

NOTES FROM OVER THE SEA.

LITERATURE, ART, AND SOCIAL LIFE IN LONDON.

A CLERGYMAN'S MISTAKE—GARDEN PARTIES AND RECEPTIONS—THE UPPER CIRCLES OF BOHEMIA—AMERICAN WRITERS AND SINGERS ABROAD—DIVERSIONS OF THE SEASON.

LONDON, Tuesday, July 13, 1878.

Dr. Houghton, of the "Little Church Around the Corner," has a formidable rival in Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, late Curate of St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green, who last Autumn gave a Sunday lecture on "Theatres and Music Halls," which was so exceedingly liberal, so astoundingly broad in sentiment, as to cause, when reported, much surprise and alarm in ecclesiastical circles, and considerable excitement and discussion among all classes. The man, unluckily, was not strong enough for the crusade he so boldly engaged in—the battle-axe of reform was too heavy for his hand—so that the valiant blow he struck was comparatively ineffectual—in fact, its first apparent effect was to unhorse the crusader himself. Before the lecture was even printed in full, the Bishop of London, after condemning it, its admissions, and arguments, with terrible severity, dismissed Mr. Headlam from the curacy, in which he had worked for five years with great devotion and evident usefulness, it is said, especially among the lower classes. The lecture, with the correspondence connected with it, has been sent me by a Liberal friend. After reading it, I cannot see how "London," being a Bishop, could do otherwise than drop poor Headlam. He declares he is no "Puritan," but, as the good old Methodist said, "one must draw a line somewhere," and his Lordship draws his at music halls and the leg drama. Yet, he need not have been so hard on "actors and music hall proprietors." They are probably no more disreputable fellows than the "publicans and sinners" of Christ's time. The lecture was certainly not a very judicious or discriminating discourse, but it contains some truths which the Church, though deafened by the melodious thunder of great organs, though shut in by an awful magic ring of respectability, though heavily swathed about by gorgeous robes of self-righteousness, must yet listen to, must yet face, must yet grapple with. Yet the need of the common people for more amusements, inexpensive, yet of a healthful and pure character—not a spiritual need, but one before it in order, if not in importance—requires a more powerful champion than our curate. He is evidently honest, and thoroughly ingenuous; indeed, the simplicity and exceeding good faith of the man are most amusing. Speaking of the dancing at music halls, he says: "Pray, bear in mind, ladies and gentlemen, what a lot of discipline a person has to go through in order to become a good dancer." He almost seems to think that the means justify the end, not remembering that the "discipline" he so admires is surpassed by the slow and painful training that goes to make up the brilliant result of an "Artful Dodger" or a "Flash Toby Cracket."

So marvelously easy is this good man's philosophy of amusement for weary tradesmen and over-worked curates, that he speaks approvingly of "Barbe Bleu," as played by Lydia Thompson and her blondes—saying *par parenthese*, "of course, with any one who thinks that short skirts, or trunk hose are indecent, I can have no argument," which must have seemed a little cool to the Bishop—the comment, not the costume. I am afraid the curate is in no sense a conservative, for speaking of the Canterbury, he says: "I heard the Marseillaise encored four times—which was most satisfactory to my radical heart." Still harping on music halls, the logical reformer says: "I don't think it at all fair to blame a place for the people who go there." So it was, perhaps, that hell got a bad name. But he goes on to say: "I think that the large proportion of music hall audiences are respectable working people and clerks, but that prostitutes do go there is undeniable. But I don't think that is any reason why respectable people should keep away—rather, perhaps, all the more reason why they should go:—if some of the wives and sisters of the upper and middle classes would go, and not let their husbands and brothers say that music halls are not fit places for them, it were better. At any rate, it is by a healthy public opinion—by countenancing and enjoying all that is good in these places, that we shall get rid of the evil."

