her chambermaid. Where professional reputation depends on scenic effect and scenic effect depends upon the *equivokes* put into the actress' mouth, and the applause with which their delivery is received, the man who concocts the *equivokes* and the man who criticises their delivery become equally objects of attention to the actress who is looking out for a *clientele*. Saving these necessary exceptions, these assemblies are composed of rich old men anxious to dissipate the money which they have made, and the rich young men anxious to dissipate the wealth

which they have inherited. And now we hear that the wives and sisters of those men seek admission to these Paphian halls.

RESPECTABLE WOMEN VISITING THE LORETTES.

It is, indeed, not an unnatural, though it is far from a decent curiosity which prompts ladies entitled to the reputation of virtue to examine something of the life and domestic economy of those ladies whose very existence presupposes an entire repudiation of virtue. The married women naturally desire to know something of the manners and mein and language of the rivals whose hearts have divided their own husbands' treasures into alien and obnoxious channels. When a wife hears that her husband has, at one magnificent stroke of the bourse, carried off 1,000,000 or 2,000,000 francs, she is curious to ascertain the process by which no inconsiderable proportion of these winnings has been "affected" to the payment of Mlle. Theodorine's debts or the purchase of Mlle. Valentine's brougham. And the anxious mother who has long dreamed of the ceremony which might unite the fortunes of her dear Alcide with the dot of her opulent neighbor's daughter, is tortured between the misery of frustrated hopes and curiosity to understand the motives which impel Alcide to become the daily visitor of Mlle. Gabrielle in the Rue d'Arcade, and her daily companion when riding on the Bois de Boulogne. Certainly the subject is a very curious one. But does the solution of the problem quite justify the means taken to solve it? Might not enough be inferred from the antecedent history of those who are the subject of it, to dispense with the necessity of a nearer examination? Take a number of women of the lower classes from the different provinces of France—with no refinement, with a mere shred of education, and with but small claims to what an English eye would regard as beauty—but compensating for lack of knowledge, education and refinement by a vivacity and coquetry peculiarly French—take these women up to Paris, tutor them as stage supernumeraries, and parade before them the example of thousands of the more successful lorettes, and the rest may be imagined. From these general premises it is not difficult to conjecture the product obtained, to conceive the manner on which young gentlemen dote, a manner made up of impudence and grimace, that repartee which mainly consists of a new slang hardly known two miles beyond the Madelette, those *doubles entendres* of which, perhaps, memory is less the parent than instinct, and that flattery which is always coarse and always venal. It would be erroneous to say that we have here given a complete picture of the class which certain leaders of Parisian fashion wish to study. There are, in the original, traits and features which we could not describe, and which it is not necessary for us to attempt to describe, as they are portrayed in the pages of the satirist who has immortalized the vices of the most corrupt city at its most corrupt era. Juvenal will supply what is wanting to our imperfect delineation. English ladies may read him in the vigorous paraphrases of Dryden and Gifford; while their French cotemporaries may arrive at a livelier conception of what we dare not express, if they only stay till supper crowns the festal scene of the masked ball. If they outstay that they will have learned a lesson the value of which we leave to themselves to compute.

It is idle to say that curiosity of this kind is harmless because it is confined to few. Only a few, indeed, may have contemplated the extreme step of being present at the saturnalia of the *demi-monde*. But how many others have thought of them and talked of them? To how many leaders of society are the doings of these women the subject of daily curiosity and daily conversation? How many Patrician—or, at all events, noble—dames, regular attendants at mass, arbiters of fashion, and ornaments of the church, honor with their inquisitiveness women of whose existence, twenty years ago, no decent French woman was presumed to have any knowledge? And do these noble ladies suppose that this curiosity is disregarded by the adventuresses from Arles or Strasburg, Bordeaux or Rouen, whom successful prostitution has dowered with lace, diamonds, carriages and opera boxes? Do they suppose that the professed admiration of the young Sardanapali for the ex-couturieres and ballet girls of Paris has not a more potent effect when combined with the ill concealed interest of their mothers and sisters? And what that effect is on the men in one class, and on the women in another, a very slight knowledge of human nature is

sufficient to suggest. That girls of moderately good looks will contentedly continue to ply the shuttle at Lyons, or to drudge as household servants in Brittany, or to trudge home to a supperless chamber in Paris, with the bare earnings of a supernumerary or a *choryphee* at a small theatre, when a mere sacrifice of chastity may enable them not only to ruin young dukes and counts, but to become the theme and admiration of duchesses and countesses, is a supposition which involves too high a belief in human virtue; and the conditions we have named are bound to be fatal to the poor French women. And as for the men, what must be the effect on them? Debarred from the stirring conflict of politics; exiled, so as to speak, from the natural arena of patriotic ambition; knowing no literature save that of novels in which courtezans are the heroes, and caring for no society but that of which courtezans are the leaders; diversifying the excitement of the hazard table and the betting room, with the excitement of the *coulisses*; learning from their habitual associations to lose that reverence for women and that courteous attention to them which are popularly supposed to have at one time characterized the gentlemen of France, they partially redeem the degradation which they court by showing that even a mixture of vapid frivolity, sensual indulgence, and senseless extravagance is insufficient to corrupt a nation, unless also the female leaders of society conspire to select for their notice and admiration those creatures for whom the law of the land would better have provided the supervision of the police and the certificate of professional prostitution. When virtuous women of birth and position rub shoulders with strumpets, protests are useless and prophecies are superfluous, for the taint which goes before destruction is already poisoning the heart of the nation.

[Cannot Paris, as portrayed in the foregoing article, fairly claim close relationship to the "Cities of the Plain?"

BET'S MATCH-MAKING.

The only time I ever tried match-making in my life was when I was seventeen, and I then so burnt my fingers over the business that I took care never to meddle with it again. I was living at the time with my stepmother on her farm near Ballymena. My father was dead, and my stepmother did not like me. She had placed me for a time with a milliner in the town, but finding it expensive supporting me apart from her, had me taken away again. She was thinking of a second marriage, though I did not know it at the time. But this I did know—that she had written to some distant friends of my father's in America, who had unwillingly consented to take me off her hands.

I don't think it would have been half as hard for me to have made up my mind to die; for I was a shy little thing, without a bit of courage to deal with strangers, and my heart was fit to burst at the thought of leaving the very few friends whom I had to love, and my own little corner of the world, where the trees and the roads knew me. But I felt it would have to be done, and I lay awake all night after the letter arrived, trying to think how I should ever be brave enough to say good-bye to my dear friend Grace Byrne, and to Gracie's lover, Donnell M'Donnell.

Gracie was the cleverest of all Miss Doran's apprentices. She was an orphan without a friend to look after her, and she was the loveliest girl in the county. People said she was proud and vain; but I never could think she was either. She and I loved one another dearly, though I cannot think what attracted her to poor little plain me. She had plenty of admirers, and she queened it finely amongst them; but the only one to whom I would have given her with all my heart was Donnell M'Donnell. And, oh, dear, he was the very one whom she would not look at.

Donnell and I were great friends, and I had promised to do all I could to help him with Gracie. He was young and strong, and as bonny a man as could be seen. He had a fine farm, all his own, some three miles across the country from my stepmother's place. If Gracie would but marry him she would live like a lady, and drive into Ballymena on her own jaunting car. But she was always saying that she would go away to London, and be a great West-end milliner. This terrified me badly, seeing that London is such a wicked place.

My stepmother was always crying out that Gracie would come to a sorrowful end, which made me wild; and as I lay awake that wretched night I thought a great deal about what might happen to her if she went to London by herself,