Perhaps, oh, Right Reverend Bishop, this poor, head-strong Headlam, of Bethnal Green, is not so far out of the way here after all. If men will resolve not to frequent places of amusement to which they cannot take their wives and sisters, places of amusement will soon rise to wife and sister level. That more judicious and orthodox clergymen than Mr. Headlam think it not derogatory to the cloth to dip into the delightful upper circle of Bohemia—to stimulate thought, and brighten their fancy in the society of the best English actors and actresses—I was convinced by meeting more than one member of the "high profession spiritual" at a garden party given one afternoon last week by Mrs. Crowe. (*née* Bateman,) at her charming place in Hammersmith, known as the Grange, a quaint, ivy-grown, old Queen Anne house, backed by lovely lawns and garden-plots, shadowed by magnificent old trees. It was a delightful party that, peopling and picturing one's memory with gay groups and bright colors. The exceeding graciousness and watchful, attentive kindness of our hostess, aided by her beautiful sisters and no less beautiful mother, gave to each guest a feeling of freedom and ease not by any means always found in these sylvan gatherings, meant to supersede, by surpassing in informality and pleasantness, the *fêtes champêtres* of the olden time. On these occasions the most wayward and artificial child of society should come home to mother nature for a little time, in all possible simplicity and childlikeness, not with the airs and artifices, the glitter and sumptuousness which nature abhors. There may have been gay parties on that lawn, and under those trees, in the days of Queen Anne, but nothing like this for enjoyableness, I am sure. The polite society of that day had no such piquant spice of variety, no such a saving salt of noble domestic virtues—had not such brave naturalness wedded to such true refinement, not such freedom joined to such delicacy, such hearts among the "men of parts," such brains among the women of fashion. Then, to be decent was to be dull; then, an educated woman must be a pedant and bore her guests; a wit must be a satirist and wound them. Here, somewhat less than 200 years later, the people were nearly all clever, and the greater number of them, distinguished in art and literature—authors, actors, journalists, critics, poets; yet nobody had the air of being anybody in particular. I fancy that Lady Mary always looked arrogant, and Pope cynical, and Swift venomous, but, above all, *literary*; that the women of fashion were all *prudish* or coquettes, and the men wits or bloods. The lady novelists of London were out in considerable force at this garden party. Some of them seemed to me astonishingly young. They must have begun plotting in the nursery and scrawling dialogue in their copy-books. I half believe that as soon as a clever English girl discovers that her doll is "stuffed with saw-dust" she begins constructing the heroine of a three-volume novel. Among these famous young ladies, apparently as "fancy free" and as little acquainted with such ugly things as ink and midnight oil as the school-girl daughter of our brilliant countryman, Monsieur D. Conway—eating strawberries and cream at the same time—was the handsome, fresh-looking author of the bright, political novel *Hogan M. P.*, and a still later Irish story, entitled *The Honorable Miss Ferrard*. Miss Braddon (Mrs. Maxwell) was also there, looking wonderfully youthful, placid, and unworn, when one considers the amount of hard work she has performed, and the power of invention and passion she has put forth in her extraordinary novels. Under the shadow of the most kingly tree of that lawn stood that "melancholy Dane," Henry Irving, smiling on the friends gathered about him in a right princely fashion, as *Hamlet* smiled out of his dark dream of vengeance on the players. He is a handsomer and even a more

elegant man off than on the stage. Toole, the comedian, was there, and George Augustus Sala, each keeping a group of listeners laughing continually, and there also was Hughes—dear old "Tom Brown"—strolling about with a blooming young daughter. Among the Americans was Bijou Heron, looking very fair and womanly in her pretty black dress. By the way, we noticed at this party more well-fitting, tasteful, and picturesque costumes than we had seen in any English gathering this season, owing, I suppose, to the artistic element and a spice of Bohemianism.

Seated near a bed of flowers daintily sipping an ice, chatting with a friend, and casting about her quick, bright glances out of a pair of dark Italian eyes—glances which had in them a sort of wistful sadness—was a little, thin, dark old lady, elegantly dressed in black silk with a profusion of soft black lace about it. She seemed to me like a beneficent but pensive fairy, who, perhaps, had generously parted with the gift of eternal youth, piece by piece, and was a little sorry for it. This, they told me, was Mlle. Taglioni. I watched her with an interest more intense than I myself could understand. I recalled Mrs. Jamison's wonderful description of her when she was the world-witching queen of the dance, revealing in her wondrous, supple body and exquisite limbs and shapely head—in the law of beauty and harmony in every muscle, nerve, and curve, attitude, pose, and motion—the subtlest grace of all life, of all the elements and forms of nature, the undulation of waves, the floating of clouds, the waving of leafy boughs, the swaying of the lily on its stem, the leap and dart of flame, the rush of mountain streams, the soft uplifting of morning mists, the flight of birds, and the light, stealthy tread of beautiful wild creatures of the forest. When at last she rose and moved toward her hostess to take leave, I fancied that she started with a half-unconscious impulse of the old lightness and grace, but instantly felt on her once airy feet the leaden shackles of age, and on the shoulders where so often had gleamed and softly clashed gauzy fairy pinions, the cold weight of many mortal winters. It was pitiful to see her. Something of the charm of the sylph, of the ballet of 40 years ago, lingered yet, I could see, in her eyes and her smile; something in her form of the old dainty and aerial character remained, but somehow chilled and stiffened. She was like a half-frozen butterfly.

A few days later we attended another brilliant garden party of much the same character. It was at Richmond, and was given by "the Maxwells." Publisher and author (the best sort of a partnership that,) seem to have been equally fortunate, as a quaint, beautiful house, one of Sir Christopher Wren's grand old nests, luxuriously furnished and artistically adorned, with extensive lawns, gardens, and shrubberies, is a very solid and satisfactory result of their united business talent and genius. Here we met again authors, actors, artists, and singers, just the kind of people who will make any party go without effort or management, and yet we seemed to owe all our enjoyment to our host and hostess, in whose genial presence all reserve and stiffness melted away, even with the most strange of us. Among the stage people was Mrs. Keeley, a wonderfully well-preserved old lady, if the word "old" can be applied to one so perennially cheery and youthful in all her sympathies. She professes toward America the pleasantest and most grateful feeling for the cordial manner in which she and her husband were received there many years ago—how many I did not ask her. She must have been very attractive in her youth, as her face is still full of kindness and animation; she has yet a trim figure, and that most excellent and rare thing in woman hereabouts, a pretty little foot. I realized what a big slice had been cut out of my life since my first season in London, as I met elderly men and women who were young folks in the literary and artistic world then. There was Laman Blanchard, the younger, and the widow of Shirley Brooks, and Frith, the painter, and Trübner, the publisher; yet to do them justice, they all bear their years bravely and cheerily. The winter that shows white on the heads of some, is "frosty, but kindly." In fact, an Englishman is thankful if envious time leaves him any hair to be gray with.

Among the pleasantest in-door parties which we have attended are the weekly receptions of our friend, Miss Philp, the popular vocalist and composer, where we hear much delightful music, but nothing more delightful than the fine ballad-singing of our hostess. Powerful and dramatic, it is yet most simple and natural—the fearless outpouring of a live, earnest nature, and a brave, healthful life—honest English singing, in short. Miss Philp frequently sings her own compositions, in which good music is invariably wedded to noble words. So fine are these songs that I wonder they have not made their way to larger hearing in America. A very pleasant party was given in Euston-square some three weeks ago by two accomplished and beautiful American women—fast friends—Mrs. Laura Curtis Bullard and Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton—on which occasion we met several American and English authors and journalists. *Place aux dames!* There was Miss Kate Field, looking stronger and younger than as I remember her two years ago. Mrs. Moulton herself shone resplendent that night, smiling "right childly," or blushing "celestial rosy red" at compliments on her divine toil as a poet, and diviner toilet as a woman of fashion—on her gift from Paradise, and gown from Paris. Mrs. Francillon, the wife of the novelist, was there. She is a singularly fascinating woman, with a fine dramatic face and is a delightful singer. Her clever husband was also present, as was Mr. Hepworth Dixon, Philip Marsden, the young blind poet, our T. W. Higginson, and the "wild and wayward" poet of the Sierras—Joaquin Miller—who is as popular in English literary society as ever, and who has very properly a grateful love of England, which has been to him a more golden land than California. There, too, was the handsome and manly Julian Hawthorne, dowered with a double inheritance of genius, artistic perception, and poetic sensibility. There were various other novelists and poets and critics little known to me, who have so far drifted out of the great current of literature, into the turbid whirlpool of political journalism. At the house of that ardent lover of poets and worshiper of heroes, Francis Ben-rach, we recently met at dinner Commander Cameron, the brave African explorer, whom we found exceedingly simple and modest, like most brave men, and withal better informed in regard to America than most of his countrymen, and more familiar with our literature. At least five of our authors are well known and fully appreciated in England—Longfellow, Lowell, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and Joaquin Miller. The question is frequently put to me, however, "What is Mr. Harte's real name?" Nobody seems to suspect the Mexican "Joaquin," of "the California savage," to be pseudonymic. But if certain American authors are reasonably popular in London, certain American singers are taking its world of fashion and art by storm. To say nothing of the rival queens of song, Patti and Albani, there is charming little Minnie Hauk, who is mounting up into the heaven of fame like a lark. She is not only a delightful singer, but a remarkably good actress. Valleria, who also sings at Her Majesty's, is also, I am told, an American. Miss Thursby, who merely lit, here on her flight Parisward, and sang two or three times, delighted all who heard her by her "profuse strains of unpremeditated art," and by her sweet, fresh, womanly manner and presence. The popularity of the great ballad singer, Antoinette Sterling, is "new every morning and renewed every evening" with the power of her grand, triumphant voice, which is the natural, unfeigned outcome of a profound, emotional nature.

We have indulged rather temperately in theatre-going since we reached London, especially enjoying, after Irving's plays at the Lyceum, "Olivia" at the Royal Court, and "Diplomacy" at that most exquisite of theatres, the "Prince of Wales". Charming pieces are they, and wonderfully well acted and put upon the stage. It is in representing the minor characters, and in scenery and properties, in attention to all the accessories of the play, even to the most trifling, that foreign theatres are so far before ours, with a very few exceptions. Here stage management seems to be an art; with us it is too often not even a trade, but a sort of job-work of the most extempore, clumsy, hap-hazard sort. Even scene-shifting is done in a shiftless way. "Diplomacy" is the most unexceptionable play of Gallic extraction I have seen of late. You could take that precious, inconvenient creature, a wife or sister, with you to see it without danger of calling that pretty but uncomfortable thing, the "blush of shame," to the "cheek of modesty." Several of the dramas of this season have been of purest and most elevating moral tone. "Olivia," (the *Vicar of Wakefield*.) giving wonderfully realistic pictures of the simple joys and sorrows, virtues and follies, of a humble but respectable family of the olden time—scenes over which we have so often wept and smiled—is one of these. I should like to catch that meek and humble servant of heaven who signs himself "London"—for snort—but who is the Right Reverend Lord Bishop of this awful world of London, and shut him up in a box at the Olympic during a performance of "Love or Life," a dramatization of one of Crabbe's tales, the chief rôles in which are played by Mrs. Dion Boucicault and Mr. Henry Neville; and then I should like to ask my Lord if he could say, on his sacred, solemn word of honor that he had ever preached in all his apostolic life a sermon so calculated to in-

fluence for good, to' profoundly move, the people present—especially the more common class—as this simple, domestic, rustic drama, with its touching lessons of virtue, of devotion, and self-sacrifice, flashed, and burned, and melted into their hearts by the power of that admirable young actor, and the ripened genius of that most gentle, tender, and womanly actress. We have several times seen Irving, who never plays anything unworthy of his pure taste, his blameless character, or of the art he loves with a reverent passion—but of him, by your leave, I would say more than I have left myself space for in this letter. England's other great star actor comes home to-day, after playing a brief but brilliant engagement in Berlin.

GRACE GREENWOOD.